

Issue Five (Winter 1996)

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A MESSAGE FROM THE S. O. T. A. P. D. CHAIRPERSON

Matt Meiers

The contributors to "*Teaching Today for Tomorrow*", the educators who facilitate workshops and the teachers who devote many hours of their time to organize inservices are all acting out the conviction that their efforts will contribute in some meaningful measure to the ongoing conversation about education.

The manner of our participation in this dialogue defines us as educators and, perhaps, even as human beings. Teaching is morally valid when it allows children "to acquire their rightful inheritance of humanity." This is a complex and often difficult activity. Teachers act in a sphere where the welfare and progress of children are genuinely at stake and where good teaching is absolutely essential. It follows that the support we lend each other in our complex and critically important activity defines our understanding of its worth and meaning.

Attention to the quality of educational dialogue has become particularly crucial at a time when loud voices are seeking to frame the discussion in terms of strictly instrumentalist understanding of education. These voices define education as a means for economic competition and confuse it quite deliberately with job training and economic policy. This instrumentalist view legitimizes statements such as, "Canadian children are not only competing with children at the next desk; they are competing with children in other countries whose education systems are giving them a better start in life." (Barlow & Robertson, *Class Warfare*. p. 117). Acceptance of such a dubious understanding of social and economic reality silences all meaningful inquiry into the purposes and methods of the educational enterprise.

Caring parents and teachers know that children are more than just cannon fodder in a supposed economic conflict between the nations, corporations and human inhabitants of this world. Education is about introducing children to the human community, to its history, past achievements and present condition. Education is about teaching children "an understanding of the world not only as it is, but as it can and should be" (Guigon, *Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*. p. 236).

I believe that the contributors to this publication view education as the process of inclusion into humanity. It is my hope that we engage their voices in a constructive and yet critical spirit to make the ideal of a community of learners an ongoing reality. After all, it is our view of humanity that governs our educational practices and the dialogue which informs them.

CO-AUTHORS OF MIRACLE OF MIRACLES

John Wiens

The decisive difference between the "infinite improbabilities" on which the reality of our earthly life rests and the miraculous character inherent in those events which establish historical reality is that, in the realm of human affairs, we know the author of the "miracles". It is humans who perform them -- people who because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action can establish a reality of their own. Hannah Arendt, 1968 "What is Freedom?" Between Past and Future (p. 171)

When I first met Tanya, she was eight-years-old, a very shy, withdrawn little girl with big, deep eyes and yellow hair which hid most of her cheeks. Tanya was new to our school, having arrived in my office minutes ago -- in the middle of September. She had come with her father, an ominous foreboding hulk of a man -- a man of few spoken words. As he looked down on us from his height he said, with what seemed to come from the depths of sorrow,

"This is my daughter Tanya. I want you to teach her to read. She hasn't been in school much." Then he turned and walked out of the school, leaving Tanya with me.

Tanya's teacher was, in her words, "just an ordinary classroom teacher", "Mrs. Rampaul" to her "children", who often called her "Mom" by mistake at the beginning of the year as they tried to catch her attention or they needed special help. I told her what Tanya's father had said, then quickly left the room in case she would ask me what to do (that part I remember clearly).

I visited Mrs. Rampaul's class occasionally having by this time found out the name of Tanya's father and where they lived. They did not have a telephone. Every day Tanya came to school with her father and every afternoon they left together. Tanya seemed to be cleaner, brighter, cheerier, and more involved as we drew closer to that first November parent night, but she still hadn't talked to me.

Two weeks after parent night I was again in Tanya's classroom and was just on my way out when I felt a tug on my sportscoat. There was Tanya attached to my side with a piece of paper clutched in her hand,

"Mr. Wiens, look what I can do now."

On the paper, in perhaps the neatest printing I have ever seen, with no other marks, no spelling mistakes, was a story about an obviously well-loved cat. The sentence structure was perfect, the language was polished, the punctuation without fault and the thoughts coherent.

"What a great story, can you read it to me?" -- and she did. "Did Mrs. Rampaul help you with your story?"

