

THINKING Classroom

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Editorial Office

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
USA

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THINKING Classroom

MISSION STATEMENT

Thinking Classroom serves as an international forum of exchange among teachers, teacher educators and others interested in promoting democratic teaching practices. The publication encourages professional development, research and reflection. *Thinking Classroom* features articles that foster learner-centered teaching strategies including critical and creative thinking, active and cooperative learning, and problem solving. The journal also publishes articles about the institutional structures that support these practices.

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International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road, PO Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
USA

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Letter from the Editor



The Perils and Pleasures of a Bilingual Journal

You have opened either *Thinking Classroom* or *Peremena*. Either an English journal or a Russian journal. In all likelihood you read it without giving a second thought to its counterpart. You don't wonder how this or that word or phrase looks in the other language, or whether anything important gets lost in translation. When you read something by an author from Azerbaijan, Croatia or Latvia you probably don't consider the fact that initially this text was created in a different language, neither English nor Russian. And you are wise not to think about it. Leave these problems to the editors.

There are many challenges involved in producing an international journal, and twice as many challenges in producing an international bilingual journal. We know some of you are working to establish publications using translated materials. We hope many of you are planning to write articles for *Thinking Classroom/Peremena*. So, as the editor mainly responsible for the language part of this publication, I wish to share with you some of my experience that may be helpful to you in these endeavors.

It all starts with a text in the author's native language. If that language is not English or Rus-

sian, the problem of getting it translated into one of these two languages falls to the author. This is the first stage where misunderstandings may occur, since languages differ considerably in both structure and semantics, and only skillful translators know how to preserve the subtle connotations and put logical emphasis where the author meant it to be. My advice here is simple: try to stick to the overall meaning rather than to the dictionary definitions of individual words. Remember that it is the spirit, not the letter, of the text that we want to convey. The choice of words is like the choice of methods and strategies in class—both are valuable only as a means of reaching one's goal.

Now, let's assume that your article has successfully passed through the peer review process and has been accepted for publication. At this point, we edit it in the language in which it was submitted. If the author is a native speaker of Russian or English, this is routine language editing. But in cases where neither English nor Russian is the native language of the author, we need to help the author sound natural and authentic, while at the same time preserving the intended meaning. Articles often contain cultural and national references that would be

lost on a foreign reader. In such cases we have to provide clarification, often consulting with authors regarding their intent. Sometimes it may seem to the author that we are destroying the subtlety of the text. Believe me, we are only trying to make the meaning transparent so that people with a different cultural background can understand it correctly.

The next step is translating the text, either into Russian (if it was initially submitted in English) or the other way around. We have highly professional translators, and we are indebted to them for their skill and devotion to our journal. However here, too, lie hidden hazards. Remember that we, as readers, reconstruct the meaning of a text, so our understanding of it may differ considerably from the author's conception. This same process goes on in the translators' heads. That is why *Thinking Classroom/Peremena's* editors not only edit the translated text for language, but also check the meaning by comparing it with the original (which, as you recall, may not have been written in the native language of the author). Laborious? Yes, it is, but it's also really interesting. And keep in mind that we, the editors, are also human, so we each reconstruct and understand these

Letter from the Editor

texts differently. That is why we try to arrange for at least two editors to read each text in each language.

I have described this whole process in detail not only in the hope of helping you. I am also counting on you to help us. When you are writing an article for this journal, keep these, our mutual challenges, in mind. The more clearly you formulate your ideas, the better the chance that, at the end of this translation marathon, the reader will receive an accurate representation of them.

Here's one more difficulty that can drive the editors to distraction: some of our authors are fond of epigraphs and quotations from the great thinkers of the past. We like them too, but... Typically the author takes an encyclopedia of aphorisms and picks out the most appropriate one. And if a Russian author quotes, let's say, Leo Tolstoy or Alexander Pushkin, we're in luck, because we can simply translate the quote. But what if this Russian author is a devotee of Jonathan Swift or Abraham Lincoln? He provides the quotation from a Russian language source, but for the English version we have to hunt down the original – otherwise, if we just translate the Russian back into English, our readers will not even recognize the quote they learned in school.

We, the editors, are committed to maintaining the quality of the language in *Thinking Classroom/*

Peremena at such a level that teachers can respect the journal both for its content and as an example of excellent English or Russian.

And finally... As you recall, the title of this editorial mentions not only “perils” but also “pleasures” involved in a bilingual journal. It is indeed my pleasure to work for an international journal that is dedicated to helping people of different origins, and different professional and cultural backgrounds, communicate easily and efficiently – almost as if we all spoke the same language.



Olga Varshaver



Beverly Michaels recently joined the IRA editorial staff. After receiving degrees from Oberlin

College and the University of Pennsylvania, Beverly has worked as a Russian language teacher, a free-lance editor, and a children's librarian. The editors asked Beverly to introduce herself to readers of *“Thinking Classroom.”* Here's what she said:

A new beginning for *Thinking Classroom/Peremena*; a new beginning for me. The journal is making its official transition from an RWCT project journal to a publication of the International Reading Association, and I am beginning my work as Senior Editor.

My job will not be to command or direct the publication, but rather to facilitate the fine work already being carried out by the present editors: Daiva, Wendy, Olga, and Inna. My office will provide a central location for collecting manuscripts submitted to the journal, distributing them to appropriate reviewers and editors, and tracking their progress through to publication. Similarly, we will be available to respond to questions or comments from readers or prospective authors.

Of course, even the best organizational structure is only a framework for the content of the journal. The continued success of *Thinking Classroom/Peremena* depends on its community of dedicated authors and readers. To ensure that the journal follows your priorities and anticipates your needs, I invite you to respond to our offerings with your suggestions, criticism, and even your praise.

I also invite you to contribute an article for publication. Instructions for Authors can be found at the front of the journal. Your unique viewpoint as a teacher, teacher educator, librarian, or parent, could provide a new and valuable perspective for your colleagues.

What's New?



The role of the Pro Didactika Education Centre in Moldovan educational reform

For several years, the educational system in Moldova has been undergoing a process of reform. As part of this reform, a new organizational structure was adopted for the schools:

- Years 1 to 4 – Primary school
- Years 5 to 9 – Gymnasium
- Years 10 to 12 – Lyceum

The Lyceum curriculum comprises two courses of study, Humanities and Natural Sciences.

However, this structural reform did not lead to significant changes in the educational process. Teachers at all levels continued to use outmoded techniques, leading to unsatisfactory educational outcomes. This led to tensions in the relationships between teachers and students, and also between teachers and parents. There was a general sense that change was urgently needed, both in teaching methods and in the interpersonal relationships involved in the educational process.

In response to these circumstances, in 1996 a program called “Modernization of Humanitarian Education in Moldova” was created, designed to support educational reform. The initial phases of the program included:

- Creation of a project library to serve as a center for information on pedagogical issues, for teachers and researchers;
- In-service training of teachers;
- Development of teaching materials; and
- Initiation of various reform projects.

Thanks to the support of the program, 1996 saw the publication of a great many new teaching materials, created in accordance with the latest guidelines. These materials were distributed throughout the country.

In 1997, based on proposals submitted by the schools, 18 schools were selected to become regional methodological centers. Teachers and administrators came to these centers to receive intensive training in implementing new teaching methods and new models for the administration of educational institutions. Returning to their own schools, the participants in the project then organized workshops for the local teachers.

In 1998 an additional 17 schools were brought into the program. The geographic scope of the reform was significantly widened. But in such difficult times, even this expansion was not enough to instill confidence in the ultimate success of the modernization process.

Within the framework of the reform program, on May 1, 1998 the RWCT (“Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking”) project was launched. Also in 1998, the “Modernization of Humanistic Education in the Republic of Moldova” program became the “Pro Didactika Education Centre”. The Centre continued the work of promoting various programs connected with innovative educational methods, in particular the RWCT program. Teachers were selected on a competitive basis to participate in a series of workshops, after which they would train teachers in their regions.

At the same time, improvements were being made to the education system in the area of curriculum. Pro Didactika organized high-level seminars for those administrators who were involved in formulating educational goals and standards, training teachers, and developing new teaching materials. The Centre also financed the preparation and publication of new curricula and textbooks for the Lyceums.

Pro Didactika Centre organized in-service training for Lyceum teachers in all content areas. These courses introduced a growing number of teachers to new teaching methods and educational philosophies. As a result, conflicts developed in the schools between these teachers, eager to apply their new ideas, and administrators who were devoted to the old precepts. So the Centre initiated new training for administrators at all levels of the educational system. These programs were greeted with great interest throughout the Moldovan educational establishment.

Pro Didactika Centre’s programs have produced very positive results – both teachers and administrators have changed their attitudes toward education. The authoritarian model of school administration has increasingly been replaced by a model of self-evaluation involving all the participants in the educational process. It is in this context that a new project, “Self-assessment of Schools”, has been established.

During the past year, interest in Pro Didactika’s programs has increased to the point that the

What's New?

Centre has made the decision to enter the commercial market, providing training to teachers and administrators on a fee for service basis. This is a significant change, involving a conscious decision by the educator to invest in upgrading his or her professional skills. As a result, self-esteem of the participants is increased; and having paid for their training, the trainees have a strong incentive to implement their new skills, rather than falling back on their old habits.

Although Pro Didactika is new to the educational market, the Centre is already working to broaden the scope of its services and improve the professional level of its staff. Staff members are routinely offered training opportunities at various prestigious centers. Pro Didactika Centre is also eager to share its expertise and experience with colleagues from other countries, and recently helped set up a regional training program for Russian teachers and administrators at Orenburg State University.

Oleg Bursuk

Reunion in Moscow

How can we attract new participants into the RWCT project? How do we conduct certification in accordance with international standards? What can regional RWCT centers do to strengthen their collaboration with the International Reading Association and local reading councils? These questions were among the topics discussed by the directors of the regional RWCT centers when they got together in Moscow in March.

Special guests at the meeting included IRA President Donna Ogle, IRA Executive Director Alan Farstrup, IRA International Development Coordinating Committee Chair Pehr-Olof Ronnholm, Member of the IRA Board of Directors Ann-Sofie Selin, Open Society Institute Project Coordinator Astrid Benedek, Moscow Reading Council President Natalia Smetannikova, and St. Petersburg Reading Council President Tatiana Galaktionova. All those in attendance agreed that the meeting's lively discussions provided for a very productive exchange of ideas.

The six regional RWCT centers, located in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Kirov, and Novosibirsk, agreed to unite into a Russian Interregional RWCT Association. The purpose of the association is *to facilitate the cooperation of people working toward educational reform that aims to promote the development of individuality, in accordance with the contemporary values of an open civil society*. The RWCT Association will take responsibility for overseeing the dissemination of the RWCT program in Russia, for maintaining its quality and integrity (in accordance with international standards), and for instructing new generations of internationally certified trainers.

The guests at the Moscow RWCT meeting also participated in the Sixth International Conference on Theory and Practice "The Role of Associations in Developing a Reading Citizen of the World, in the Context of the Modernization of Education". The hosts of this

conference were the presidents of Moscow and St. Petersburg Reading Councils. Co-chairs of the Conference were Professor B.V. Biryukov, President of the Interregional Russian Reading Association (IRRRA), and academician A.A. Leontyev, President of the Association of Reading Researchers and Vice-president of IRRRA. The fundamental issues addressed at this conference, in plenary sessions and round table discussions, were as follows: cooperation among associations, libraries, and educational institutions, referred to as "natural collaboration"; support of specific individual experts and programs; participation in national and international projects; preparation of new programs and textbooks; and, most importantly, teacher training.

Conference proceedings, in both Russian and English, can be found at: www.gagarin.cbs.org.ru (see Reading Centre)

Natalia Smetannikova
Sergei Zair-Bek

Lithuanian NGOs form coalition

The Youth Career and Advising Center, the Modern Didactics Center, the School Improvement Center, the Center for Innovative Education, the Debate Center, and the Association of Students and Parents have joined together as "Educational NGOs for Capacity Building in Advocacy". This project is supported by the Baltic-American Partnership program. The main goal of the project is to disseminate effective methods of public advocacy, and strategies for building strong coalitions, to represent the interests of NGOs



and their clients. Two training sessions have been held for the participants, the first conducted by Partners for Democratic Change (from Slovakia); and the second by Bill Seary (from UK), a consultant from the European Council. The project will conclude with a joint action by the six organizations, designed to address an urgent problem in the area of education. The precise nature of this action has not yet been decided. But it is already evident that with coalition comes increased power, power that can influence educational change in a positive way. We hope that our cooperation will not end with this project, but that we will continue to work together in the future.

