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WHY IS EDUCATION SO HARD?

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If a group of educators sit around and discuss the problems of education for a while, it doesn't take long before someone observes that young children arrive at school full of energy and eager to learn but within a few years they are turned off and uninterested in what school has to teach. Young children, it is often added, learn a language in a very short time - an immensely complex task - and they learn how to fit into a particular social structure, learn the nature of different relationships and how they should behave to different kinds of people, and learn a huge range of stories about the cosmos, which explain, more or less, why we are sexed and mortal creatures, and how the Earth came to be, and what stars are, and so on. The massive amounts of seemingly easy learning that goes on in the first years makes later learning for most students seem as though they are having to walk through molasses. What happens?

Three answers: all wrong

The first response to this often-observed condition of human learning is what I will call the "socialization" response. That is, the conditions in which young children are such effective learners should be replicated in formal educational procedures. We should, in John Dewey's terms, make the "formal learning" of schools be as like the "natural learning" of the child's out-of-school environment as possible. This leads to concerns with "relevance" to children's lives, moving gradually from active manipulation to theoretical understanding, having teachers model the skills and values that we want the child to learn, and generally integrating the child's learning with the everyday realities of their social and natural environment.

The second response is Plato's. He observed the rapid early learning, and concluded that the problem with it was that children believed whatever stories they were first told, and that the educational task was to carry their minds from the concrete and confused content of early learning to sophisticated abstract thinking. To achieve this he devised the lengthy curriculum of increasingly abstract forms of knowledge that would gradually shape the student's mind until they would understand what is real and true about the world. He accepted that this would be hard, but that's how it is, so stop moaning and just get on with it. Teachers in this scheme are very important because they have the knowledge whose transmission shapes the student's mind.

The third response was Rousseau's. He agreed with Plato about the problem of the early rapid and powerful learning being that the student internalized a lot of nonsense,

which it was very difficult thereafter to dislodge. His solution was to prevent the nonsense being learned in the first place. His students then would be taught away from the social

influences that would only lead them astray. Nature would be their real tutor, because only nature could be relied on not to deceive them with "words, words, words." Relying on nature would ensure the proper development of the student's mind. The teacher, in this view, is basically a facilitator, whose job is to ensure that, as far as possible, the only influence on the student's developing mind is nature.

These three ideas shouldn't seem odd to us, because they are the only ideas we have to think about education. Our current thinking is made up of mixtures of all three of them. We require our schools to socialize students to the current requirements of Canadian cultural and business life. We require them to do the academic job of shaping students' minds so that they learn the truth about different aspects of the world disclosed by various disciplined forms of knowledge. We aren't satisfied with them simply picking up and accepting a bunch of random opinions. And we require schools to attend to the natural developmental process that is supposed to underlie our growth, theories like Piaget's are our current guides to this.

Evolution: why those ideas are inadequate

An oddity of human evolution is our development of language. One effect of our genetic programming to learn a language very early in life is the provision of a range of capacities necessary for this incredibly complex task. So, in early years, we are flooded with a commitment of intellectual resources to enable us to achieve this remarkable task in a very short time and with little overt effort.

We can see features of this commitment of resources by our developmental program if we consider young children's ability to generate and recognize appropriate metaphors. That capacity peaks in humans at about age four, and then gradually declines for a number of years. Metaphoric fluency is also central to the capacities we generally call the imagination - this intellectual ability also peaks early in life, and typically declines thereafter, atrophying significantly in adulthood for very many people. This is all fine for the hunter/gatherer societies we are evolutionarily programmed to function in, but today we want the flexibility we see in early metaphor use, and imagination, to extend more richly into adult life.

So the three ideas above - the set our modern conception of education is made up from and on which our schools are built and operate - address the problem of learning-decline while ignoring evolution's influence on us. Socializing assumes that if only we keep using the apprenticeship models of early childhood we will overcome evolution. Good luck! Plato's scheme assumes that hard unremitting work will enable us to muscle our way through - or at least for those few who have the intellectual muscle-power, which, alas, doesn't include most of us. Forget it! And Rousseau's scheme assumes we can avoid the problem altogether if we only keep our students from learning anything

much until they are about thirteen years old and then expect them to learn all the usual cultural content with ease. Dream on!

The right answer

Oh dear, I'm just about out of space! O.K. O.K.