"No, not this one, but my Dad said that she taught me how to read and write. He said I didn't know how when I came to school. I knew that; but now I can and I did this all by myself. My Dad's coming with us on our field trip to the museum tomorrow." And he did, and not just that field trip, but every one of Tanya's trips and to each concert after their "first" (self-confessed) concert that December, and to the school barbecue and I could go on.

The other day when I met Tanya, her husband, their new baby and the new baby's huge grandfather, they reminded me of that day.

"Do you ever see Mrs. Rampaul? She turned our lives around - boy would I like to thank her now -- it was like a miracle."

But they couldn't thank her, because she had departed this life some time ago. Still she wasn't gone. Tanya had returned the gifts of "freedom and action" they created together in their classroom -- in the form of immortality.

Teachers and children and reading and writing make that possible. Teachers and children and parents together are co-authors of so many miracles that they seem almost commonplace - their sheer volume and variety outstrip the "infinite improbabilities" of nature.

I'm glad I'm a teacher, I thought to myself.

EDUCATION AND THE HUMAN CONVERSATION

Steven Ladd
St. John's College

As the French philosopher Michel Foucault noted in *The Discourse on Language* in 1971:

Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it (Foucault 227 1972).

The social situation of education which Foucault describes, and which I take to be a fact, places teachers in a position of great power, authority, and responsibility. It also, however, situates them as sites of social and political conflicts. These conflicts exhibit themselves in arguments about the curriculum, the means of assessment of both teachers and students, the manner of their interaction, the role of business and government in the schools, and the ends which direct our educational endeavours -- to give but a few examples. As I am sure you recognize, the sites which teachers occupy, at the intersection of these arguments, are, for this reason, difficult to navigate in a manner which is consistent with personal integrity and the well-being of students. It is my aim to attempt to provide you with some navigational aids in the context -- a context in which it seems the battle may be heating up.

The first thing I wish to attempt in this respect, is to share with you some aspects of my view of the ends of education and the conditions of its possibility. I will state firstly, that whatever the ends of education may be, any propositions about them which are not in accord with the conditions of its possibility, will be, of necessity, misguided, and, if applied damaging. Let us turn then to consider what the conditions of the possibility of education might be, so that we may consider what ends might be in accord with them, and avoid and resist those proposed ends which misconstrue them.

It seems an unavoidable fact to me, that, for better or worse, all of us are born into a world we did not make and had no part in making. Indeed, we are born into an already ongoing conversation composed of a multiplicity of voices articulated in words, images and practices, all of which are indissolubly interwoven, and which constitute the

inheritance and real capital that is our civilization. It is a conversation that has been gradually articulated and has no real origin, except perhaps in Michael Oakeshott's rather amusing account of how it may have shaped our appearance as we emerged from the primeval forests:

It is the ability to participate in this conversation, and not the ability to reason cogently, to make discoveries about the world, or to contrive a better world, which distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilized man from the barbarian. Indeed, it seems not improbable that it was the engagement in this conversation (where talk is without a conclusion) that gave us our present appearance, man being descended from a race of apes who sat in talk so long and so late that they wore out their tails (Oakeshott 490 1991).

One should note, that in saying that it is not "the ability to reason cogently about the world . . . that distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilized man from the barbarian," Oakeshott is not down-playing the value, or role, of these voices as they emerged from, and were articulated in, conversation, but rather, that the ongoing conversation, and the decorum appropriate to its continuation, are the conditions of the possibility of their development and continuation. It follows from this, that the condition of the possibility of education is this conversation, and that the most basic end of education, therefore, is the intimation of individuals into a capacity to participate in and enjoy it. It is only through this civilizing and humanizing process that it in fact becomes possible for an individual, or a society, to be productive with respect to so called practical concerns, and any attempt to reduce education to one of the voices which constitute the conversation will not perform this function and will erode the conditions of its own possibility. This however, is an ever present danger, for each voice in the conversation -- and some more than others -- is prone to the self-involved -- not to mention ill mannered attempt, to impose itself as a standard for the others to live up to, i.e.: to assimilate the conversation to a monologue and as Oakeshott notes, this is the essence of barbarism:

*Each voice is prone to **supurbia**, that is, an exclusive concern with its own utterance, which may result in its identifying the conversation with itself and its speaking and its speaking as if it were only speaking to itself. And when this happens, barbarism may be observed to have supervened (ibid. 492).*

There are many means through which barbarism may make its incursions into education, one of the most important, however, is the silencing of other voices through a monolithic notion of "relevance", which disallows other voices by denying their pertinence in the conversation and allowing discourse only in the language dictated by a limited conception of relevance. What is left unsaid, the acts of exclusion which attempt to prohibit various voices from the conversation, and the various silences which correspond to these, are all equally, and inevitably, a part of the conversation. Hence what is not said, or what is disallowed, or marginalized is most often as significant, or

more significant than what is actually said, with respect to the condition of conversation and the strategies of the voices and their places within it. In the words of Michel Foucault:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourse (Foucault 27 1990).

For this reason, it is critical that the establishment of curriculum and educational procedures not be adjudicated by a single voice, or a single agenda, under the auspices of "relevance."

What is required first of all, before any of the various criteria of relevance are even considered, is the intimation of children into a capacity for engaging in conversation in general. Only then will they even be given the opportunity to appreciate the various criteria and practices articulated by particular voices. Only then, will they have the opportunity to become "productive", and not simply produced according to an external demand which reduces them to an object of technique rather than working to allow them to acquire their rightful inheritance of humanity. As Friedrich Nietzsche already understood:

*I put forward at once -- lest I break with my style, which is **affirmative** and deals with contradiction and criticism only as a means, only involuntarily -- the three tasks for which educators are required. One must learn to **see**, one must learn to **think**, one must learn to **speak** and **write**: the goal in all three is a noble culture. Learning to **see** -- accustoming the eye to calmness, to patience, to letting things come up to it; postponing judgment, learning to go around and grasp each individual case from all sides. That is the **first** preliminary schooling for spirituality: not to react at once to a stimulus, but to gain control over all the inhibiting, excluding instincts. Learning to **see** as I understand it, is almost what unphilosophically speaking is called a strong will: the essential feature is precisely not to "will" -- to **be able** to suspend decision. All un-spirituality, all vulgar commonness, depend on the inability to resist a stimulus: one **must** react, one follows every impulse (Nietzsche 511 1968).*

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[Part two of this discussion: The Blueprint For Action...](#)

INCLUSION: A DESCRIPTION OF THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN MAINSTREAM CLASSROOMS

Jan De Denus

During the past two years I developed and implemented a research study in Seven Oaks School Division, studying the process of including students with special needs in mainstream, elementary classrooms.

The study was a disciplined inquiry, ". . . conducted and reported in such a way that the {description of the educational experience of mainstreamed students, with special needs} could be painstakingly examined . . ." (Cronbach & Suppes, 1969, p. 15). Five randomly chosen elementary students with special needs were observed in regular classroom settings then, interviewed using an open-ended interview format. The classroom teacher, two randomly chosen student peers, and one peer nominated by the teacher were interviewed for each student with special needs. Each observation was a continuous record of the classroom actions and interactions of the student with special needs, the classroom teacher and student peers in close proximity.

The observational and interview data were then organized, reduced and placed in matrices as well as analyzed using the Non-numerical Unstructured Data, Indexing,

Searching and Theorizing (NUDIST) computer software program (Richards, Richards, McGalliard & Sharrock, 1992). The computer program and matrices were used to sort, code and reduce the data to identify and explore emerging themes, consistencies and hypotheses. A picture of daily classroom experiences emerged as the product of this study available for rigorous scrutiny by researchers and teachers.

The pictures of students and teachers that emerged were vivid, touching, sad, heartwarming, joyous, ordinary, and extraordinary. The words of Villa, Thousand, Stainback & Stainback (1993) capture what I observed; "No child {was} 'cured' of a disability but in one small part of the world, people are recovering from the ills of separation and being restored to the good health of togetherness."