Daiva Penkauskienė

RWCT and Step by Step: on the road to collaboration

A conference on "Collaboration in the Process of Education Reform: possibilities, problems and solutions" took place in Baku at the end of April 2002. This joint event of the Step by Step and RWCT programs was supported by the Soros Foundation – Azerbaijan.

Sixty people participated in the conference, representing such programs as Step by Step, Debate and RWCT, as well as the Ministry of Education and various state educational organizations.

Mehriban Akhmedova acquainted the participants with RWCT and noted that the most important result of this program's operation in Azerbaijan was the evident change in the students. They take a more active role in their own education; are able to

express themselves better, both orally and in writing; are able to explain and defend their opinions, etc. The international journal *Thinking Classroom/Peremena* is now available in Azeri, the national language. Recently a guide to RWCT methods has also been published here.

Conference participants were asked to choose one of four possible directions for the ongoing education reform. To do this they had to define the problems connected with each choice, and work out ways to solve these problems. RWCT representatives Bakhar Kerimova and Mehriban Akhmedova organized the section of the conference devoted to staff development.

On the second day of the conference, participants visited schools that were actively implementing RWCT methods, and also experimental kindergartens and primary schools of the Step by Step program.

Irada Mamedova

New project in Northern Thailand for Burmese educators

In June 2002 the first RWCT workshop was held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, in partnership with the National Health and Education Committee (NHEC), an umbrella NGO founded in 1995 to coordinate the efforts of various Burmese ethnic organizations working to improve health and education. The 30 educators who attended the workshop represented a number of groups who live and work along the Thai-Burmese border: Mon, Karen, Karenni, and Shan, as well as various democratic organizations and migrant schools.

RWCT representatives traveled to Thailand in 2001 to attend an NHEC-sponsored seminar for teachers, and to explore the possibility of bringing RWCT to the area. During the seminar, a number of local educational concerns became evident: a lack of textbooks; limited teacher training; emphasis on traditional rote teaching methods; low teacher salaries; and lack of proficiency in the Burmese language. In addition, the available textbooks do not reflect the culture and history of the minority ethnic groups, which make up at least 40% of Burma's population.

Addressing these issues will require time and effort from all those concerned with the future of Burma's educational system. We hope that the teachers who participate in RWCT will become leaders in instituting the needed changes, promoting active inquiry, cooperative learning, critical thinking, and other aspects of best teaching practice, both in their own classrooms and among their colleagues. U Thein Lwin, Academic Coordinator at NHEC, commented:

Schools in Burma usually focus on teacher-centered methodologies and encourage rote learning whereby students sit passively in the classroom. As Burma emerges and reaches toward democracy, young people need to know how to participate as active citizens in an open society. The RWCT project will help teachers to empower students to become active learners and develop critical thinking skills.

Jill Gentry Bettenhausen

Look Who's Talking

THE QUESTION:

Our class discussions often lead us into areas far removed from the original topic. I want students to be able to express opinions and follow their interests, but I also have a lesson to teach! How can I keep discussions from going too far afield?

Ausma Pastore

Teacher of Latvian language and literature,
Allazi Basic School, Latvia

First, I check to see whether the learners want to restart the discussion on the given topic:

- How does what you have just said, Tom, refer to...?*
- Does anybody remember what we were actually trying to find out?*
- Is this question relevant enough just now that we want to pursue it, or shall we keep it in mind for discussion at some other time?*

If the learners think the diversion from the topic is very important, and if it is connected with the question under discussion, then I allow things to take their course. If the learners admit that they have deviated from the topic, then I ask some leading questions, e.g., Could you repeat the last opinion that was relevant to our topic?

However, if the teacher follows some basic principles in organizing the discussion, such a situation will never occur. These principles are:



- *The teacher grants everybody a chance to express his/her opinion; everybody takes turns*

speaking; and everyone either speaks on the given topic or provides feedback on an opinion or argument expressed by a classmate.

- *Learners are listening “actively”, i.e., they ask open-ended questions, react to what was previously said and not to the person who said it, etc.*

Simona Bernat

Assistant Professor, Department of
Educational Sciences “Babes-Bolyai”
University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

When students become involved in a heated discussion of something related to the main topic, but far from the goals of the lesson, what I usually do is to let them spend 2-3 minutes talking about that issue. In this way I give the students themselves a chance to realize



that, while the conversation topic may be interesting, it does not speak to the theme of the lesson. If they fail to realize

this, I use questions to redirect the conversation to the desired subject.



Marina Hilova

Chemistry teacher, Head of the Chemistry Teachers' Association, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

Everything depends on the situation. Sometimes during a discussion, interesting and unexpected ways of solving problems may arise, ways that were totally unforeseen by the teacher.



Then it makes sense to go in a new direction, bringing the discussion to some logical conclusion.

However, often during a discussion the emphasis shifts to minor, unimportant details, or to certain students' personal agendas. In this case, I do one of two things. I may not react at all, acting as if I have heard nothing, and continuing to recognize the more constructive participants; or I may divert the students' attention, perhaps by telling a joke or "clumsily" causing a pile of books to fall off my desk. Then I can ask what we were discussing before we started laughing or picking up the books.

Vita Salmina

Teacher of geography, Krustpils Elementary School, Latvia

If during the discussion the students switch over to another topic, then I as a teacher first of all consider what is happening. Are the children deliberately trying to deviate from the topic? This very rarely happens in elementary school. A second possibility is that they don't understand that their comments do not relate to the theme under discussion. A third possibility is that the topic they are focusing on is more relevant or significant to them than the one offered by the teacher.



In the first case, as I am the leader of the discussion, I indicate that the issues they have started talking about do not reflect our topic, and ask them to return to the topic. If the question they have suggested is interesting and falls within the scope of that particular class, then I encourage them to explore it further, for future class discussion or as an individual study project. In the last case, I could also discuss the alternate topic with the learners immediately (and this strategy often proves the most successful), and then return to the initial theme of discussion.

Zoltan Kovacs

Physics teacher, Cluj, Romania

In such cases, I usually try to work out what has distracted the



students, and consider whether the concern is an issue for several students or only for one. If it is a matter of one

or two students, I try to handle the case individually. But if the whole group is involved, I try to bring the discussion back to the topic, or wind it up altogether and move on to another topic.

A question for the next issue:

My students seem to think that learning stops when they walk out of the classroom. I know there are many excellent and entertaining books related to the curriculum available in the library, but I don't know how to motivate the students to read them. How do you encourage outside reading?

Readers are invited to respond to this question, or to suggest questions for future issues. The editors will select items for printing.

Please e-mail your answers and suggestions to:

bmichaels@reading.org

Practical Reflections

Developing Responsible Citizens for the Future: Social Critical Literacy

Howard L. Mould

A truly democratic country depends on developing responsible citizens and a climate of critical thinking. It especially involves developing students who are socially-critically literate. Such students are able to interrogate text, to try and identify the values of the authors, to also identify the voices being heard, and voices not being heard.

I would like to share a personal anecdote. My daughter's basketball team won the pennant in the Grand Final. In the local newspaper the following week the results of all the teams were duly reported with some photos of the "stars". There were 6 photos of boy players but not one photo of a girl. What does this tell us of the author's (possibly unconscious) bias?

Social Critical literacy is not simply a case of making students aware of injustices but must involve action to help correct perceived injustices. I duly wrote a polite letter to the editor pointing out the unfairness of the situation. Indeed, the letter was published in the next issue along with a response from the editor. The article he wrote surprised many readers for it turned into a personal attack on me in which I was accused of being simply "politically correct". He did not perceive the situation as unjust to females or of denigrating the place and value of women's sport in our society.

I have many similar examples, particularly the way the Indigenous Australians have been portrayed in books, especially children's stories. The Australian Aborigines have important stories, which are referred to as Creation Stories, but were often referred to as Aboriginal Myths. I have heard teachers read some of these stories and then ask

the class to write an Aboriginal Myth. I wonder at the outcry that would ensue if I read from the Holy Bible and asked the students to write a "Bible Myth". The insensitivity to the Indigenous Australian's beliefs and cultures is, I am pleased to say, being addressed, even if not fast enough for me.

In all societies there are disfavoured people. In Australia 7% of our population is of Asian origin yet they are rarely portrayed in the children's picture books. I was pleased to notice in an advertisement for men's clothing that one of the models was in a wheelchair. This proved the exception to the rule for I have seen very few advertisements in which disabled people are featured. Again this is a situation of hidden or disfavoured people.

Teachers play significant roles in helping students discover texts. Theories of critical literacy suggest that the texts teachers select and the facts they choose to present have a significant impact on a student's understanding of particular events. (When I refer to texts I mean the term in its widest sense – printed material, spoken utterances, videos, etc.) When studying events, past or present, seeking multiple perspectives allows students to examine both dominant and suppressed stories. When considering texts for the classroom, several questions should guide selection:

- Who has written this text?
- What perspective is taken in the relating of events?
- What events were selected for inclusion/what was excluded?
- Is there a counterpoint that should be considered?
- What background information might a student need to understand this text?

Background

John Goodlad, Dean of the Graduate School of Education, University of California, Los Angeles, from 1967 to 1983, produced a short article titled “Improving Schooling in the 1980’s: Toward the Non-Replication of Non-Events” (1983). Goodlad had undertaken extensive observations of classroom practices around America, and concluded that they had learnt more about how not to achieve change. He wrote that he observed

... in the English/language arts program a kind of repetitive reinforcement of basic skills of language usage throughout the grades: a heavy emphasis on mechanics in the topics covered by the teachers, textbooks stressing these topics, and both workbooks and quizzes emphasising short answers and the recall of specific information.

These remarks bear out my observations of many classrooms I have observed in Australia, the United States and Great Britain. There was an emphasis on answering teacher or author formulated questions from textbooks or worksheets. It is not surprising that many students see reading as information retrieval, in which they try and find the answers to someone else’s questions. The evaluation of their success in this endeavour is typically done by some other person, usually the teacher.

Goodlad particularly noted that:

What schools in our samples did not appear to be doing was developing all those abilities commonly listed under “Intellectual Development”, the ability to:

- think rationally
- use and evaluate knowledge
- and to develop intellectual curiosity.

(Goodlad, 1983)



Photo: International Reading Association

Teaching strategies

What do I consider a good teaching strategy?

An effective strategy is one that develops in pupils a **willingness** and an **ability to reflect** on what they have read. The word “reflect” has connotations for me of allowing time, and indeed I feel we need to do a lot less in the school curriculum, but do it well. Instead of superficially discussing information and stories, and completing worksheets or textbook activities, I believe that we should undertake more in-depth and challenging intellectual content.

In the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Project (RWCT) which is a program being sponsored by the International Reading Association and is being conducted in countries that were in this or that way associated with the former Soviet Union, such as Uzbekistan, Mongolia, Lithuania and Ukraine, there is a very sound underlying structure, as seen in the diagram below, which allows for such an in-depth analysis of texts.

EVOCATION	REALIZATION OF MEANING	REFLECTION
Mobilisation of the student's prior knowledge Establishment of authentic purposes for reading/ writing/learning activities	Students construct meaning in response to text	Self-assessment by students Elaboration of topic Critical analysis of text Evaluation of strategies

The ERR Model is a valuable framework for thinking about lessons. Teaching strategies may fit neatly into one category (e.g. Anticipation Guides are clearly an Evocation Activity), but many strategies cover the three areas (e.g. A Directed Reading Thinking Activity).

Firstly, mobilise prior knowledge. From this will come an authentic purpose for reading and a desire to read. This is the Evocation Stage of the ERR Model. The single most important factor in learning is what the student already knows. It is therefore important for the student and the teacher to ascertain this, and for the teacher to teach accordingly.

Children do not need to be motivated to learn. Learning is what we as humans do most efficiently and we learn all the time. Unfortunately, it is not always what the teacher planned for the students to learn that is gained from a lesson. Children may “learn” that schooling is mainly about completing worksheets or exercises in textbooks and is irrelevant to life.

Our role as teachers is to engage the children’s interest in topics we feel worthwhile. We want students to want to find further information about a topic. This usually involves reading, although there are other avenues for gaining information such as interviewing a person, viewing films, etc. We need to create a climate in which the students are engaged in authentic actual reading tasks.

Children must be helped with any reading difficulties during the reading i.e. during the “Realization of Meaning Phase” of the ERR Model. There is little value in simply testing comprehension. Teach comprehension!

The end of a session does not need to be a recapitulation of the content.

Comprehension is increased if the topic is elaborated. Teachers need to ensure children make many “**mental hooks**”. These may not “catch” ideas till months or years later, but are part of raising intellectual curiosity. This is the stage of the ERR Model referred to as “Reflection” and many worthwhile activities can be incorporated in this section of the lesson. There is also an opportunity to develop social critical literacy during this phase, e.g. Where is the writer trying to position me? Do I want to be placed in this position? Is the

writer marginalising certain groups? Is the material discriminatory toward certain groups? etc.