The trick is to ensure that early schooling conforms with the learning we are evolutionarily super-equipped to do in those years. As the volcanic power of the early years wears off, evolution won't give us many clues, but cultural history will. That is, we can see from post-evolutionary cultural development how human understanding has changed in a particular pattern. The educational trick is to explore and expose that pattern as well as we can and see what it tells us about cultural and developmental predispositions in learning. We will find these by exploring the cultural tools--like language, literacy, theoretic thinking, and so, whose development we can trace historically, and whose learning we can build into our curricula.

What humans have developed culturally are tools that can enrich our understanding. I have tried to excavate a set of these tools and explore what kind of curriculum and teaching methods would be best for furthering them. In a new book (*The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding*, University of Chicago Press, 1997) I have outlined five kinds of understanding called somatic, mythic, romantic, philosophic, and ironic. I have tried to show that, while we can't beat our evolution, and while it must remain in some sense an enemy of our educational aim of extending imagination richly into adulthood for everyone, we can find help in the cognitive tools developed in our cultural history. Such a focus for an educational program can get us beyond the old socializing, Platonic and Rousseauian ideas and their endless conflicts - between "traditionalists" and "progressivists", between "vocational" and "academic", between "relevance" and "basics", etc. The trick is to see how literacy, for example, has developed most richly in our cultural history, and see what intellectual tools it requires for fullest and most abundant development, and build these into our educational program.

Easy to say in the abstract - but the book tries to lay out in detail what these tools are and how we can develop them in our teaching, and so make teaching more easy and fruitful. Yeah, yeah, dream on. Have a look and see though.

Reference:

Egan, Kieran. *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding*. University of Chicago Press. 1997.

The First Example of Teacher Action Research in our Journal

This is the first time that *Teaching Today for Tomorrow* publishes a teacher's narrative inquiry into the educational and human dynamics within his/her classroom. We believe that the following piece of writing shows how teachers can gain new perspectives and understandings of educational processes in the classroom by describing these phenomena in narrative form. Rather than abstractly outlining how this process might work and how it might benefit the learning of children, we decided to provide a concrete example. Please, note that this narrative is fictionalized in the sense that students' names have been changed and that these name changes do not necessarily indicate their true gender.

DIALOGUE, REFLECTION, REVISION ... TOOLS FOR LEARNING

Zoë Thompson

"I've written in my journal so much about this book. I've put a lot of work and thought into this writing. I'm not sure I have anything new to say. Do we have to do the final project? Like, how much more do you want me to do?" Terri asked with that heavy sigh that goes with the adolescent favourite word, "like . . ."

We were almost at the end of reading the novel together. I was encouraging the free-write at the end of the reading.

A good question.

I do expect students to describe and explain in their writing responses. Terri's writing had shown an understanding of the events of the novel, the relationship between characters and some understanding of "writer language and techniques" - the use of literary devices. What more could I ask of her? What further evidence could I possibly gather that I thought I needed to have about her understanding and appreciation of this piece of literature? What more would an additional assignment do to help her further develop her understanding and appreciation? Did she need any additional supports with writing, thinking, revisiting the work that might be found in an additional "project"?

"How much is enough?" was what I think Terri was asking. She wasn't looking forward to more writing about this novel. She was satisfied that she had written all she could. Because I encourage students to talk about their work and write about their

understandings of content and of process, her question was not unusual. We were negotiating the curriculum. As a group, we discussed "the project" and talked again about the criteria for their evaluations. But I knew the question Terri had asked was a critical question for me.

That reminded me of my own question as a teacher researcher; "What counts as evidence?" and "Who decides what is evidence?" This question is central in my classroom and because it preoccupies me, it preoccupies the way I intentionally go about my teacher work with students. Was Terri telling me that she did not want to engage in a game that had no value for her, or for me? I had already been looking ahead to the writing piece I had designed and was wondering about time-lines, moving on to something new, how would I fit this activity in? I was already considering the value of the project, not as a class project, but as an exercise for some. Her question forced me to make a decision. I told the class I needed to think about Terri's question.

What did I really want the students to be able to write about after their readings and discussions with the novel? What activity would best show their understandings and appreciation of the writing? I presented the students with three questions as a final writing piece that I hoped would show something about what they had learned from their writing workshop activities connected to the content of the reading workshop activity. What I read turned out to be some of the best writing they had done. Their explanations were concise, clear and communicative. They obviously loved the story and wrote convincingly. It brought closure to the novel study and our negotiations of their curriculum. They wrote powerfully. Was it partly because they had been empowered to do so by Terri's question?

"I've always done it this way! I can't do it any other way! When is this project supposed to be done, anyway?"