What was commonly observed in each of these classrooms was the extraordinary commitment of each teacher to find a pedagogical match for virtually every teaching/learning experience that enabled congruent or appropriate learning for the student with special needs. "Pat's" experience was typical: while the class was completing a Social Studies map "Pat" was coloring a version of the map, using an implement that was strapped to her hand. "Pat's" head was up, her eyes focused on this very challenging task and she occasionally smiled at the three students in closest proximity. More than once, her peers looked at her work and praised her efforts. These engagements were certainly not contrived or gratuitous. By the time this observation occurred, the students were accustomed to my comings and goings, and ignored my presence, as they did with the other caregivers and support people who were routinely in and out of this class. "Pat" has multiple handicaps and limited mobility and no conventional language.

The child with special needs has a more meaningful educational experience in the regular class and gains emotionally from peer contact. "Pat's" teacher said:

She really does enjoy being with the other kids. You can see that by the smile on her face when she's in a group setting. Because she's not a verbal child, it's hard to assess that a lot of the time. Her smile is the only way to assess it. I think there are great benefits, not just for her but for the other kids as well.

Another teacher commented on her student's complexity and behavioral challenges:

It's nice to see him along with the other children, because he is doing a lot better than some of them. Seeing the different aspects of his personality come out at different times; also to reassure myself that it's not me doing this to him, and it's not him doing this to me. And just realizing that this is just a little boy who needs a lot of help.

Each teacher both struggled with and achieved inclusion. The students, the day, the timing and manner of the activity, and peer behaviours all interacted to affect inclusion, in the complex manner very typical of human activity.

These teachers cared for their students as individual people and showed this caring. There was a range of caring responses that varied among the teachers and appeared dependent on the teachers' energy levels, the degree of activity or noise in the classrooms, and the evidence of competing demands. The climate in each room usually radiated positive regard. Students were accountable for their behaviour and their work. The challenges of special needs did not excuse inappropriate behaviour or incompleteness of tasks. Expectations were modified, but every student engaged in the learning process.

Teachers also showed pedagogical caring, i.e. the serious care about students' learning. The educational focus was on student needs, with attention to good teaching and management. Again the degree of caring varied and was dependent on the competing demands for teachers' time, energy and attention. Learning goals were occasionally stated overtly, but these five classrooms can generally be characterized as highly structured, well organized and active learning environments.

Inclusion had a personal cost for teachers. They worked diligently to balance the competing demands for their time and energy and at times felt tired, harried or frustrated. Every one of them asserted a commitment to inclusion, and shared personal joy and professional learning that resulted from their experience with the child. One teacher's comment was typical:

She is a child first and the disability is secondary. Foremost she is a child. She is special, but all the other children are special, too. So I think you just need to see her as a child. And that's something that I learned this year, too I also find that she is a really courageous little girl. Like the problems she's had to overcome. When you think how it can get frustrating sometimes, 'Oh you can't find your pencil again! Did you put it in the pink box? Where's your book?'

'Oh, I left it at home and I don't know where it is.'

And sometimes you just need to step back and say 'Whoa! She's really had a lot to contend with and she's really doing okay.' You sometimes get caught up on wanting to move on and get things done, but then I think about what she's had to go through.

Student peers collaborated in the inclusion process and generally attended to the physical challenges. They naturally and comfortably adjusted their routines and expectations to accommodate their peers with special needs. Some supporting descriptions or quotes are:

From peers:

Q: Is it hard having her in your class?

A: No, it's easy. She doesn't fight and she's nice to play with.

A: They are normal, but it's hard for them to concentrate and stuff.

From teachers:

*They (peers) have learned acceptance . . . tolerance . . . patience . . .
They are very accepting and like to help.*

From students with special needs, an assertion of their very normal day to day experiences:

Sometimes I read books or I do L.A. or Math or Spelling or going to the computer room.

Their experiences were enmeshed in the regular classroom routines; not separate or different.

The major themes and conclusions were:

- Student collaboration facilitated and contributed to the success of the inclusion process.
- Paraprofessionals were the primary classroom support personnel for teachers having students with special needs.
- Students with special needs and their peers both experienced significant social and academic gains in an inclusive classroom.
- Classroom teachers did not generally use professional team teaching to facilitate inclusion.
- Teachers were more accepting of inclusion when the process was not complicated by students' behavioral challenges.
- Students with behavioral challenges may benefit from a different kind of inclusion process and a different support system.
- Teachers gained understanding, knowledge, and positive experiences from the inclusion process.
- Teachers identified time constraints and the desire to meet all students' needs as personal dilemmas for them when including students with special needs.
- Teacher willingness, experience and expertise, as well as strong collegial and administrative support were prerequisites for successful inclusion of students with special needs.
- Larger classrooms or larger numbers of students with special needs in a classroom resulted in a high physical and emotional toll for teachers as they struggled to include.