It is the latter stage of Reflection on which I propose to focus – for this is the phase I find receives the least attention in class lessons. There are practical reasons for this, for far too often the time allotted for a lesson quickly disappears and the next session begins with a new topic. It is in this last section of reflection that the really important critical thinking occurs. However, I have found that many teachers do not even challenge the information in the text and the students often regard the textbook being used as a Bible. Questions such as:

“What questions do we still have unanswered?”, or

“What part of the texts do you disagree with?”, or

“Do you think this text is well written?”, or

“What date was this text written and might the information have changed?” were rarely heard in my many classroom observations.

If these issues are not addressed, how can students be encouraged to be socially critical of text when they are not being encouraged to be intellectually critical of the information presented in texts?

In Australia a model proposed by Freebody (1992) gives four positions of the reader as in the table below (please do note that this is not a hierarchy):

Four Roles as a Literacy Learner

- **Learning your role as a code breaker**
- **Learning your role as a text participant**
- **Learning your role as a text user**
- **Learning your role as a text analyst**

Yes, the students have to learn the code, and have to learn how to use literacy to gain information or achieve their goals. It is the latter role that I feel needs more prominence, i.e. “Learning your role as a text analyst”.

What is aimed at in this section is to have the students made aware that:

- Texts are constructed, and anything that has been constructed can be deconstructed.
- Every choice by an author foregrounds what was selected and hides, silences or backgrounds what was not selected.

Awareness of this prepares the way to ask critical questions (Morgan, 1997). The sort of questions we want students to ask include:

- Why was this text constructed? By whom? For whom?
- How am I meant to react to/interpret this text?
- Do I want to be positioned this way?
- Could the text have been constructed in another way?
- Whose voices and positions are being expressed and in particular whose voices are not being heard?
- What do I do with the text?

To enable these questions to be asked requires an attitude by the teacher that sees literacy as far more than being able to read and write. Literacy in itself leads nowhere in particular. Indeed there is a clear relationship between language and power. Language can be used to maintain power but it can also be used to **challenge power**. This is what Freebody refers to as “Learning your role as a text analyst”. This is indeed the skill we want to develop in students if we wish them to develop a democratic society. Allied to this is the need to have **many voices** heard in our classrooms. We cannot afford to rely on one set and authorized textbook or article. The exponential growth of the Internet gives teachers a very valuable tool for finding newspapers from around the world, expressing differing points of view, that can be easily accessed in the wealthy countries. This technology will be available soon in most countries and hence voices not normally heard (the disfavoured groups which every society has) may be heard and empowered.

Yes – the word “**empowered**” is the key word. As teachers we are trying to empower students to be confident to question texts and authority figures. We need to teach students to resist gurus, whether they be writers, teachers, TV personalities or political leaders. To develop this type of classroom requires teachers to be willing to share, or rather negotiate, power positions with the students. As I said before, social critical literacy is not simply an awareness program but requires **action**.

Whilst in Ukraine in 2001 I saw action in a group protesting about the position and situation of the President of Ukraine. I saw a tent-city built on the main square and hundreds of people coming to take one of the pamphlets. I was saddened to hear that the demonstration, which lasted a few weeks, had been forcibly squashed. On a recent visit to Kiev I looked at the building that had taken place in the main square. Now it would be very difficult to hold a mass demonstration in the centre of the town. Was it intentional, I wondered?

Democracy in the new millennium will depend on developing critical readers who can evaluate the past and present to inform their future. However I feel very positive for the countries participating in the RWCT program, for the ideas unleashed by the program have been taken up with enthusiasm by thousands of teachers, and the next generation of students will be far more socially-critically literate and hence politically active.

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Howard L. Mould, Lecturer, School of Language, Cultural and Art Education of the Deakin University (Melbourne, Victoria, Australia).

Practical Reflections

Inspiring and Nurturing Gifted Children

Laima Sruginis

In the United States the methods of educating gifted students vary from state to state and even from city to city. Where there is no formal program, the education of gifted children is left up to well-meaning individuals. One such self-motivated educator is John Glynn, a middle school teacher in Maine, who in 1981 founded The Festival of Creative Youth, a three-week summer camp for gifted children. The camp offers forty intensive courses ranging from creativity training to algebra, chemistry, and physics. It is open to children aged six to fourteen, who have an IQ of 120 or above, have been recognized as academically gifted by their classroom teachers, or have exhibited high ability in the visual arts, music, or dance.

Located on the picturesque campus of Southern Maine Technical College, on Maine's rocky coastline, the camp offers not only a collegiate atmosphere with lecture halls and stately New England houses, but also access to spaces that invite the imagination to play: one of Maine's oldest lighthouses, an abandoned civil war fortress, about a mile of shoreline, an arboretum, and grassy lawns and gardens. Students select four areas of interest, with courses ranging from Marine Biology to Karate to Rocketry. They arrive at camp each morning at 9:00 am, attend four one hour and fifteen minute classes with a half hour intermission for lunch, then depart for home at 3:00. The tuition for three weeks is \$600. The average weekly salary in the state of Maine is roughly \$500; therefore, Glynn has created a generous scholarship fund that allows for the profit made from one year's tuition to fund scholarships for the next year's needy students.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the basic philosophy of The Festival of Creative Youth is Glynn's selection process for the teachers who spend an intense three weeks teaching at the camp. There are many humorous stories of Glynn walking the streets of Portland, Maine asking questions, sniffing out people who are "doing something", in other words, individuals who are actively engaged in their careers and dreams, whatever those careers or dreams may be. Although a few professional educators do work at the camp, most of the staff do not have formal training in the field of education. If Glynn is offering a course on architecture, he will look for a working architect to teach the course, someone who can bring the children to his or her office, and walk around the city showing the children projects that he or she has completed. The puppetry teacher performed for years in a famous puppet theater and can teach children first hand how to fashion puppets, write a script, and develop a performance; the cartooning teacher is a professional cartoonist; the photography teacher is a local photojournalist.

I am an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Southern Maine; my area of expertise is Creative Writing. In the spring of 2000 I called Glynn to sign up my eight-year-old son for the Festival of Creative Youth. Glynn involved me in a conversation over the telephone, asking me about my teaching techniques, feeling me out for my enthusiasm for the field. Because I enjoy teaching I was happy to tell him about my various projects.

I thought nothing of our conversation until a few weeks later when he called

and asked me if I would like to teach Creative Writing at The Festival of Creative Youth. He also told me that in addition to my pay, my son would receive a scholarship to attend the camp – what could be better? I told him that I would love to teach at the camp, but I had a five-year-old son and a one-year-old daughter at home and no childcare arrangements during the summer months. “That’s not a problem,” Glynn said, “bring them along too.” So began my involvement with The Festival of Creative Youth.

One of the first things that struck me about working at the Festival of Creative Youth is the intensity of the children who attend the camp. Last year 258 children attended the camp; I taught four classes consisting of no more than eight children per group. Despite the amount of activity going on, the daily routine flows smoothly. In the two summers that I worked at the camp I cannot remember having seen or heard of a single fight or argument between the children. Obviously, Glynn, and the teachers, and the parent volunteers are tuned in to the children’s needs, but beyond that the children are genuinely engrossed in their activities and absorbed by the tasks that they are working on. The classes truly demand a high level of extended concentration and intellectual endurance with no breaks for recess or play in the course of the day.

I noted that the children at the camp feel more in tune with each other than they do with the classmates they attend school with throughout the academic year. I met twelve and thirteen year olds who were busily at work writing five hundred page novels! These students would talk about how they were made to feel foolish by their peers at school for loving books or wanting to be writers. What they found at the Festival of Creative Youth was like-minded peers and a camaraderie they never were a part of at school. They found that they could be as “weird”, as “intellectual”, as “strange and creative” as they pleased.

The first summer that I taught at the Festival of Creative Youth, I prepared lesson plans before the camp began. John Glynn warned me not to do this. He told me to first meet my students and

then let the projects evolve. However, I felt that I needed to be prepared, so I visited the campus, noted all the cozy places where we could go to work, and prepared my projects. By the end of the three weeks one of my classes had written and performed a play based on a free-writing assignment that centered on describing a tacky 1970’s bronze head on a platter. One student fantasized that the head was frozen into place by the Greek goddess Medusa and was the head of a former lover. Another student picked up on this idea and commented that perhaps the head was that of Medusa’s unfaithful husband and so on until we had written “Medusa’s X”, a comic tragedy describing how the head on the platter came to be. The students concocted witty dialogue, drawing from the knowledge of Greek mythology they had gained from their “Goddesses” class, and using acting techniques that carried over from their acting class, finally crafting togas and other humorous props, such as wobbly lightning bolts. This play was performed on the final day of the camp, and parents were invited to attend.

The second summer I began my writing classes by introducing interview exercises that would allow students to get to know each other. After a few days working in groups and pairs, I asked each group to discuss what they would like to spend the remainder of camp working on. Each class decided on something different. One class of seven, eight, and nine year olds decided to write a play; another decided to write and illustrate a book about monsters and other imaginary creatures. My class of nine through fourteen year olds decided to focus on learning to write poetry. My class of ten and eleven year olds decided to write short stories.

I like to use the free writing technique and peer editing workshops to generate, evolve, and refine ideas in writing. The way free writing works is simple: students empty their minds of all thoughts, quiet down, then pull out a blank piece of paper and a good pen or pencil. When the teacher says “go” students write continuously for a set period of time – either five or ten minutes – putting down on paper whatever comes to mind. If a student feels that he or she has nothing

to write, that student must write “the the the”, or any other word, non-stop during the duration of the free write. After the allotted time students reread what they have written, underlining thoughts that they would like to develop further. Then the group discusses the results of the free write. Often ideas generated from free writing sessions are developed into stories, poems, or plays.

The workshop is used to teach editing skills. A student brings a work in process to the class, providing enough photocopies for each class member. The students and teacher seat themselves in a circle. As a classmate reads out loud, everyone remains quiet and listens. Then students reread the work silently, writing comments onto the photocopy. Students are asked to find three things that they like about the written work (e.g. character, plot, setting, voice, tone, etc.) and explain why they like those three things. Then they note three areas of the writing that they don’t like, explain why they don’t like these areas and offer concrete suggestions for changes. The student-writer listens without commenting, takes notes, and may comment only once the workshop has finished discussing the work. After the workshop is complete the teacher summarizes the students’ comments and adds his or her own comments. The student-writer is encouraged to then produce a revision, using only the comments that he or she finds relevant to his or her project. It is important for the student-writer to learn how to be his or her own best editor – to select the comments that he or she finds helpful and not give in to the impulse to include each and every suggestion.

The group that chose to write a play discovered through free writing exercises that they were interested in the topic of friendship (this was a group of seven young girls). One of the girls was fascinated by the idea of living in a lighthouse. I told the class that traditionally in Maine families who operated lighthouses also lived in them, right up until the time when computers took over the tasks previously performed by the lighthouse keeper. I suggested that we do some research on lighthouses. The next day we walked to the lighthouse museum, learned a number of facts, and

heard senior citizens tell about their own work in the lighthouse when humans operated the lights. We brainstormed using our facts and began writing our play.

In order to get a better idea of how we could stage our play we decided to negotiate the quarter mile long rock jetty and go out to our local lighthouse. Once we reached the lighthouse and settled down onto the rocks, watching oil tankers and sail boats go by, we decided that there was no other way – the lighthouse play would have to be performed out here, in the middle of the bay, around the actual lighthouse. On Festival Day, enthusiastic parents made the rather arduous walk to the lighthouse to see their children perform. Unfortunately, an oil tanker began blaring its horn in the middle of the performance, but the girls later said that it had only added to the ambiance.

Similarly, my poetry class and I walked out to an abandoned civil war fortress that jutted out into the ocean. I had read that ancient Japanese poets would write haiku (tiny poems that describe a moment in nature) and pass them on to other poets, creating a long string of tiny three line poems. I decided that together we would try writing linked haiku, like the ancient Japanese. This stone fortress had a number of windows facing the ocean; each window was at least three feet thick. I asked each student to climb inside a window, to watch the ocean, the rocks, the clouds, the light, and then to compose a haiku. Once a student had composed the haiku he or she would climb down and deliver it to the student in the next window. In this way our linked haikus circled around and around from window to window in the course of an afternoon.

The result was better than I had hoped for. Each student would write what the previous student had read and pick out an image and elaborate on it.