She was shrill, she was backing away, and she started to stamp her feet.

"Well," I said firmly. "Just try."

As we were discussing how to put the written report together for their research project, I asked the students not to use subtitles. We used subtitles in their webs for note-taking and I wanted to move away from that "look" for organization to a new look for the written report. My intention was to teach them not to write about one topic on each page, but to have "the story" flow, paragraph to paragraph. I mentioned this because I had kept this in mind from previous work. I was surprised that students had handed in some written work previously that followed a format that resembled one page, one main idea and one subtitle. I looked at "where they were" and was making some decisions about where I might lead them next and I was planning my next teaching steps after looking at their work.

Initially, they had selected topics of their own, were to brainstorm questions of their own to begin their searches, researched the topic and made a web for their note-taking. My

agenda included the teaching of the web and note-taking format. They decided what to research and how best to organize their information. We talked about the main ideas for topics and how the research resources they had consulted already had the information organized. Did this help? Were these organizers enabling us to find out what we really wanted to know? Were we using these organizers to help us find out or were we depending on these organizers to tell us what we wanted to know? We had some interesting discussions about how text gives us messages through the organizers we see. I called titles, subtitles, bold face print, maps, illustrations, charts, graphs, etc. the "organizers".

We spent one class discussing how best to present their work. Many suggestions came forward - dioramas, posters, audio tapes of interviews, mobiles, videos. Some asked if they could write "a report". We didn't negotiate the details of these various ways to present. I felt that they were working with enough concepts right now. Note-taking and organization on top of content was enough for now. We could revisit much of this later in further mini-lessons and various other activities. This is how I go about assessing their progress as their searches unfold.

During each independent study class time, I conference with each group or individual. Sometimes the short conference goes like this.

"Mrs. Thompson, can I go to the library to work? My references are there and I want to finish this one section."

"O.K. What other help do you need?"

Sometimes, the conference is a lot longer. I usually begin with, "Last day you said that you wanted to finish . . ." (I consult my notes that I keep on each session, each group). "What do you want to get done today? What can I do to help?"

I knew with Karen's choice of a written report, she was fairly secure with topic sentences and supporting details in paragraphs now and I was hoping that her comfort with this would help her create a piece to present that showed some organization of the ideas. I expected her to use her questions as organizers, but I knew there were obvious organizers such as geographic location, climate, animals, vegetation, cities, transportation links, etc. for the topic Karen had chosen. I didn't want to use the word "essay" so I used the word "story" when I showed how a piece of writing would look if there were no subtitles. I thought this might help to wean her away from this apparently ritualized style of "doing a project". I knew I was in trouble because we were moving into unfamiliar ground for her and I knew Karen well enough to predict her frustration with new things. She always had to be perfect, and when she was starting to feel not in control, not able to get this perfect the first time, anxiety loomed. Karen was in a panic!

You really have to know Karen like I know Karen to fully appreciate her discomfort and her impatience. Our relationship had come a long way. She was learning to trust, to take more risks, to be open to new ideas, and to be more patient with new ideas. She

was struggling with not having to be perfect the first time around. I was trying to teach reflection, revision, revisiting and all this was new territory. But, by this time of year, this was increasingly more familiar territory for her.

Obviously, I thought, we need to revisit some notions. Please don't let this be a stand off.

She had already handed in a gorgeous report with a plastic binding, typed carefully on her computer with an unusual font, accompanied by computer-generated maps, captions, and a table of contents. Yes, and with subtitles; each section she researched was presented in separate sections. I returned it to her. I had to.

My sticky note asked, "Why did you decide to do your report this way, with subtitles and separate sections?"

"Would you change my mark if I rewrote it without subtitles?" she asked later that day as she approached.

I was a bit confused because we hadn't discussed a mark. I thought we were working on format. But I knew Karen was always concerned about marks and I thought I had some understanding of why. I wanted her to think about something else for now. "I only wanted to know why you decided to do what you did. We haven't discussed marks."

"Everybody knows that teachers like it when we hand in stuff that 'looks good'. Why isn't this way good enough?"

I wasn't sure where to go with this next. Karen was personalizing this. She was challenging me. We had been through this many times together. We had been here before. I needed to spend time with others about their writing. I couldn't handle her demands just then. I had another piece of writing in my hand at the time.

I tried one more time, "Here is an example of what a report could look like without subtitles. This story has no subtitles and see how paragraphs flow into each other for about two and one-half pages. The transitions in each paragraph help the writer help the reader to go where the writer wants the reader to go without the visual cues that the subtitles provide for us. Try it with your writing."