Recommendations made by teachers were:

- be as consistent as possible in routines and classroom structures
- use the available supports
- don't take things personally, or personalize student behaviour as a reaction to you as an individual
- limit class sizes and the numbers of students with special needs in one class
- have a safe, supervised time-out and learning space for students with behavioral needs
- insist on adequate supports so the child with special needs can learn in the regular class
- provide a structured environment
- alternative programs both in and out of the class should be available; for example, swimming and life skills

Recommendations resulting from the overall study were:

- differentiate the teaching instruction and support of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms
- multi-age classroom arrangements to mitigate uneven distributions of students with special needs and/or behavioral challenges
- creative teaching arrangements such as family groupings
- students' needs for learning should be the primary determinant for educational grouping rather than an arbitrary grade level
- heterogeneous educational groupings to ensure opportunities for co-operation, collaboration and mutual assistance
- differentiation of support for teachers
- strong administrative support
- teachers and administrators should spend time preparing themselves, the student peers and the community within and outside the school when including students with special needs.

These recommendations frame the conclusions of my study. My commitment to and feelings about inclusion are eloquently articulated by Maxine Greene: "My interest in coping with diversity and striving toward significant inclusion derives to a large degree from an awareness of the savagery, the brutal marginalization, the structured silences, the imposed invisibility so present all around" (1993).

Completing this study took more than two years, resulting in descriptions that are unique in the educational literature of mainstreaming and inclusion. When I discuss my research with many teachers and colleagues, I am often confronted with the "yes, but . . ." excuses for exclusion. Many educators confuse the mainstreaming/inclusion of our students with physical or cognitive challenges with the inclusion of students with behavioural challenges. The reality is that students with behaviour problems have always been in the mainstream. However, as our society has changed, we are faced with larger numbers of behaviourally challenged students, and more serious, intrusive

and violent behaviours. The needs and inclusion of these students is a separate issue that warrants serious study.

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THE THESIS PROCESS

Patti Germain

- Dites donc, commandant, qu'est-ce qu'un homme peut faire de mieux de sa vie?». . . - Transformer en conscience une expérience aussi large que possible, mon bon ami.»

This is a key passage from André Malraux's novel *L'Espoir*. Here one character asks another, "How can one make best of one's life?" To this the reply, "By converting as wide a range of experience into conscious thought." This reflects Socrates' idea that "the unexamined life is not worth living." Indeed, the dialectical relationship between thought and action strengthens the sense of purpose with which the many and diverse characters strive to protect the values of democracy and human dignity in this epic novel set in the early months of the Spanish Civil War.

On May 25, 1995, I was informed that my final draft of a thesis in literature had been accepted by an examining committee at the University of Manitoba. It is entitled «Les Voix romanesques et le front populaire dans *L'Espoir* d'André Malraux» (Narrative

Voices and the Popular Front in André Malraux's *Man's Hope*). This thesis examines how Malraux's novel, through both thematic and stylistic means, depicts the pluralistic nature of the organized attempt to defeat Franco.

In the scheme of my life, this is a major event. I would like to describe how such an undertaking has enriched my life as a professional educator, firstly by examining the language skills such a project requires. I will then describe my understanding of how research in the "humanities" has some direct applications to both classroom and community life.

Processes

One of the first results of graduate work is an increased level of literacy. My ability to read and write in French developed substantially. Graduate courses and the thesis itself require vast amounts of reading. One becomes much quicker at skimming and summarizing academic writing. Increased skill also made reading in French a true source of pleasure. My literacy in English also developed. While I was able to "plod" through academic writing, I can now approach it with more ease, swiftness and with a greater ability to form an opinion about it. What I believe to be true for my students has certainly been true for me: the more one reads the better reader one becomes especially when a small element of challenge is present.