Building on that success, the next day I took the class to the arboretum, where each tree was identified by a sign giving both its Latin and English name and describing its characteristics. Each student selected a tree or bush, found a cozy spot beneath it, and wrote a haiku; then found another student and passed the haiku along. Again, the result was a

set of poems that playfully linked images, this time working in the Latin names of trees and shrubs.

My most challenging class was scheduled in the late morning; mid-way through class these students' eyes would glaze over and they would begin to ask me, "When is lunch?". This group was interested in fantasy creatures, but I wanted them to create their own, so I devised a game. I would scribble on a piece of paper, hand the paper to the student, and tell him or her to create a fantastic creature out of the scribble. Once the creature had been produced with all its detail, I would ask the student to write down the characteristics of the creature: What did it eat? Where did it live? What did it do if disturbed? Once we had worked out all the properties of the creatures I would draw upon those properties to create one sentence scenarios, such as "Zig-zag was sleeping, buried in the sand, when a group of curious children dug him up with their plastic shovels..." and the student would then expand upon the story.

One week the camp was fogged in entirely. Walking to class, I was fascinated by the sight of an oil tanker slowly being absorbed by the fog and disappearing from view. Inspired, I rushed into the classroom and said, "Come on, grab your notebooks and let's go document this, the tanker, the Penny Ugland, is being eaten by the Fog Monster!" The class did not know exactly what I meant by "Fog Monster", but we had written about monsters so much over the course of the weeks that they were ready to jump right into my fantasy game. This is how "The Saga of the Penny Ugland" began – a writing project that led the students into considering the characteristics of the Fog Monster and the fate of the crew of the Penny Ugland.

"What we do every year at the camp we do with the goodwill of the teachers," Glynn has said. Those of us who have met and worked with gifted children, heard their stories, listened as their minds overflow with thoughts, ideas, and questions, value the efforts of The Festival of Creative Youth and similar programs and are happy to give of our time and creative energy to help keep the

spirit of the camp alive.

The festival reminded me of a pre-school my son had attended in Vilnius, Lithuania from 1995-1997. This pre-school was called *Diemedis* and like the Festival of Creative Youth relied on the individual teachers' love of children, goodwill, creativity and resourcefulness.

Rasa Dikciene, founder of the school, Audrius Penkauskas, former director of the school, and others who developed the school's programs used methods adopted from George Steiner's philosophies and the Waldorf method to create an arts-based curriculum that emphasized interdisciplinary learning. The positive experience that my son had as a pre-schooler at Diemedis in the early years of Lithuanian independence (1995-1997), when the banks failed and most people lived in dire economic conditions, proves to me that although financing and resources are important, the most important factor in education is the dedication, creativity, and open-mindedness of individual teachers.

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Laima Sruginis, a writer, poet, and a literary translator, currently works as an Assistant Professor of English at the University of Southern Maine, USA.

Practical Reflections

Noise in the Classroom: Obstacle or Opportunity?

Igor Zagashev

*I'll betake me to them that carry the reputation
of wise men and hunt after that golden bough,
as says the proverb. Among whom the grammarians
hold the first place – grown old among a company
of boys, deaf with their noise ... they think
themselves the most excellent of all men,
so greatly do they please themselves in frightening
a company of fearful boys with a thundering
voice and big looks.*

Erasmus of Rotterdam
From "The Praise of Folly"
(Translated by John Wilson)

I say, they were so noisy today...

From a conversation between two teachers.

Every schoolteacher is familiar with the phenomenon of "noise in the classroom". The general conception is that noise is something the teacher should be afraid of, something to be avoided, something that hinders the realization of educational purposes. My suggestion is that noise should be perceived simply as an objective reality we have to consider in our work.

How do teachers usually act in a noisy classroom situation?

- Collect the students' notebooks with an air of importance.
- Have the noisiest students stand up, and keep them standing "until they calm down".
- Raise their voices so as to be heard above the students.
- Scold (and offend) the students.
- Beg them to please quiet down.
- Take offence and blame the students.
- Pause ominously and stare pointedly at the source of the noise.
- Rap on the table with a set of keys (or a pen or pointer).
- Threaten the students or try to make them feel guilty.

These actions of the teacher are predicated on the assumption that noise in the classroom is something that must be stopped, rather than something that might be used for the benefit of the teaching-learning process. Some methodologists regard any signs of noise in the classroom as a sign of teacher error. However Fritz Perls, a well-known psychotherapist, believed that a mistake may lead to the creation of something new and different; that it possesses creative potential. Many researchers into the creative process, among them psychologist V. M. Allakhverdov, think that making erroneous decisions is often a necessary step towards establishing the truth. We shall try to consider noise as part and parcel of the lesson. But first, we shall explore the causes of the phenomenon.

So what are the most common causes of noise in the classroom?

• **The use of unclear or unfamiliar terminology.** Experience shows that even at teacher seminars, where the participants have scholarly degrees, it is sometimes worthwhile to define the terms used, and give illustrative examples. And the same is certainly applicable to schoolchildren. Without meaning to sound simplistic, our observations show that after a teacher uses four or five unknown words, noise in the classroom dramatically increases. Experienced teachers have a nose for such words, and in a case where they are obliged to use unfamiliar terms or phrases, the vague expressions of the students, occasional yawns, vacant stares and other "symptoms" will signal that it is time to provide some explanation.



Photo: RWCT Albania

Take, for example, the frequently used terms “literally”, “abstract”, “systematically”, “consciousness”, “behavior”, etc. Try to explain the meaning of these words to yourself, and you will have some idea of what children feel when they hear them.

- **Unclear assignments.** The ability to give clear instructions is a hallmark of pedagogical skill. However, students’ understanding of these instructions depends on the situation: the class may understand the teacher perfectly well on one occasion and misinterpret the same task on another. In planning activities, the teacher should be aware of student reaction to each and every word of the assignment. But even this is not enough. The students will truly accept an assignment only if it is logically connected with the previous parts of the lesson; and even more important, if they can see and understand the point of the assignment – its educational aim. Performing meaningless tasks may result in mindless facility, but this result is not educationally sound.

- **No outlet for pent-up energy.** For some obscure reason, physical exercise and warm-ups are considered expedient only in the elementary classroom. Teachers of upper grades are generally skeptical toward the idea of warming up. But the fact is, if the teacher does not initiate any activities to release accumulated energy, it is apt to find other, more harmful, outlets: graffiti on the desks, scratches on the wall, etc. Noise in the classroom is just one way of “letting off steam”. Certainly, actual

physical exercises with older students may seem awkward, but warming up can take other forms. The teacher may sing a song with the class, play an intellectual game, or simply talk for a while about something different, e.g. tell an interesting story. A skilled teacher will easily find a way back to the theme of the lesson.

- **Absence of logical connections or “transitions”.** This is another reason for the classroom to become noisy. Human perception is continuous and integral: we do not like to be interrupted in the middle of the thinking process, to have our expectations upset by something completely new and unexpected (which is one of the reasons for our general dislike of TV advertising).

Often the teacher presents a task that has no connection with the previous activity, saying simply “Well, and now let us move on to something else...”. Such “leaps” cause mental strain for the majority of children and invariably produce a negative reaction. Those who are not especially good at behaving themselves develop an irresistible desire to talk about something else. The noise-generating situation just described falls under the heading of “lesson plan mistakes”. The continuity of the lesson, its “logical transitions”, should be planned beforehand. And in the case of an awkward transition, it is better for the teacher to back up a step and restore the missing logical link.

- **The “residue” of previous emotions.** Students may arrive in your class after writing a difficult paper,

receiving a poor grade, or experiencing a conflict with another teacher, a fight during recess, a quarrel with a friend, etc. For the most part the specific causes will remain unknown to us. But a shrewd teacher is attuned to minor signs – such as snatches of conversation overheard in the hall – that can reveal such emotional baggage. If these signs go unnoticed, behavior problems during the class can hardly be avoided. One way to neutralize previous emotions is to focus the class's attention on the here-and-now or on the future (for one cannot be in the past and in the present simultaneously). There are many techniques for such focusing: having the students guess the theme of the lesson, or asking them to describe an object, or describe their feelings, etc. The traditional trick of having “problem” students work at the blackboard remains effective, too.

- **A student's personal problems.**

This cause may be the most difficult to identify, because it is rooted not in the lesson, but in the student's personality. Psychologist R. Dreikurs named four “mistaken goals” leading to behavior problems: an attempt to attract the adult's attention; a desire to show one's own power; revenge (either toward a particular teacher, or toward the adult world in general); and displaying inadequacy (expressed as boredom). The first three cannot be dealt with within a single class period – they require much patience and persistence.

- **Inappropriate pacing of the lesson – either too fast or too slow.** When students are out of sync with the pace set by the teacher they may become noisy. This situation is not so easy to correct, for our personal tempo is often rooted in the peculiarities of our own nervous system. But the teacher who recognizes this as a problem may be able to balance the situation through the use of class activities that are less dependent on the instructor's idiosyncrasies.

- **An overly didactic tone.** Some teachers cannot resist an opportunity to teach a moral – as well as an intellectual – lesson. They overlook the fact that the actual effectiveness of such a “lesson with a moral” is usually close to zero. While we can – and should! – debate this contention, one thing is indisputable – excessive moralizing in class leads to

excessive noise. And how difficult it can be then to descend from the exalted realms of ethics to the ordinary prose of science! There is no point in giving advice in this situation, but perhaps it is worth remembering that often the advice we give to others (as to how to behave, etc.) is in fact meant for ourselves. If the shoe fits...

- **Teacher's monologue.** Noise in the classroom may be generated by an imbalance in activity between teacher and students. “Either equal to or less than”, a rule frequently cited in pedagogical circles, means essentially this: the duration of the teacher's speech in class should not exceed the duration of the students' speech. Certainly there are teachers who, like talented actors, are able to hold the audience's attention for a long time. It is truly a pleasure to see such teachers perform. But I am concerned with the others, the majority... We are constantly engaged in dialogue in our lives, and consequently we have difficulty attending to long monologues. That's all there is to it. Only the most well-bred individuals can restrain themselves for long periods of time.

There may well be other causes – this is not intended to be an exhaustive list of noise-generating situations. I do want to suggest that we consider classroom noise not as something to be feared and avoided, but as a fact of life that we must accommodate and learn from.

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Igor Zagashv, Deputy Director on Science and Methods of Teaching of Nekrassov College, Saint Petersburg, Senior Teacher of the Department of Psychology, Saint Petersburg State University.

Critical Thinking on the Arts

Sergei Lysenko

In Moldovan schools, one of the units in the 11th grade course “Man and Society” is “The Arts”. The main aims of the course are: to promote a philosophical approach to life, to find one’s own place in the world of ideas and events; and to form a system of beliefs. So, in starting the new unit, I wanted my students first of all to consider the role the arts play in our lives, to consider the value of the arts. This determined the theme of the lesson: “Is Art necessary?” You may immediately ask: For whom? And what kind of necessity do you mean? But this vagueness appealed to me, I felt it useful as the nonstandard wording encouraged discussion and thus further engaged the students.

The more specific goals of the lesson were:

- awareness of different viewpoints on the purposes of art and how these purposes meet individual needs;
- development of the students’ skills in expressing their opinions succinctly;
- supporting their hypotheses and opinions, and generating new ideas in the course of team work; and
- recognizing the importance of keeping an open mind towards different artistic trends.

To achieve these goals I needed to create an appropriate learning environment, and therefore I had to answer the following questions: What could inspire the students to reflect upon the necessity of the arts? How could I stimulate them to develop their spontaneous opinions into conscious arguments? What could help my students see the practical value of the lesson?

For me as a teacher, finding answers to these questions was perhaps the most

difficult part of my preparation. It was quite clear that such a discussion must be based on some work of art, one that would be accessible to the students and, at the same time, open to a variety of interpretations. The students must also have a chance to advance and support their opinions, i.e. to move one step further in their understanding and arguments. I decided to use the song “Home from the War” performed by the popular Russian group “CHAIK”, and also some statements on art from the “Encyclopedia of Aphorisms”.

Now, to the lesson itself.

The *Evocation* stage was launched by a brief discussion of questions the students had received during the previous lesson:

- What is the difference between a book by Leo Tolstoi and a book by Agatha Christie? What is the difference between Mozart’s music and rap music?
- What benefit do people derive from works of art? (The benefits suggested by students included joy in the process of creation or appreciation of art, the opportunity to express ideas and feelings, etc. For me it was important to elicit various opinions.)

After three or four students had expressed their ideas to the class, I asked each member of the class to summarize, on index cards, their own ideas about the necessity of art.

All the cards were then taped to the blackboard, with similar opinions grouped together. Here are some examples: “*Progress in Art means progress in life*”, “*People need to express their emotions, desires, aspirations*”, “*Art helps people express and preserve their feelings, and as a result they gain experience in understanding each other*”.