And she did.

The next day she arrived at my desk with a smile on her face and a report in her hand. She made the changes I had asked for. I'm not sure what the smile was about. Maybe she needed to see a concrete example? Maybe she lost her fear to try something differently? Maybe she had learned to trust the re-doing, re-thinking, and was pleased with the results?

Maybe she was thinking about a better mark?

I was soon to realize that the shift from one "look" to another required more than a shift in format. I was also asking them to do much more with the thinking through of the research details. I was hoping that they could write a "story". And I think what I meant by a story was in the words I used about how a story looks. There is of course, much more to a story than just how it looks. The difference between what her project used to look like and what it now looked like had the format changes but it also had some writing changes.

She saw the other piece with which I had helped two other students. She saw that I had photo copied parts of their writing, cut it apart, pasted it on longer paper and left spaces between parts. All this in an effort to help show/explain about transitions. It had worked well with the other two students. She needed to have a look at this "lesson" if she was going to understand something new.

It was then I was struck by the idea that stories are the result of understanding or that stories lead us to further understanding and that the part that was missing for the students was this connection. They were working with the mechanics of this, the paragraphing, the transitions, and the hardest part - the ending. Through their struggle with the change in how their writing looked, I was struggling with why the change was so important to teach. Maybe because some of the connections were missing for me at the time, too. There was a tacit knowing of where we needed to go with this; as yet I didn't have the vocabulary and hadn't thought through how to go about showing in a different way. How to move students from simply reporting facts they have read about and written down to applying what they now knew in a different way?

I knew I wasn't getting at what I thought counted as evidence. I didn't know how to get at that. Yet. But I knew I could find another opportunity to try with different topics so I was not concerned about immediacy. For now, what the students seemed to value as evidence was facts, and well-organized facts at that. What I was trying to get at with them was the, "So what?" part, the part where they could show me that they could put some ideas together. I needed more time, time to teach with this concept again and more opportunities to see student work and to see what they were thinking.

To see what they were thinking . . . we make decisions based on what we think? How do we make visible what we think, what we think we know? Through writing about it and certainly by talking about it. E-mail conversations with other teachers help me talk about it in writing and also allows me to see what I think. It is intellectually interactive, or "transactive", as the Deweyians would say. How do I make student writing that we share become intellectually transactive, an exploration of ideas, expressions of our understandings? Actually, I believe I do that. I set up the daily interactions/transactions with students so that our conversation about the learning at hand has the potential to be changed, transformed by the exchange. This is part of what counts as evidence.

"How is she doing?" mom asked. "I have the document, the report to parents with me, but Karla has yet to show me her work. Until I see her portfolio, I don't get a full picture of what the document means."

"Karla will have time to show you now. Karla has a collection of five pieces and she is prepared to present them," I said.

The hallway was crowded with parents in overcoats. Not the best situation for an evening with students and parents that is so important. How to provide time for meaningful conversation yet accommodate everyone? As one family was preparing to leave the classroom, I had walked into the hall and had begun this conversation with another family. These are well-informed parents who are involved in the lives of their daughters as students and the talk quickly shifted to Karla's writing.

This was the first student led discussion time. And with the crush of people waiting, I could see that the quality of our talk was going to be in jeopardy because I was feeling a time squeeze. It didn't help that the principal had already casually made a remark to remind me of the people waiting. But I would take the time, even if I was on my feet.

Karla takes her life as a student very seriously and parents supervise often and helpfully. I explained that one way I thought I could continue to facilitate Karla's learning was with the development of her essay format. Mom thought the skills of debate would help. I countered with the skills of conversation that I was trying to develop. I was explaining that within the conversation of an essay format, students are learning to explain what they know from an informed stance. Knowledge of debating skills and how to offer skilfully those experiences for students was something I thought I did not have as a strength, so this formal debate procedure had not been a part of teacher-student work in Room 8 but perhaps I could help in another way. There was a debating club in the school. Students were free to join.

I promised to talk with the teacher involved with debates and to think further about her suggestion. Mom ended the conversation with the comment that the document, the report to parents forms, was not enough detail about the student work if she could not have a portfolio to accompany it. Also, she wanted more anecdotal -style detail.