Accessing the reading material, the "research", increased my familiarity with recent cataloguing technologies which have expanded far beyond print methods. Knowledge of the process of retrieving information may now serve a variety of subjects.

The process of writing a thesis entails a variety of skills. The imaginative part of thesis writing is brief and very early in the process, occurring at the moment when one is inspired by the prospect of delving into a certain question and can imagine a possible result. Writing and thinking through an extended argument involves organizing a series of defences, examples, and explanations in support of an idea. Researching the ideas of others uncovers support, proof of the contrary, as well as many new angles on the same problem. A mass of information must be sorted through, rejected or incorporated into the work. I developed an elaborate coding and filing system to this end. I never sat down and wrote my thesis from beginning to end. Rather, bits and pieces were plugged into a framework organized at the beginning, a framework that required constant re-adjustment. Unifying and editing the work was the last of the writing tasks. A day comes when the contents of this framework must be prepared for presentation. Preparing a "final" copy is a practical but uneasy decision, for indeed, exploring any questions in depth raises new ones.

In addition to the reading, thinking, research and organizational skills, this process required that I develop computer skills. Like all other skills, this one is developed through need, practice and problem solving.

With these skills I am better able to appreciate and participate in the academic or theoretical side of the field of education. This project has also affected my daily practice in a profound way.

Classroom Applications

What I have done is what my students are doing everyday. They are reading, thinking, organizing information, writing, working with language all at the very limits of their capacity. There is little difference between a grade four student trying to make sense of a written math problem in French and me trying to make sense of Jean Paul Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*. We are at different places on the same literacy continuum. The student is able to derive some meaning from the print. So am I. But I believe we are both similarly uneasy about whether we have really understood. When I see children reading, everyday, surrounded by what is challenging print to them, I need only think of the writing of Lévi-Strauss or my endless files to imagine what they must be feeling. I am proud of my own reading accomplishments. My respect for *their* reading "work" has really grown.

My thesis allowed me to model the writing process. One day, last February, I brought a draft of my thesis into the classroom to present to my students. What I wanted them to take note of was that, like them, I was a student, working on a challenging project. This required reading books for information and then going through all the steps of the writing process through which I have been guiding them in their recent research project on animals. I showed them places where I had edited my work with a different colour pen if it didn't make sense. I explained how I would be embarrassed if there were any spelling mistakes and how I frequently consulted the dictionary for both spelling and meaning. At the end of June I was very proud to show them the bound "published" version. I look forward to applying my computer skills to "publish" children's work in a way that will inspire them to write and give them a similar sense of pride in their work.

Literacy skills and language development are at the core of writing a thesis. They are also at the core of my daily work with grade four students. My reading and writing was about literature and about the telling of stories. In elementary classes literacy is developed mainly through the use of stories. In the course of my studies in literary theory, I began to make some connections between certain developments in academic thinking and certain classroom practices. Orin Cochrane's story grammar, for example, is a way to explore the structure of a story. It is a useful idea for both reading and writing. It helps children recognize patterns. Literacy is built upon such recognition of predictable structures. I suspect that the "structuralist" movement of some decades ago, influencing our understanding on linguistics, culture and literature, may also have provided a base for such developments in the field of education. What I now know about how stories are told assists me daily in helping children derive meaning from fiction and create meaning in their own writing. I studied literary theory concerning "point of view". I am now more apt to ask children, "Who is telling this story? Would it make a difference if someone else told the same story? Do the words used identify the story-teller?"

Broader Applications

The language learning and story telling, which form such an important part of the elementary classroom, are termed at the university level "the humanities". The spirit of education at either level does not, I believe, reduce learning to a set of processes or skills, even though these can be identified. Reading fiction is not merely decoding prose. Understandings about life arise out of reading other people's stories. In an imaginative and artful way, literature helps us experience situations which we may otherwise never know. It is a form of communicating with a neighbour on the other side of the world or next door or from another time in history. The world of humans is large and infinitely complicated. Reading stories helps us think through issues, solve problems and define the kind of community in which we want to live. There is a place for developing technologies and quantifiable understandings in bettering our communities. But in creating citizenry, which is an important goal of education, the "humanities" are essential. I would like to think that writing a thesis in literature has not only made me a better educator, but a better member of the community.