This exercise prepared the way for a discussion of the question, “Is Art necessary?” The blackboard covered with index cards showed that we would be answering this question positively, and the diversity of opinions provided a good starting point for discussion.

The *Realization of Meaning* stage of the lesson began with listening to the song “Home from the War”, performed by “CHAIF”, a popular group of rock musicians. I chose this piece for several reasons. First, school discussions about the arts are usually illustrated by works of classical authors and composers; these works and artists are often remote from the students’ interests and experiences. Using a popular, contemporary song was sure to come as a surprise to many members of the class. I expected that this surprise would pique the interest of even those students who remained passive after the *Evocation* stage, and serve to

draw all of the students into the discussion.

While listening to the song, the students followed the words on copies of the text in front of them. Their task was to decide whether this song met the criteria (hypotheses) represented on the blackboard. For three minutes the students worked individually, then they discussed their ideas in groups of three, and each group reported the results of their work. At this stage the discussion became more concrete, turning to the idea that in the arts each individual may find something that is personally meaningful to him or her. Most of the opinions expressed were similar since my students had little experience in tracing human feelings and emotions as reflected in works of art. For this reason I tried not only to involve the students in discussion, but also to share my own impressions of the song.

Home from the War

*It's dark behind your front door,
and the smell's nasty, just like before,
your place was right up under the roof –
there you were a little closer to the stars.
You were in no hurry
coming back home from the war,
with the sweet taste of victory,
and the bitter taste of guilt.
This was your home, but the lock on the door
was new.
She'd been waiting for you so long,
but you couldn't come back home.
A final night passed,
she was in tears, at your place,
and still you didn't come,
but in crept Fear.
Fear stared her in the eyes,
through the reflection in the dark glass.
Fear told her it would be better this way –
better for both of you.
Fear showed her to the door,
pointed to the new lock,
it put the key into her hand,
and made it so
you couldn't come back home.
And you went outside,
you sat down on the ground
like a homeless dog,
you were a little weary, and a little cold.
And you knew that had you hurried,
you might have made it in time,
but you couldn't do anything about it now.
You took your guitar and began to sing.
But the neighbors don't see why*

*you have to sing.
They don't like your songs,
they're used to suffering in silence.
They come through this dark doorway every day.
And when there's a “no entry” sign
for them it always means “no”.
But you bellowed your merry song
with the sorrowful ending.
Some men came to see what all the noise was,
and with them you drew lots –
you had to go and fetch the wine.
There was an empty tin can –
they used it as a wineglass.
You got a little warmer,
but had to fight against sleep.
And then you told them everything –
you even told them about the war.
But one of them yelled:
“You're a liar, musician!” –
then you pressed yourself against the wall.
You hit first,
as your father had taught you
many years ago.
And then you managed to glance at the window –
just when she was putting out the light.
It's dark behind your front door,
and the smell's nasty, just like before,
your place was right up under the roof –
there you were a little closer to the stars.
You were in no hurry
coming back home from the war,
with the sweet taste of victory,
and the bitter taste of guilt.*

Vladimir Shakhurin
recorded by CHAIF on the album
CHAIF at 15: *It's all just beginning* (2000)
(reprinted with permission)

To explore the theme more deeply, we worked with aphorisms about art: each student received a card with several quotations and was asked to choose the one that had the strongest connection with the song we had just listened to. The results were discussed in small groups, then each group chose a single quotation and explained their choice to the class.

To advance to the *Reflection* stage, which demands a special emotional state as well as a “warmed-up brain”, I told the students a short story about an art contest (based upon “The Contest” by V. Veresayev).

Once there was a city, and in the city was a square called The Square of Beauty. And the City Council decided to install a painting there that would celebrate The Beauty of Woman. One eminent artist, sophisticated and renowned, said that he would travel the world in search of the ideal of female beauty. His young competitor, however, said that he would not have to go far, for he saw this ideal in his wife, whose name was Little Dawn.

A year passed. Finally, the day came when the people of the city gathered in the square, in front of two covered paintings. A bell rang, and the people quieted down, waiting for the cover to be removed from the renowned master’s painting. When it was, there was a buzz in the crowd followed by complete silence. In a wreath of violets, a maiden stood high above the crowd. Her eyes were large and clear like the sky after a thunderstorm. No one in the city had ever seen such beauty. This beauty was dazzling, almost blinding, but they could not take their eyes off that face. When they finally looked away from the painting at the world around them, everything seemed dim to them. The girls and women of the city hung their heads diffidently, and the boys and men, comparing them with the Violet-Wreathed Maiden, asked themselves, “Why did we ever like those ill-proportioned bodies and dull eyes?” So they stood like that for a long time and then let out a great sigh, a general sigh of yearning.

Reluctantly, one of the elders made a sign and the cover fell from the young painter’s picture. There was an almost indignant murmur in the crowd. The picture showed Little Dawn sitting on a bench, her arms around her knee, her face slightly forward. She was looking at the crowd. She was quite true to life, in that picture, with her slightly slanting eyes, her turned-up nose, her skin burnt by the sun.

There was an uproar, and some vulgar remarks could be heard. Someone suggested

Thoughts on Art

Most people, engaging in the silliest, most useless, and very often immoral pastimes – writing and reading books, painting and contemplating pictures, composing and listening to music or attending plays or concerts – are apt to think quite sincerely that they are busy with something that is intellectual, useful and sublime.

Leo Tolstoi (Russian writer, 1828-1910)
(as cited in *Encyclopedia of aphorisms*, 2000)

Art never addresses the crowd, it speaks to the individual, in the deepest, innermost recesses of his soul.

Maximilian Voloshin (Russian poet and writer, 1877-1932)
(as cited in *Encyclopedia of aphorisms*, 2000)



Art is a substitute for life, so it is loved by those who are failures in life.

Vassily Klyuchevsky (Russian historian)
(as cited in *Encyclopedia of aphorisms*, 2000)

It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realize our perfection; through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence.

Oscar Wilde, Anglo-Irish playwright and poet, in *Intentions* (1891)
“The Critic as Artist” pt. 2 (as cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1992)

It is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine, at least.

Robert Browning, English poet,
in *The Ring and the Book* (1968-9) Bk. 12, 1.
(as cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1992)

We all know that Art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth.

Pablo Picasso, Spanish painter,
in Dore Ashton *Picasso on Art*
(as cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 1992)

that the self-assured young artist and his picture should be stoned. But gradually the noise subsided, and there was silence as the crowd began to notice a strange light coming from the painted face of Little Dawn. It made everyone in the square feel warm and cozy, and brought back memories of the best moments of their own love. It was the same light that had shone in the faces of their beloveds when their first secret promises were made. This light evoked the eternal, all-conquering beauty in each woman.

Then somebody shouted, and everyone agreed, "Let the young artist be the winner!"

Following the story, the students were asked to write a 5-minute essay beginning with the words "If there were no art..."

Here are some of the results:

- *If there were no art, people would not learn to value the world around them. Art opens their eyes to what is important for them.* (Tanya Samoil)
- *If there were no art, people would not be very different from animals. The capacity to create something that can reveal our thoughts and express our feelings – the capacity to share what we see and hear with others – is what distinguishes Man from other beings. Every person can leave something for the future, for coming generations, and that is why art is everlasting. It helps us not only to understand each other better, but also to achieve a kind of immortality.* (Marina Stratanovich)
- *If there were no art people would simply miss out on many things in life that are of great value. They would not be able to understand other people's viewpoints and feelings. Art introduces us to new feelings, new ideas, a new understanding of life and all that is in it. Which is to say, people begin to value what previously perhaps they did not consider worthy of their attention: beauty, love, human relations.* (Irina Stratanovich)

When the essays were completed it was time to conclude the lesson, and the students talked about what they had learned.

Their homework assignment was to consider the following questions:

- Why doesn't everyone like Bach, Shakespeare and other recognized artistic geniuses?
- Why do some works of art last for centuries, and others for just a few weeks?

The answers to these questions would become the *Evocation* stage of the next

lesson, devoted to popular culture and the art of the elite.

Our lesson on the theme "Why is art necessary?" had lasted 80 minutes.

Below are some additional reflections on my part.

The song proved to be a good choice: many students not only followed their texts, but joined in singing, and this emotional involvement prepared the way for active participation in the discussion.

Work with aphorisms – interpreting them, giving reasons for choosing one over another – involved higher-level thinking. For the students, it was a chance to compare their own opinions with the ideas of great writers, politicians and philosophers. In addition, the original, often paradoxical forms of the quotations, and the depth of the thoughts expressed, helped the students generate their own ideas.

In conclusion I would like to pose some questions to the reader. Dear colleague, do you find the lesson described useful? Do you think there was enough new information at the Realization of Meaning stage? What could you suggest to make the lesson better?

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Sergei Lysenko teaches history in the "Svetoch" (Luminary) Lyceum (Kishinev, Moldova), heads the Debate club and coordinates Debate activities among Russian speaking students in Moldova. He is a trainer in Moldova's RWCT program.

Reflective Reading: A Tool for Understanding

Ildikó Bárdossy, Margit Dudás, Csilla Pethőné Nagy, and Erika Priskinné Rizner

Reading as an interactive and reflective process

"Reading is a picnic where the author brings the words and the reader brings the meaning."

(Paul Ricoeur)

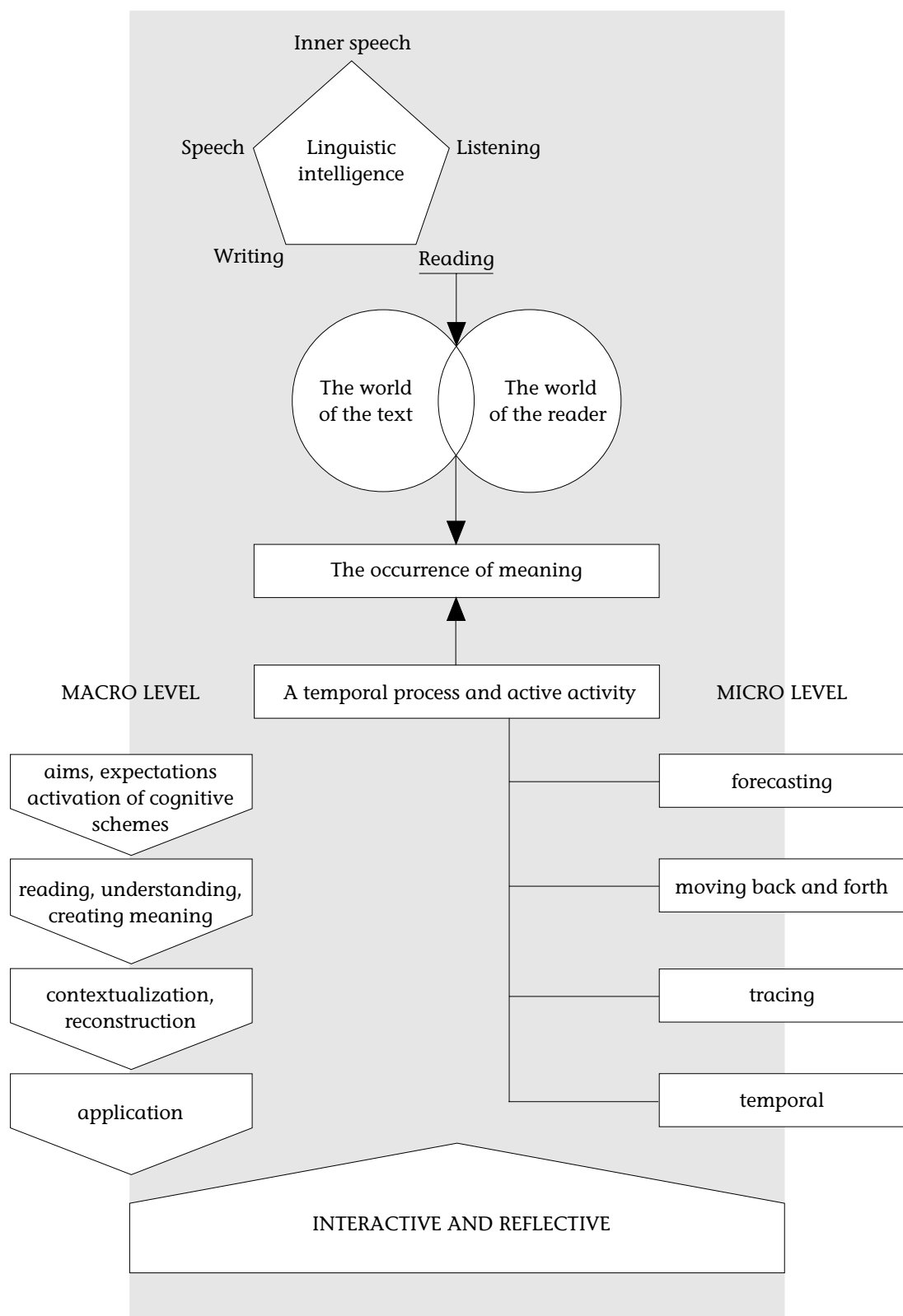
Recent work in cognition, information processing, and linguistics, and studies of the relationship between reading and memory, have significantly expanded upon the behavioural investigations of reading processes done in the 1960's. The passive image of humans represented by behaviourism has been replaced by a theory of learning involving "agency" – the notion that people actively process and use the information received from their environment. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) laid the groundwork for this change, and his notions of research subject and method have had a great impact on reading research today. The other predecessor of the cognitive tendency in psychology was the development of the information sciences. Human intelligence, according to cognitive theories, is largely a function of the information processing ability of the brain.