I needed to talk about this with parents and students as much or more than I needed to document some detail on the report forms. Karla's mom reminded me that she needed more written information, because in the past I had given much written information to parents. She had appreciated the detailed anecdotal. She had received less this time because now we were going to hear from Karla. As we all sat around the round table Karla's voice would be heard as she initiated the discussion that evening. When I sent the written report home, I knew some parents would notice lesser amount of teacher writing. I was sure they would want more. I hoped that the student-led format would provide the "more". I wanted to show students and parents that this is a transactive process. Thank you, John Dewey! (1938).

Conversation can be in written form or in oral form and probably I couldn't say one takes precedence; both are necessary and the conversation needs to be with students, parents, and teacher together. My written anecdotes are conversations with the person who is the reader. The reader is Karla. The reader is also the parent. The reader is also

the principal, or a receiving teacher. My intentions were to have students lead the discussion with a showing of selections of their work accompanied by a brief description. The students opened the discussions by referring to goals we had set together in October at our first student/ parent/teacher meeting.

"With this essay I am trying to get Karla to write about the connections she sees between what the Sumerians and Egyptians accomplished and what conditions enabled them to accomplish those things."

"Does she get a chance to talk about these things before she gets a chance to write about them?"

"Most of the conversation has been about the organization of the ideas as well as an understanding of the organizers we use. I expected the students to use Participants (who were these people?), Time (when did this happen?), Place (where in the world did all this happen?), Action (what did they do, what evidence do we have of what they accomplished, what is of importance to the person who is writing about this evidence? - we talked a bit about what makes history), and Cause (how were they able to accomplish what it is we think they accomplished? what helped them? - environment, geography? climate? trade with other cultures?)."

"She is not able to make connections with these ideas?"

"We are working on it. This is her first try at it. The research was done well, she has obviously been taking some risks with her writing because I can see she is trying to think about things differently. Our next step is to sit down with this piece together and continue to work on it."

I think I had to say, "We are working on it" because I really was struggling with this as much as Karla. I was struggling to find ways for her to understand connections as much as she was. In a way, I was also struggling with her problem, "*How can I show my understanding of the connections with these ideas?*" If I was clear about the connections, would she be clear? I am always struck with the notion that if I don't really understand something well, I always end up in a struggle to teach it. I have to be patient with myself knowing that it is through the teaching/sharing/discussion . . . the intellectual transaction . . . that my understanding is increased.

Here was another chance for me to try to articulate what different understanding about concepts I expected from student writing. I was forcing myself to revisit, reflect and revise with this mom.

But I also got the responses from students in the class when we were discussing this.

"Why don't you just tell us what you want before we do all this writing? Now it is not good enough. Now we have to do it all over again," lamented Catarina with an attitude I was learning to understand.

Transmissional notions set us up for power struggles. Catarina thrives on power struggles. She loves to talk through what's on her mind. She writes well. She prefers to write at home although she appreciates quiet writing time during class. She has often spoken of her need for the quiet of her room, the time to carefully form her written letters as she writes, the time to organize her papers together to have them all ready to hand in. In class, she likes to dominate discussions by speaking first, speaking well. As the teacher, I have to be careful that her strength does not silence the others. It is a delicate balancing act.

It is a delicate balance when trying to develop with the students their faculty of judgement, evaluation, and rational criticism (Goble, 1985). I try to give students vocabulary for questioning. We've had conversations about different learning styles and I provided some activities for students to work through to help them see the different styles, help them see their strengths. Often I refer to this past work. My purpose in doing such an activity with the class is to show them that we all learn differently, that we have strengths, and that we need to respect the various ways we go about learning in the class because sometimes we need to act as a group, a class, even though we are all different. We need to be aware that some people learn best by talking and asking questions. Sometimes, the "oral learner" gets annoying. People who don't need to talk a lot about what they are doing and why get interrupted by the student who does. I share this information as a way of contributing to their self knowledge but also as a way of getting to the notion of respect for each other. It is a way of foregrounding my philosophic intentions, my way of teaching. I believe that transactional experiences demand equality and respect. I won't give in to the inequalities in the classroom and the festering disrespect that it causes.

My delicate balancing act with Catarina started a year ago. I was the assistant coach on her basketball team.

The coach was a university student who donated her time between her classes and her job. My role was to provide a connection with the students and the school, because the coach did not know the students, was not of the community, and had never "taught" before. If we didn't have an "outside" coach, we couldn't have a team. Having an "outside" coach was not going to be easy all around, but the students did get to learn more about the game.