In the realm of ideas, Malraux's novel underlines the importance of praxis, meaning the ongoing process of thought, action, evaluation and change. In *L'Espoir* this is achieved collectively with a common goal in mind. If I were to come away from this literary study with only one significant idea this is indeed a very valuable one. Is it not in fact at the very root of what life-long learning is and especially of how to «faire le mieux de sa vie»?

Notes

1. André Malraux, *L'Espoir* (1937; Paris: Gallimard, Collection Folio, 1985) 466.
2. Malraux, *Man's Hope*, Translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert and Alastair MacDonald (New York: Random House, c1938) 396.

TEACHER TEAMS: PROFESSIONAL PROMISE

Barbara Graham

Traditional models of professional development reinforce such notions as teacher as technician, as knowledge and instructional skill as products that can be transmitted from expert to learner, and the worth of the generalizable and universal knowledge of external experts. Traditional professional development activities then become divorced from life as it is experienced in classrooms, become workshops delivered by "experts" helping teachers master skills necessary to teach new curricula, and often occur at sites other than schools. Rarely is attention paid to the particular dilemmas of individual teachers as they work in their classrooms or to the ways that individuals construct new knowledge. Some of the assumptions supporting this traditional model of professional development are that all teachers need to learn the same set of skills, that teachers' knowledge is not so valuable, reliable or valid as "expert" knowledge, and that isolated, disconnected days of workshops will foster teacher learning.

Teacher teams were established in the Seven Oaks School Division in 1992 as part of the division's commitment to ongoing professional learning. It is one strand in the web of professional development opportunities occurring in the division; others are supervision through the creation of professional portfolios, annual statements of professional growth, support for action research projects, the High School Review, and the Symposium series of lectures. The concept of teacher teams is grounded in the belief that ". . . it is teachers themselves, as professionals, who will improve the teaching profession and the practice of teaching by studying and understanding them." (Wiens, 1992) Classroom teachers had been granted "release time to engage their colleagues in reflection and study -- in the form of critical dialogue, professional reading, classroom or school research, development of discussion papers, and the like." (Wiens, 1992)

The Teacher Team concept affirms that:

- teachers are experts about their classes and schools
- teachers are able to identify and research areas of significant concern in their particular situations
- schools can be the sites of inquiry-based professional learning
- there are similarities between student learning from engagement in worthwhile projects and the ways that teachers learn
- teachers working collaboratively can create improved conditions in which student learning can occur.

The Teacher Team concept challenges us to reconceive our expectations of our colleagues and to transform both the form and the content of collegial interactions, in effect to transform both the form and content of school and teaching cultures. "Cultures of teaching comprise beliefs, values, habits and assumed ways of dealing with things among communities of teachers who have had to deal with similar demands and constraints over many years. Culture carries the community's historically generated and collectively shared solutions to its new and inexperienced membership. It forms a framework for occupational learning. (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 165) Teaching strategies, the kinds of actions that become accepted as good practice arise "not just from the demands and constraints of the immediate context, but also from cultures of teaching." (Ibid)

Dan Lortie (1975) was one of the first to describe the 'isolation' and 'privatism' of teachers as well as the egg-crate structure of schools as a prime factor contributing to this isolation. Other factors contributing to this phenomenon are the "uncertainty" of teaching, the lack of common goals, the lack of reliable and consistent feedback about whether the goals have been reached, and the connotation of criticism and evaluation when teachers observe each other teach. Isolation has been viewed in a variety of ways: as ecological, as a condition of teacher work, as a psychological attribute of teachers, as an adaptive strategy allowing teachers to focus on tasks and professional responsibilities they choose, and as an elective strategy which allows teachers the freedom to choose whether to participate in collegial interactions or to work alone. Despite these numerous interpretations, isolation remains a term with negative nuances and is often contrasted to terms such as collegiality or collaboration, both of which are regarded more positively. Most of the rhetoric of school reform suggests that norms of collegiality and collaboration are necessary for this reform to occur.