Reading is one of the most important instruments of human learning, and it has always been one of the most effective forms of obtaining information. Researchers agree that reading as a process has two main components. One is the ability to recognise words, and the other is the ability to understand and process a text, to assign meaning to the text. The reader collects information about the text, using previous knowledge, knowledge of the world, and cognitive schemes organised in meanings

and structures, in order to create meaning. Reading as a tool for understanding and applied learning is goal-oriented, and an effective reader must also be a motivated reader. When reading for comprehension, the reader is continuously forming hypotheses and making assumptions about what s/he can expect next in the text. Since the reader is checking these hypotheses while reading, he or she moves forward and backward through the text. Therefore the reader's understanding is temporal, since it changes based upon interpretation of the information received.

A good reader takes an active part in the understanding process ... incorporating the text into his or her own personal context through reflection

Understanding comes ultimately from the application of acquired information. Thus the result of reading is the construction of a different kind of knowledge, a different way of thinking, and a different way of behaving; that is, the creation of new individual schemas. A good reader takes an active part in the understanding process with his or her full personality, in both its cognitive and affective aspects, incorporating the text into his or her own personal context through reflection. The following figure demonstrates this:



The following three examples demonstrate how a classroom instructor/facilitator can help to increase reading comprehension, by using a process-based, interactive and

reflective approach to reading. The first example uses literature, the second uses historical sources, and the third uses technical texts specific to teacher education.

Teaching literature as a special instrument of learning about the self and the world

"A work of art is not 'eternal' because it constrains one meaning to different people, but because it suggests different meanings to the same person."

(Roland Barthes)

In a literary text the linguistic forms are the result of conscious and deliberate creative activity. This means that the conventional relation of the sign and the signified is temporarily suspended, a characteristic that presents a special problem in reading and understanding literature.

In addition, literary texts are interdependent, and are linked to each other, playing different roles in different ages and cultures, a characteristic referred to as intertextuality. Recent theories in reader-response criticism also consider the reader to be a culturally and historically determined factor. The reader's historical context determines how he or she forms meaning. In addition these theories contend that the reader is not a passive recipient, but is a participant in an interactive process – the reader plays the primary role in creating meaning. Therefore, the reading process encourages the reader to reflect not only on the text, but also on himself or herself. What the reader comprehends depends on his or her prior knowledge, but it also is influenced by whether or not the reader can initiate a dialogue with the text; that is, whether the reader can ask questions, and identify key issues in the text.

In a classroom setting, the instructor can help students increase their comprehension of literature by:

1. helping the recipients (the reading students) use their previous knowledge, in a goal-oriented way;
2. promoting thinking about the literary use of signs;
3. encouraging the recipient to question and reflect, and to consider the aesthetic and experiential aspects of the reading experience in a personal aesthetic context.

Great Books: An American Teacher's Perspective

I'm a firm believer in reader response and transactional theory*, so to me a text is just words on a page until a reader brings his or her background and experience to it. In department meetings and on discussion listserves, the literary merit of various titles has often come up. I am occasionally told, "You may not personally like this book, but we *all* have to admit that it is funny." Without at all meaning to be confrontational, I disagree.

I don't really feel that I *have* to admit that any book is funny (or great, for that matter!), regardless of author's intent. For example, I adore puns and so would walk across fire to get anything new by British fantasy author Terry Pratchett, but my husband only groans and hides under the covers when I gloatingly settle in to read the latest. He despises puns as humor and finds nothing funny about Pratchett's Discworld. To me, Pratchett is humorous. To him, Pratchett is torture.

A book is just treated wood without a reader, and readers can't relate to a story without bringing their life experience to it. "Great" books speak to large numbers of people and therefore earn that label. I feel perfectly happy to disagree with those labels if the book doesn't speak to me. (I have vivid memories of watching my high school English teachers cringe when I wouldn't agree with them that the canon was "great" literature. When I was 17, *Moby Dick* had no relevance at all to my life, and I wasn't shy about saying so!)

Now that I'm in a classroom of my own, I have tried very hard to empower my students to relate to books through their own lenses. Do I tell my students that a book is "great" or "funny"? No. I do go to great pains to "sell" books to kids. I work very hard staying current on new titles and reading young adult literature in depth so that I can find books that they will love. But I *never* tell my kids that a book is "great" without making it very clear that that is my personal reaction to it, and they are perfectly free to disagree. I think they have as much right as I to judge the books they read. Their schema isn't my schema. You can't divorce the reader from the text.

And that's a good thing. Or at least my husband would think so. He never has to worry about me taking his Hemingway. And I never have to wait for my turn with the newest Pratchett.

Adapted from a post to an electronic listserve

~Gretchen Lee
English Department Chair
Old Orchard Upper School
Campbell, CA

* see Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press; (1994). Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois Press.

Reading historical sources – a special tool for linking past and present

*"We do not want to know about past and present,
but about a history of existence and human relations
made simultaneous."*

(Miklós Mészöly)

Secondary level history teaching aims to familiarise students with the broadest possible array of historical sources. Any object or document that carries a message from the past is considered a source of history. Reading history source material helps students reach the following goals:

1. By reading, students acquire knowledge, interpret it, and eventually, reach a new level of understanding, allowing them to better connect the past with the present.

2. Students will become reflective readers. They will learn to read in a way that involves reflecting on the text, and forming an opinion about what they have read.

The skill of source reading must be developed gradually. The first skill to be developed is thinking critically about the

main ideas of the text. For this, a number of techniques could be taught to them, such as *re-focusing*, in which, after students clarify the meaning of the words and thoughts, they focus on posing good questions. Good questions, in this sense, are aimed at clarifying, looking for arguments, reasons and consequences. To clarify the text, it can also be helpful to translate what has been read into a visual code. For example, students studying the Middle Ages might make a map of a medieval town.

On the next level, students learn to compare sources written from different perspectives. They must not only interpret what they have read, but also find points of comparison among the texts. This leads to a dialogue between the texts being read. Making a table to illustrate similarities and differences could facilitate the students' thinking. The table below outlines how a Catholic and a Protestant source describe the roles of István Bocskai (military leader in Hungary's struggle against the Turks and Germans, and Prince of Transylvania 1604-1606) and Gábor Bethlen (Protestant Prince of Transylvania 1613-1629).

CATHOLIC SOURCE ABOUT ISTVÁN BOCSKAI Vilmos Fraknói 1863	COMMON POINTS	PROTESTANT SOURCE ABOUT ISTVÁN BOCSKAI Károly Szász 1865
Bocskai was evasive and mean, deceived gullible people; was egoistical; and greedy. Protestants were malcontents, who desired expansion, leading to civil war and suffering. They attacked Catholic monasteries and monks.	People in the country were discontent due to incursions of foreign mercenaries, and the persecution of Protestants. Bocskai occupied the country quickly.	Bocskai took up arms to avenge his injuries. He wanted to restore freedom of religion. He was proclaimed Monarch of Hungary and Transylvania.
ABOUT GÁBOR BETHLEN Combative. Waited for the optimal time to attack the Habsburg monarch. In Besztercebánya (Banska Bistrica) he forced the Catholic and loyal high priests and lords from the country. He had the country destroyed by Tartars.	In Besztercebánya (Banska Bistrica) he was proclaimed King of Hungary. Interfered with the Czech war.	ABOUT BETHLEN GÁBORRÓL (GÁBOR BETHLEN) Loved truth, was wise, tolerant in religious policies. Seeing the unrest in Bohemia, he joined the Protestant cause in the "holy common affair" (Thirty Years War). Had unexpected and quick success. The national assembly in Besztercebánya and the Protestant majority proclaimed his rights.

During source analyses, it is crucial to elicit students' opinions about the topic being discussed. Ideally, conflict over the ideas in the texts will develop into a debate, where the students can make use of their previous knowledge. This can lead to a discussion of why it is important to examine historic figures and their deeds from several points of view.

In order to reveal simplifications and distortions (in addition to merely comparing sources with differing viewpoints), it is necessary to reconstruct

the author's motives and underlying interests. It is at this level that we achieve critical comprehension. The students may reach this level if they are encouraged to summarise (and if needed, supplement) their knowledge, while sharing it with each other.

The following chart shows the views revealed in various accounts of the Spanish encounter with the Aztecs (e.g. How did the Indians see the conquering Spanish, and vice versa? What are some possible reasons for the distortion?):

AUTHOR, SOURCE	INDIANS natives	SPANISH	WHAT IS HIGHLIGHTED BY THE DISTORTION?
AZTEC CHRONICLE 1528	They are afraid, have no idea what to do, defenselessly awaiting the Spanish.	They have cannons and armour, they ride on deer and they are as white as lime.	Points out the unknown and different things. They believe the conquerors are gods.
BITTERLI'S NOTES	They are pagan. They worship totems, they steal, they practice cannibalism and polygamy.	–	All negative features of the Indians are rooted in their being pagan. Misgiving. Exaggeration of cannibalism.
ANTONIO PIGAFETTA'S DIARY	Primitive arms. They attack with terrible roaring.	Seeing that the natives are superior in numbers, most of the Spanish flee. Some continue fighting with their heroic captain (Magellan).	Exaggerates the natives' number. The aim is to perpetuate the heroic image of the captain.
LAS CASAS, A SPANISH BLACK FRIAR. HISTORIA DE LES INDIAS	Badly armed, they protect themselves against their oppressors.	Well-armed and extremely cruel.	Tries to give an objective picture, sympathetic with the Indians; might exaggerate the cruelty of the Spanish.

The instructor may demonstrate that critical reading is vitally important in present times as well, by comparing articles or commentaries on current events from different newspapers. The

ultimate aim of reading and discussing historical sources is the recognition that the past is prologue to present, and that they are inseparably linked.

Reading professional texts as preparation for the teaching profession

"I think – I have always thought – that texts, professional texts, should not be memorised, but they should be understood, experienced, considered, so that they flow through your veins."

(a student's reflection)

Inevitably, students in teacher training programs have preconceived notions about their future profession – preconceptions about learners and learning, teaching, the subject and the teaching materials, and the teacher's roles. These views are formed based on previous personal experience, during their 12 years of schooling. The teacher candidate must uncover his preconceptions, ideas, and inner images (which are often implicit) before he can decide whether they need to be changed; and if so, how and to what level they must be altered. If this analysis does not take place, the theoretical knowledge conveyed during the training program will be ineffective, and the new teacher will teach in the same way he or she was taught.

We contend that a student teacher's previous attitudes about learning can be exposed by reading professional texts, if this reading involves collecting, analysing, interpreting and reflecting on the student teacher's own experiences. Given an opportunity to compare their personal experiences with professional texts, student teachers can realise an interactive and reflective process of learning. In this comparative process, the student teachers make their personal views and presuppositions conscious, and have an opportunity to modify them.

In the course "Introduction to Education and Learning the Teacher's Profession", a multi-stage process can be planned to achieve the goals outlined above. At the first stage, students are familiarised with journals on education, books and introductory studies that describe how to prepare for the teaching profession. For most first-year students, this is the first time they have read such books and journals.

After that, assignments may be organised to help students articulate their own viewpoints on teaching and learning. Possible topics include the functions of school (schoolchildren's ideas about school), the "hidden curriculum" (what

happens in school in addition to academics), sources of the teacher's self-knowledge, and the significance of the teacher's behavioural patterns. While reading the assigned texts, the students are encouraged to think about the following: Does the content of the text correspond with my experiences? Can I add anything to it? Are there any contradictions? Do I have questions about this issue? Does what I have read make me think? Does it remind me of something? Can I fit what I have read into my knowledge or not? Do the others think about it in the same way? etc.