Catarina was among those who were anxious to have the team experience. She was athletic, competitive, wanting to work hard, wanting to learn more about the game, wanting to win. On the losing days, she became a not-very-nice person because it was always someone else's fault when we lost. Usually the coach's. Jane, our coach, never came back to the school with us after a game when we had games away. She brought her own car and usually was rushing off to her part-time job. The first time the conversation on the return bus ride became all about Jane's shortcomings, I stopped the complaining. I told the girls that we needed to talk about this when Jane was with us, as a team. I acknowledged their frustration by saying that I understood how they were feeling, but that a better way to handle this would be to have a team meeting. The

second time this happened, both girls' teams were together on the return bus ride, our team had lost, the other girls' team had a victory. The complaints started. Both teams of girls were involved in an instant, and before I knew it, so was the other teacher/coach of the other team. The other teacher? Now what?

"We don't talk about this without Jane. This is not a team meeting. We wait until next practice when Jane can be with us."

If the other teacher could have shot me down with her look, she would have. I had shut the conversation down with the students and also with a colleague. The other teacher never spoke to me for months. The team meetings were never as ugly as the bus conversation started to be, but Jane was always defensive. She had a tough job and the learning to do it well was causing her some growing pains, but she was progressing with the students and they were learning to improve their skills. The dynamic in the group could have been healthier.

When I knew Catarina was going to be in my classroom this fall, I knew I would need to watch for chances not to get into power struggles with her. Others would follow her lead.

On the first day of school while going through the class list and asking for clarification of the pronunciation of names, I had an opportunity to ask Catarina what she preferred, "Catina"? or "Catarina"? I told her a quick story about how much I liked her name. A university friend from my past was a Catarina and she was very important to me. She said I could call her Catarina, but that most people just called her Catina or Tina. "Catarina" it was. I needed something to put me into a different space with her and "Catarina", just my saying her name differently, would help me think this through.

We have a good working relationship. She tells me when I go too fast for her with my explanations, she reminds me that she gets confused with too much information, that she needs information in small amounts, step by step, as discussed with learning styles. She contributes to class discussions, often initiating issues that most students find difficulty discussing. At times we have disagreed on how discussions should flow.

In class, I have several students working fairly independently and begin new sections with an overview to show the class where we are going with content and evaluations. I do this for two reasons; one, is to provide the global view, the second, is to provide the students who are working ahead with a general idea. That seems to be all some need to take off with their own inquiries. She interrupted the class on three occasions to remind me that **all** students didn't need to hear the overview. It didn't suit her. Two other students agreed with her.

"Fair enough", I said. "Would those students who need this information meet with me before the end of the morning so that we can make a plan, please? Now, for those just starting to read, consult pages 79-83 and begin your note taking with your web."

I stopped "annoying" her with my approach. I met with the students who were working ahead, separately. I got to spend more quality time with a small group of students needing very little direction. The small group was able to ask specific questions very quickly and they were then set free to proceed with their own ideas. I also arranged to spend more time with the small group of students having the most difficulty staying on task, reading the resource material, putting ideas to paper.

The only thing I can think of in response to Catarina's opening question is that I have to see how they think before I can help them with their writing and their thinking. They have to have something on paper, some thoughts, some decisions, . . . then I believe that as their teacher I have some **THING** with which to work.

Of course, I am battling process writing notions. Why is it that students have not met Donald Graves (1989) through his work with students, nor Nancies Atwell (1987)? Students who are more comfortable with a process approach to learning (writing) write and write again. They are less resistant to trying again, taking risks, and don't worry so much about getting things perfect.

There is another thing I am battling too. And I think it has to do with power in the classroom. Students (people in any group, not just students, not just classrooms) have connected schooling with power struggles. The heart of the story starring Catarina is that her notion of learning is transmissional and it gets confusing for her because she has met a transactional teacher. She said, "Why don't you just tell us what you want before we do all this writing? **Now** you are telling us that it is not good enough. **Now we have to do it all over again.**"

What I try to do is teach by revisiting, reflecting, revising. The dialogue between student and teacher, parent and teacher is vital to the transaction. The exchange of ideas furthers the understanding. It is the understanding that is important. What is also important is finding ways to make my practice visible in helpful ways.

It is indeed a delicate balance when trying to develop with the students their faculty of judgement, evaluation, and rational criticism (Goble, 1985). I encourage the students to question the process as it unfolds in the classroom. I encourage them to be critical with informed opinions, not just to say something "sucks" but what it is that they feel is unjust and what they would like to see done about it. In my attempts to " ... plead today for attention to the deepest and most difficult goal of education - the effort to increase the sum of wisdom, and diminish the power of stupidity" (Goble p.6) I need to keep in mind the consequences of these efforts, the consequences for me and the consequences the students who I hope are learning how to make reasonable decisions.