Hargreaves has coined the terms 'balkanization' and 'contrived collegiality' to demonstrate that there can be negative forms of collegial interactions. Balkanization can occur within departments by year level or by language program and consists of sub-groups within schools. It can limit professional learning to the shared knowledge and understandings of small groups of people. Since membership in these groups or departments remains relatively stable over time, new members with fresh ideas and different life and professional experiences are seldom welcomed. Contrived collegiality is characterized by groups of teachers assigned to work together on someone else's agenda, under conditions imposed by others, with little flexibility allowed for the exercise of professional judgment.

As part of the educational reform movement, schools are being transformed into learning organizations (Lieberman, 1995, p. 592) in which the content and process of learning and teaching are to be redefined. Lieberman (1994) suggests that five elements can be found in schools where cultures of support are nurtured. She refers to Little's study of six urban schools and Rosenholtz' study of several elementary schools to illustrate how norms of collegiality, openness and trust foster staff development. Principals and teachers, working together to establish shared values, common expectations for teachers and students offer mutual assistance as people experience

the tasks of teaching. There is support for the belief that "there is a strong relationship between the structures, norms and patterns of interaction in school cultures and the potential for teachers' growth and development". (p. 17) In schools where there are strong norms of interaction, teachers view themselves as members of a professional community with shared goals and as teachers who have some control over their work.

The second element identified by Lieberman is the provision of time and opportunity for systemic inquiry. A flexible approach is pursued in organizing class time for students; this enables teachers to meet together to devise plans for such things as interdisciplinary teaching and action research projects. This provision of time leads directly to her third element which is providing opportunities for teachers to learn in the context of their classrooms. The interdependence of teaching and learning are being recognized and teachers are increasingly being viewed as learners who pose questions about their own practice.

When teachers research their own practice, the knowledge they construct as they are exploring their work becomes shared with colleagues, both within schools and between schools. Teachers are perceived as having worthwhile knowledge and as they discuss this knowledge they begin to take on leadership roles in the school. Traditional hierarchical patterns are eroded for more collegial patterns of interaction. This fourth element, the changing perceptions of school leadership leads to the fifth element which Lieberman labels the development of networks and professional coalitions.

This brief discussion of Lieberman's elements which facilitate the establishment of cultures of support provides us with an extra-divisional context for examining the divisional Teacher Team Leader concept. This concept encourages discussions led by teachers on educational issues, active involvement of all professional staff, reflection on these discussions, and provides opportunities for professionals to articulate what they have learned. Teachers are being asked to view themselves as both learners and scholars, as professionals capable of generating shared knowledge and of using this knowledge to find new ways of approaching the complex and multiple demands of teaching. Most of our previous experiences have not equipped us for engaging in professional dialogue. Many felt frustrated with lack of a tangible product at the end of the two hour discussions. As we work through these frustrations and begin to build shared understandings of some of the issues facing us, we begin to develop a new language and new ways of conceiving our roles and our interactions with colleagues despite the artificiality of forced discussion groups.

Has the Teacher Team Leader concept enabled us to expand our view of professional development? Have the supports such as release time for Teacher Team Leaders and monthly discussion groups contributed to a culture of inquiry in schools or was time spent on managerial and administrative tasks? Have the patterns of collegial interactions and support groups been enhanced by groups working together to understand educational issues as they apply to specific contexts? Are conditions being created which encourage knowledge sharing that is anchored in problems of practice and that places the needs of learners as the focus on inquiry? Do teachers think of

themselves as scholars, capable of constructing knowledge and understanding and articulating this newly created knowledge? The Teacher Team Leader concept challenged us to transform our understandings of professional community and roles. Have we begun to meet these challenges?

Selected Readings

- Hargreaves, Andy. 1994. *Changing Teachers: Changing Times*. New York. Teachers College Press.
- Lieberman, Ann. 1995. "Practices That Support Teacher Development". Phi Delta Kappan, p. 591-596.
- Lieberman, Ann. 1994. "Teacher Development: Commitment and Challenge" from *Teacher Development and the Struggle for Authenticity*, Grimmett and Neufeld, editors.
- Wiens, John. 1992. *Teacher Teams -- Discussion Paper*.