As a closing stage of the process, the student teachers can recommend texts, books, and research accounts to one another. They now have a new consciousness of their own thinking processes, knowledge, and approach to learning, and this consciousness will persist after their training ends.

In our experience, reflections written by the students during this process are concerned with both the content of the texts and the methods used in the class, which allowed them to interact with their classmates and reflect on the experiences and opinions of their peers.

Some examples of the written reflections of the students follow:

"[T]he lessons... not only called our attention to reading, but also to the 'how' and 'why' aspects of this kind of reading... Student teachers can take part in this process if they do not remain passive readers, but if they try to integrate [the texts] into their own thoughts, and attempt to relate the problems discussed in the literature to their previous experiences."

"Reading and talking about the professional texts was a bit difficult because understanding the text was very hard for me. It was full of special terminology, but I also found the content interesting."

"I think – I have always thought – that texts, professional texts, should not be memorised, but they should be understood, experienced, and considered, so that they flow through your veins. I think these lessons are also good because the students can discuss, accept, alter or reject the suggested topics at once."

"It is impossible to learn professional texts thoroughly because they are too long and there are too many of them. The most important thing is to analyse parts that correspond with our previous experiences. I

like reading critically. It is easier to process a text this way."

"What I liked most was that we had a chance to debate with our classmates when we had differing viewpoints. For this reason, I think, the best lessons were the lessons in which all of us could freely talk about our reflections and experiences in response to a text. Even a short excerpt, maybe one or two lines, turned out to evoke so many different opinions."

(from the written reflections of Szilvia Dobai, Boglárka Bencze, Gábor Imre, Nóra Czvikli and István Bódi, all first year students. 29 March 2001)

To summarise, it can be said that reading and interactively (reflectively) processing professional texts is a valuable tool in preparing for the teaching profession. It allows students in the initial stages – and throughout their training – an opportunity to uncover their experiences and previous knowledge, to make implicit knowledge explicit. And, since revealing underlying assumptions about learning is an ongoing process, it may help not only the student teachers, but also the instructor, contributing to the development of his thinking as well.

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The authors of this article all teach at Pecs University, in Pecs, Hungary; and also work together as trainers for the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project in southern Hungary.

- **Ildikó Bárdossy is an Associate Professor specializing in methodology and curriculum development.**
 - **Margit Dudás is an Assistant Professor and Ph.D. candidate. She teaches courses in communication and professional development.**
 - **Csilla Pethőné Nagy teaches Hungarian Language and Literature and is a secondary school teacher trainer. She is the author of a series of literature coursebooks based on RWCT principles.**
 - **Erika Priskinné Rizner teaches History and works with secondary school teacher candidates.**
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New Roles, New Goals: Rethinking the Educational Paradigm

Jeremy Parrott

This paper discusses some weaknesses in teaching and assessment observed at a Hungarian university and explains how a course was developed to help maintain students' motivation and interest in genuine learning by getting them to consider the purpose of education from a social and individual point of view.

1. Polemical introduction

Schools are places where forgetting takes place. Places where children lose their sense of wonder, joy, spontaneity and creativity. Before school the world is their oyster. They can interact with it in a whole variety of ways, and make sense of experience such that it is meaningful to them. Once in school they soon learn that thinking is something to be done along tram tracks, or better still, not at all. Clever people have already answered all the questions worth asking and the pupil's task is just to gradually absorb snippets of received wisdom, regurgitate it periodically, and then forget it.

I was particularly good at playing this game, always getting more ticks than crosses for my efforts, and was thereby allowed to proceed to higher education, where I learnt to play the game with modified rules expressing what *I* think about what other people have thought and expressed. For many students this minor and circumscribed freedom comes too late, for by that time any spark of curiosity or originality has already been snuffed out by the relentless pressure of the system. For others it may never come at all as many colleges and universities simply serve as extensions of school, shovelling more and more useless

information into the poor students' heads until they're full to bursting.

Upon finally emerging from the educational sausage factory some of the successful products decide to recycle the remains of their anamnesia (lack of forgetfulness) and become teachers. *They* were successful at this game, *they* know the rules and can enforce them if anyone tries to question them or step out of line. Thus the system perpetuates itself, down through the generations, and schooling, instead of preparing individuals for life and self-fulfillment, acts as a major coercive and repressive force, breeding conformity, passivity and compliance.

Is this assessment too bleak, too cynical? Regretfully, I fear not. Is there any hope of breaking out of this closed cycle of forgetting to enable some *real* learning to take place? Yes, indeed, but probably only on an individual, micro-level. There have always been educators, a fairly small minority I suspect, whose goals have been genuinely humane and whose methods encourage and reward risk-taking, exploration, daring to be different. At whatever stratum of the system one teaches, and in whichever subject, it is, I believe, both possible and necessary to stimulate a questioning approach and to openly accept that not all questions have a right or definitive answer.

2. Old roles, worthless goals

These remarks come not from an outsider, but one who has spent the past twenty years teaching English at tertiary level, the last fifteen of which as a teacher educator. At times my antipathy to the sausage factory model of schooling recedes into the background and I meekly get on with my work, ploughing my own

furrow, teaching my own classes. At others, and usually triggered by some event, these deeply held convictions well up volcanically and demand expression. The specific event which caused me to be writing now was the introduction of a new exam in the university where I currently teach. It was agreed by the senior teachers of the English Literature Department that students didn't know enough, that they hadn't got enough facts in their heads. What was to be done about this distressing state of affairs? Make them learn some, of course. But would the university take on the responsibility of teaching them these salient nuggets of knowledge from English and American literature, history and culture? Why, of course not! The students should simply know them, glean them, acquire them, cram them – get them into their heads by whatever means possible. Then what the university would condescend to do was to test them, half way through their degree studies, to find out if they had enough facts in their heads to be allowed to carry on studying. If they failed they would be forced to repeat years or drop out of the university.

Is there any hope of breaking out of this closed cycle of forgetting to enable some real learning to take place?

Some of you reading this may find it hard to believe – so did I when I first heard about it. It would be farcical were it not painfully and tragically true. The format of the test is that students have to answer 100 multiple choice questions in 100 minutes. The pass mark is 70%. A couple of sample questions from the mock exam made available to students will give you the true flavour of this exercise.

39] What is the relation of the 1930s to the 1920s?

- a) the 1930s brought about a change in the novel's reflection of social life and the plot became more realistic and less subjective.
- b) The 1930s were the continuation of the 1920s. The 1930s only reproduced

the plots of the 1920s in a Surrealist novel discourse.

- c) There were no really good novelists in the 1930s and the novel suffered it seriously, *[sic.]*
- d) The social changes forced the revision of the 1920s in Waugh's novels, *[sic.]*

67] The Black Death

- a) was a pandemic that killed every third subject of Edward III.
- b) was a pandemonium that killed every third subject of Edward II.
- c) was a panegyric performed by rats infected by blocked fleas, *[sic.]*
- d) was actually a panacea carried to Europe via Genoa.

Such questions are not exceptional, but entirely representative of the kind of nonsense being inflicted by the English Literature Department on its hapless students in what it calls a "Comprehensive Test of Literature and Culture". I trust that a detailed critique of such items is not necessary – they are so self-evidently multiply flawed – and yet... the English Department still had the self-satisfied arrogance to launch this test in January 1999, and then hand down pass or fail grades. In the event, only 6 out of 107 students scored 70% or more (thus *proving* to the senior faculty that the students knew nothing...) but in an unprecedented gesture of magnanimity, the pass mark was suddenly lowered to 50% in order to save face, and roughly half the students passed.

It is difficult to think of a more blatant abuse of power in an educational context. Unaware or unconcerned about displaying their own ignorance in setting such bad, sub-Trivial Pursuit quiz questions, the teachers seek to demonstrate the students' ignorance and cow them into submission by fear of failure. The example I have outlined at some length is perhaps an extreme case of a tendency I see as very prevalent in the education systems of Central and Eastern Europe. Education is viewed as the piling up of knowledge or facts. Teachers lend their learners a bucketful of facts during a course of study and then require them to be returned at the end of the semester. Skills are not valued, taught or imparted, nor is critical engagement

with the material being presented. The teacher is the final arbiter and authority, the irreproachable representative of tried and tested values and traditions. Under Communism such an approach may have been expedient or necessary but surely, ten years on, it is time for an educational paradigm-shift in line with the demands of the Information Age.

3. A new course – Thinking English

My practical response to the introduction of this test (apart from satirizing it mercilessly at every opportunity) was to introduce a new course for freshmen, with the specific objective of getting them to think about and to question the system they were entering. I had to camouflage this under the innocuous-sounding label of “Integrated Study Skills” and ran it for the first time as a seminar course during the Spring semester of 1999. It was a selection of materials and approaches developed during this course that I tried out with participants at my workshop during a CEP conference in Szeged [editor’s note: CEP, the Civic Education Project, is a group of educators and professionals who are dedicated to educational reform and to encouraging the development of market-based economies and democratic political systems in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia]. What follows are descriptions of some of the activities used, together with outcomes and commentaries.

4. Sample activities

4.1 What are you good at?

This is an ice-breaking activity, particularly useful when working with groups of teachers or teacher trainees.

Instructions

- a) Think of something you are good at, something that’s not your job but that you do well and enjoy. Choose one thing and write it down.
- b) Now think how you got good at this thing, whatever it is. Did you learn it formally or just pick it up? Did you read books about it? Did you watch other people doing it? Write a few lines about the process.
- c) Why do you think you got good at it? What was your motivation? What

encouragement did you receive? What feedback? Write some notes about these aspects.

- d) Could you teach this thing to someone else? If so – how? If not – why not? Make some notes.

Commentary

The participants then get into groups of 3-5 and exchange information and ideas. This activity gives everyone a chance to talk about things they are good at/enjoy; we all tend to be at our best when talking about such things. Enthusiasm on the part of the speakers also encourages good listening, itself an essential component of active engagement with learning in a classroom setting. In the conference workshop the skills or interests that participants talked about included pottery, folk-dancing, cooking, interior decoration, embroidery and orienteering. The small groups reassembled in plenary mode and we went through the various questions together, extracting, discussing, playing with ideas as to how and why people learn what they learn *for themselves*, as opposed to what is imposed by a school curriculum. Indeed, none of the skills mentioned had been formally taught and learnt in a school setting. We all agreed that we would only want to teach our chosen skills to individuals who expressed a desire to learn... Again, how very different from the imposition of subjects and knowledge which schooling foists on to an undifferentiated mass of often unwilling learners.

4.2 Why are there schools?

This is a brainstorming activity to be carried out in small groups.

Instructions

Give out a large sheet of paper (at least A3) and felt tipped pens to each group. In the middle of the sheet draw a circle and write in it either: Why schools? or Why universities? The brainstorm is for the groups to write down as many reasons as possible for the existence of schools or universities, thinking as laterally or divergently as they were able, and trying to take into consideration the points of view of the various stake-holders in the educational process.

Results

In the CEP workshop groups were given 15-20 minutes to complete this first part of the task. Each group then looked at the other's poster and asked questions about the reasons they had come up with. The results of these brainstorms are listed below.

Why are there schools?

- transmission of culture
- transmission of information
- development of skills
- development of mind
- conformity
- peer pressure
- grades
- preparation for teamwork
- child care
- access to potential mentors
- nourishment (food)
- socialization
- experience in solving contradictions
- replenish the workforce
- motor skills
- learning tolerance
- resource sharing
- learning where to look for further info
- self-reliance
- learning self-control
- learning self-discipline
- rebellion
- supporting construction industry
- pragmatism results
- supporting publishing industry
- living within the system
- information acquisition
- life skills
- promotion of stereotypical thinking
- cooperation/sharing
- social mores
- competitiveness
- social values
- learning organizational skills
- developmental skills
- civic participation
- self-realization
- self-awareness
- friendship
- love
- exposure to other opinions
- learning about authority
- learning responsibility
- access to health facilities
- learning how to live with routine
- learning to learn

Why are there universities?

- to prepare good professionals
- to prepare teachers for schools
- to develop problem-solving skills
- to teach people how to think independently
- to teach how to look for information and use it
- to motivate students for self-development
- to teach social skills
- to teach how to evaluate information
- to teach students to take theories not as absolute truths but as tools
- to teach students to take responsibility
- to provide an environment for research

We considered whose point of view these responses reflected, to what extent the remarks could be characterized as idealistic, realistic or cynical, and the similarities and differences between views of school and university. These, it should be recalled, were the comments generated by a group of university teachers attending an international conference on ways of making teaching more effective. It was interesting to compare their views with those of first year undergraduates at a Hungarian university. A selection of the rather cynical and disaffected comments from *their* brainstorms is given below.