I avoided a power struggle with Catarina. Acknowledged her needs. Was more than able to spend quality time with others who needed it. I could only have accomplished this so efficiently because of Catarina's suggestion. This move was a reflection in-action and on-action (Schon, 1987). Some of the enabling conditions I had actively sought were respect, open discussion, encouraging the asking of many questions and trust.

Where is all this leading? Each of the stories in the classroom that give me pause are all about assessment of learning. I think they all show that students and parents are involved in this. Their involvement shows that assessment, discussion about it, reflection upon it, is part of a complex educational process - that it has come to be seen as an opportunity to develop more complex understandings to allow students to take more responsibility for their work. It is the provoking and engaging in reflection and revision that allows us a window into richer understandings (Schon, 1987; Stenhouse, 1975, 1988; Hollingsworth & Gallego, 1996).

Five years ago I learned that when I taught differently I needed to assess student work differently. At that time I was exploring cooperative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1986; Kagan, 1990; Slavin, 1990) and quickly realized that the assessment practice I followed did not fit the different way I was teaching. I needed to assess differently and this led my inquiry in a direction connected to assessment and instruction as it was connected to the learning and teaching that I saw and felt taking place. I had started with a concept and ended up looking for tools to help students understand the concept better. Dialogue, reflection and revision became the necessary tools for understanding.

As I look back through the large amount of writing I have completed on the topic of assessment and instruction, really an attempt to answer for myself an on-going question which is "What's going on here?", I see that authentic assessment is accomplished with the tools of dialogue, reflection, and revision - doing again, revisiting work. Simply stated, assessment becomes a tool for learning, a cultivated habit of mind. (Perrone, 1993).

What this writing has been about this year has been assessment and evaluation . The stories are real and situated in my practice. I trusted that if I could just write, get my ideas on paper for me to see, somehow my perception of the concrete would unfold into some sort of knowledge with which to proceed. Knowledge about teaching is formed from perceptions that have been captured in concrete situations. The knowledge I have been seeking, in some ways the answers to my questions, is inside this experience. The best way "to have" these experiences is to write them down. Then they are mine to reflect upon, to revisit, and to help me revise then, renegotiate their meanings to help me understand my work as a teacher. They have a way of existing so that I can explore them, think about them, reflect upon their particulars in particular places in time. Because it is so subjective, there is nothing to transmit, only to explore.

Our teacher research group has a task. It is to help us explore our perceptions, reflect on our practical experiences, so that we can perhaps put plans into place for ourselves, the consequences of which are to be reflected upon. The theoretical knowledge or conceptual knowledge that I pursue is of no real value unless chewed and digested, to paraphrase Stenhouse (1975). I don't want to be a collector of knowledge although the "stuff" of that collection stimulates and inspires.

I want to be a good teacher, I want to be a good learner, and I want to be able to show students in Room 8 how to go about this. I think I can do this by teaching them tools for exploring their knowledge, for showing them about exploration.

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COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY BOUND PROGRAM

Ken Burron

You are a graduate of a post-secondary institution. Among the many factors that contributed to your success were time, effort, confidence in your abilities, persistence, encouragement, higher level skills and financial wherewithal. How did all those things come together for you? There's probably a very good chance that a significant person or persons had a positive influence on you during what can be an unsettling time for young adults. In any event you were able to overcome the obstacles, meet the challenges, and succeed in attaining your goal.

Has your post-secondary education been of value to you?

Will a post-secondary education be of similar value to today's secondary school students? This is a difficult question to respond to in view of global and domestic economic uncertainty and the significant and rapid technological change which is occurring. There are some who suggest that advanced learning is less relevant today than in previous decades, and in fact that we have an overeducated population. The Globe and Mail's editorial writers appear to have this penchant. It appears that post-secondary education is becoming more restrictive than it was when many of us were in school. This restrictiveness impacts very profoundly on non-traditional students.

This is not to say that reforms are not needed in our post-secondary institutions, however changes must not be accomplished at the expense of accessibility. Research and practical experience demonstrates that academic, cultural, and economic influences in society and in the educational system already limit the participation of non-traditional students. By non-traditional students we mean those in our society who are under represented in post-secondary education: sons and daughters of working-class and lower-middle class parents, persons of Aboriginal origin, recent immigrant populations, and the physically challenged. If, in these times of global economic uncertainty and significant technological change, the advanced applied learning, problem solving, and expressive skills inherent in a good post-secondary education are of increasing importance to students and to the future of our country, then avenues should be sought to provide accessibility to post-secondary institutions to all students.

This is the position taken by the three institutions that are involved in the College and University Bound (C.U.B.) program. C.U.B. program partners are Seven Oaks School Division, Red River Community College and the University of Winnipeg. The intent of the C.U.B. program is to increase accessibility to post-secondary institutions for non-traditional students using strategies which address the academic, economic, and

cultural barriers to post-secondary education at an early stage in a student's academic life. Projects typically begin in the transition years to junior high and involve students, parents, and instructors at all levels of education in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the program. The objective is to develop an appreciation in the students of the importance of post-secondary education and to provide the needed academic, cultural, and economic support to help them develop their talents through their academic life.

The purpose of C.U.B. is to draw students from across the school division who, in the opinion of their teachers would be strong candidates to attend college or university, but are not likely to consider post-secondary education as an option for themselves. (For example, it could be a young woman with a respectable academic record who for cultural reasons, and possibly because of gender expectations, is unlikely to pursue her full potential at the post-secondary level; or it could be a student in a vocational or other non-post-secondary pattern who does not consider post-secondary education as possible because of the expectations of social class or culture.)

The C.U.B. program is unique in that it is the first program of its type in Canada which forms an alliance involving a University, Community College and a School Division to foster and support post-secondary education for students -- starting in grade 7 and continuing until graduation from a degree or diploma program. In collaboration the three institutions are providing academic, economic and transitional supports to make university or college a reality for students who may never have dreamed it possible.

The program, bolstered by a \$35,000 start up grant from the Royal Bank of Canada, was given approval by the Board of Trustees of Seven Oaks School Division in May 1994. Since that time a steering committee representative of the three institutions has met regularly to wrestle with questions such as identification of students, communication with parents, development of programs and activities, creation of mentoring partnerships and so forth.

Secondary school staffs were introduced to the program in the Fall of 1994. Contact personnel were identified at each school. With the assistance of classroom teachers, students were nominated for the program. Information meetings were held with students and parents in February 1995. At this time they were given the opportunity to decide whether they wanted to be involved. Virtually all said yes and the program began with approximately 90 students.

Activities for students began in June, 1995 and have continued at regular intervals since then. Students and parents have had opportunities to tour the campus of the U. of W. and R.R.C.C., to participate in hands on activities and interact with students and professors in various programs at both institutions, to attend sporting events, to explore relationships and personal growth through activities such as the Global Change game and self-awareness techniques. The intent is to eradicate the mystique and apprehension that can have a negative effect on the mindset of secondary school students, with the result that they will see post-secondary education as a viable

opportunity. Where possible activities are extended to include students who are not in the C.U.B. program.

Assistance has also been provided to parents in the form of information meetings which address issues such as admission requirements, tuition costs, other expenses, financial planning and financial assistance through bursaries and scholarships. Ways and means of reducing costs, soliciting financial assistance and providing employment opportunities are constantly being explored. Parents have been very appreciative of these efforts.

One very exciting aspect of this program is the enthusiasm and commitment of professional staff at all of the participating institutions. A strong group of 12 mentor teachers from Seven Oaks schools has been working under the direction of Verna Isfeld and Ashok Athavale, counsellors at Maples and Garden City Collegiates, to ensure the success of the program. These mentors have been teamed with instructors and professors from R.R.C.C. and U. of W. so that each participating Seven Oaks school has mentor contacts at each institution. The mentor program is designed to provide support for students during their secondary school experience, and also during post-secondary education. The obvious advantage is that a student will have an immediate connection with a familiar adult when he/she enters U. of W. or R.R.C.C.

The C.U.B. Program has strong support from senior administration of each of the institutions who, along with teachers, are Steering Committee members. The cooperative spirit manifested in developing this innovative project is sure to continue to benefit students in Seven Oaks School Division.

Ashok Athavale, a Seven Oaks guidance counsellor and steering committee member amplifies the goals of the C.U.B. program in the following comments, "Many of our students have talent, but they recognize their own circumstances and all the obstacles that face them in getting a post-secondary education. Some of them have said, 'What's the use?' and this attitude produces mediocrity and a waste of potential. We want them to look at themselves as life-long learners, to see education as something you do for the rest of your life and have fun doing it."

Hopefully the C.U.B. program will achieve this purpose.