Why are there schools and universities?

- to have exam-period (ending parties)
- (not) to become idiots
- to get a degree
- to get financial support
- to employ teachers
- to give reports and write exams
- to have somebody to tell you what to study
- to have holidays
- free season tickets
- to bother parents with homework
- turn children into decent taxpayers
- to pay tuition fees
- to find a husband/wife
- to collect children not to be on the street
- to have something to hate
- to live without parents
- to keep children warm in winter.

4.3 What's worth knowing?

Preliminary discussion

According to futurologists, the quantity of knowledge in the world doubled between 1700 and 1900. It doubled again between 1900 and 1950 and again between 1950 and 1970. Currently it is doubling at the rate of once every five years. If the current exponential growth continues then, they say, the amount of information available in the world will double *every 73 days!* However large the pinch of salt with which one takes these figures, the trend appears undeniable and the following questions invariably arise:

- In such a future scenario what and how should schools be teaching?
- Out of the infinite quantity of heterogeneous information available, what's worth knowing?

Clearly the transmissive mode, already hopelessly outdated and discredited, should be consigned to the dustbin of history. Teachers' knowledge will rapidly become obsolete, thereby undermining the basis of their power. What will teachers then do? Will they and the structures they operate in themselves become obsolete?

Task

After a few minutes' discussion on these topics I handed out copies of the following text, which I have adapted from Postman and Weingartner's inspirational work *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*.

What's worth knowing?

Suppose all the syllabi and curricula and textbooks in schools disappeared. Suppose all the standardized texts in cities, states and countries were lost. In other words, suppose that the most common material impeding innovation in schools simply did not exist. Then suppose that you decided to turn this catastrophe into an opportunity to increase the relevance of schools. What would you do?

Here is a possibility for you to consider: Suppose that you decide to have the entire curriculum consist of questions. These questions would have to be worth seeking answers to, not only from your point of view but, more importantly, from the point of view of the students. In order to get still closer to reality, add the requirement that the questions must help the students to

develop and internalize concepts that will help them survive in the rapidly changing world of the present and the future.

Obviously you are being asked to suppose that you are exactly what you are – a concerned educator living at the turn of the millennium. What questions would you have on your list?

Take a pencil and list your questions on the other side of this paper, which has thoughtfully been left blank for you. Please don't be concerned about defacing this paper, unless, of course, one of your questions is going to be, "Was the Black Prince the legitimate or illegitimate son of Edward III?" In that case use your *own* paper!

Task

It was with the setting of this task that I ended day one of the two-day workshop. The completion of the task to come up with a list of worthwhile questions was homework, food for thought, something to sleep on...

Results

Next day, bright and early, we reassembled and pooled our questions. Here are some of the suggestions:

- How and where can I find the information I need?
- How can I analyse a problem?
- How can I stay healthy?
- How can I make the world a better place?
- What should I do for a living?
- What does everybody need to know?
- Should students trust their teachers?

Having gathered our ideas together we democratically decided to continue our work outside the conference venue, al fresco, in the sunshine.

4.4 What shall we talk about?

In addition to the questions we generated, I gave participants about 100 more which Postman and Weingartner helpfully provide as illustrations of the sort of topics they feel the New Education (remember their book is already 30 years old!) could address. Here is a representative sample:

- What, if anything, seems to you to be worth dying for?
- Where does knowledge come from?
- What conditions are necessary for plant, animal and human life?

- What would you change if you could?
- How can you tell good guys from bad guys?
- When you hear or read or observe something, how do you know what it means?

From this welter of questions we decided to pick just one and see where it led us. The question we chose was: *What is a "good idea"?*

Discussion

The discussion kicked off with a review of our collective decision to hold the workshop out of doors, reclining in some long grass on the banks of the River Tisza. We all agreed that this was a good idea. But why? Because it freed up our thinking, without walls we didn't feel constrained, roles and goals were open to renegotiation... We explored the traditional roles within education and discussed why we felt there was such resistance to change. This brought in a review of Prussian, Russian and American and Anglo-Saxon educational styles. We talked about national characteristics and identities, ideological biases in school curricula, prejudice, racism and the conflict between NATO and Serbia which had just begun and which was raging a mere 20 kms from us across the newly redefined border dividing us from them. Was bombing Belgrade "a good idea" ...?

4.5 What do you mean when you say... ?

Keywords

During the course of our wide-ranging discussions a number of keywords came up which it was important to spend time exploring. Take for example the three little words "I love you". Could they be the most misunderstood words in the English language? If they are – why? Because what I mean by love and what you mean by love may not refer to the same signified at all, never mind the circumstances of and the motivation behind the utterance. We did not, as it happens, discuss love, but some almost equally nebulous terms did get used, terms which often lead to confusion and misunderstanding. What is "freedom"?

What is "nation"? What is "language"? Such words are by no means obscure or technical, they are the stuff of everyday intercourse, in which it is assumed that we all know and share an understanding

of their referents, their signifieds – their meanings. This apparent consensus, however, very often disguises wildly different views, conceptual bases, ideologies. As both Wittgenstein and Benjamin Whorf observed, the limits of our language are the limits of our world, not just in the sense that we are constrained by the grammar and lexis of a particular language, but also because our own idiolect, and the meanings we ascribe to the terms we use, delineate and circumscribe our ability both to make meaning and to interpret the intended meaning of others.

Strategy

When what appears to be a keyword comes up in class discussion, find a natural turn-taking break and call a time-out. Everyone involved in the discussion, teacher included, should then spend two minutes writing something about what the word means to them. It could be an attempt at a definition, how the individual feels about the word, an example, an incident, a lexical map with synonyms and antonyms – some written product which shows an effort to engage with and actively explore how (differently) we make meaning. A discussion of the different responses should then constitute the next phase of the temporarily suspended discussion. Indeed, most discussion worthy of the name, in virtually any discourse domain, is essentially about the meaning of keywords. What is "faith"? (theology) What is "matter"? (physics) What is "right"? (law) What is "beautiful" (art) etc. The point of such discussions is clearly not to arrive, but the stimulation of the ongoing journey...

5. Concluding remarks

The activities described in this article have all been designed to foster a spirit of critical enquiry into the processes and goals of education, and to work towards a redefinition of roles within the system. The teacher, instead of handing down knowledge in a highly stratified environment becomes a co-seeker, a facilitator, a catalyst for learning. The students, no longer treated as passive absorbers of received wisdom, will, hopefully, metamorphose into active seekers of knowledge, insight, understanding. Of course, these are not

new ideas, nor new roles. From Socrates and the Buddha on, such have been the ostensible models and goals for both secular education and spiritual development. However, the dust of two millennia has settled on these once fresh ideas and the weight of succeeding traditions has disguised and distorted the very principles on which the notion of systematic education was founded.

In my seminar group at Szeged University we naturally did a great deal more than these few activities during the course of a semester. We worked on and talked about the dynamics of our group, we read from works by Edward de Bono, Ivan Illich and Raymond Williams as well as substantial chunks of Postman and Weingartner (see bibliography). The question on which we spent the greatest amount of time was: What is “progress”? One way in which we engaged with this idea was to read Huxley’s *Brave New World*, exploring such notions as cloning, euthanasia, manipulation of and by the media, and designer drugs. Students undertook library and web searches on keywords, points of factual information and mini-projects that arose out of class discussions, and all wrote essays on some aspect of how they imagined life would be in 2020. The last few weeks of the semester we devoted to some empirical research, investigating the revolution in consumer behaviour which has recently occurred in Szeged with the opening of its first hypermarket, the largest Tesco superstore in Europe. Students took it upon themselves to find out about management structure within Tesco; supply, packaging and pricing of goods; display and advertising techniques; as well as designing questionnaires and interviewing shop staff, customers, friends, relatives and local residents.

At the beginning of the semester I had told these students that the course was experimental, that I did not know quite where we’d end up, and that I wanted them to assess both the course and themselves, by giving themselves grades which I would dutifully enter into their indexes. For many of the students, this was the most radical idea we discussed in the whole semester and we spent an hour working through an Edward de Bono-type “Consider All Factors” exercise in order to fully understand the rationale behind and

the implications of a self-graded course. The criteria we agreed on were attendance, participation, effort and self-development – the last two of which they were in a far better position to judge than I. During the last class the fatal moment came when they had to reveal what they felt they deserved; roughly half said “excellent”, roughly half “good” – an assessment which keyed in pretty accurately with my own perceptions, although I might have been inclined to give one or two more “excellents”.

Such a small-scale innovation is naturally not going to overthrow or seriously threaten the established educational routines even within the university where I work. Paradigm-shifts do not take place overnight, whether during evolutionary or revolutionary periods of human history. However, as Postman and Weingartner point out (p. 23), in this, the Information Age, the pace and nature of change itself have changed. In order for teachers, schools, universities, students – the whole structure of formal education – not to become dinosaur-like victims of accelerated social Darwinism, new roles and new goals must be embraced more widely in order to equip individuals with the skills necessary to act as fully enfranchised participants in the learning society of the early third millennium.

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Jeremy Parrott, British Council Adviser, Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics, University of Szeged, Szeged, Hungary.

Bilingualism: A Dispatch from the Front

Roman Aliev and Natalie Kazhe

A sure sign of growing interest in a given educational problem is an increase in the number of internet web pages and print media columns devoted to that issue. If you type “bilingual education” into a search engine, the number of results should persuade you that this is an extremely timely issue, on a par with concerns regarding the introduction of information technology into the schools. This very journal also bears witness to the relevance of bilingualism. As people who are part of this process, we would like to share our knowledge of the implementation of bilingual programmes in a minority language school – the Riga Classical Gymnasium – in the context of work by other researchers.

This article is also an attempt to answer the question posed at the end of an article by I. Silova and G. Catlaks, recently printed in *Thinking Classroom* (Summer 2001, 16-22), “Will teachers support the change [to a Latvian language based system of public education through various bilingual models]?”

Naturally, there is no single answer to this question, nor can there be one. However, as has been noted by Andy Hargreaves, James Tooley, and others who approach education from a philosophical point of view, the majority of teachers

have never welcomed change in the system of education for the simple reason that even the most brilliant and promising idea conceived in the peace and quiet of a government ministry can fall flat in the hubbub of actual schools. This does not mean that the idea was bad – it will undoubtedly find an appropriate application, and eventually find its way into routine practice – but this takes time, and time is perceived differently by those who come up with ideas and those who actually implement them.

A case in point: Passatino admits that even in the advanced West, half the school computers still only gather dust in the classroom, and the students are far more proficient with them, and take much more pleasure in using them, than the teachers. Teachers are conservative by nature, and in a certain sense that’s a good thing, for only a sensible union of the conservative and the

progressive can guarantee harmonious social development, without unsettling upheavals. On the other hand, contemporary schools cannot avoid change, and bilingual education is an integral part of our ever-accelerating social dynamic, and an inevitable result of globalization. Intercultural contact – with its changing educational paradigm and the resulting need for a transition from knowledge to skill, from division to



unification, from suspicion to tolerance – has made bilingual education a familiar phenomenon, especially in multiethnic countries.

Unfortunately in the Baltic states, particularly in Latvia and Estonia, this process has become politicized, and is closely connected with the changing status of ethnic Russians, who are moving from a dominant position to minority status, or a kind of Diaspora. Thus we may have a representative of this former ethnic majority who is very appreciative of bilingual education when it concerns, say, an English or Swedish-language program for his own child (in the US or Sweden respectively), but who rejects a similar bilingual alternative when the second language is Latvian. Similarly, a teacher in a “minority” Russian-language school who is accustomed to having only that language used in school resists the introduction of Latvian into the educational process, and yet this teacher is not bothered by the fact that right here in Latvia British History is taught in English. Some might argue that this is because British History is taught by the English language teachers. True, but these teachers are not native speakers of English, and moreover they are not social studies teachers, so in a certain sense they are not even professionals.

We believe, and our opinion is based on personal experience, that in order to gradually and successfully implement a system of bilingual education, the educational programs, textbooks and manuals need to include a certain amount of propaganda regarding the benefits of bilingual and multilingual education. This contention is supported by the work of J. Mills, A. Flor et al. Unfortunately, both in Russian and in Latvian the word “propaganda” has been tainted, and has taken on a negative connotation, whereas its English equivalent can be used in a neutral sense. In the current authors’ book in Latvian on bilingual education, (published in Latvia in 2001, with a Russian version scheduled for publication in 2002) we present a list of indisputable benefits of bilingual education, benefits that are particularly important in the Baltic countries:

- A narrowing of the symbolic gap (noted by C. Warger) between the Russian language and European languages, brought about by active use of the Latin alphabet.
- A perception of language not only as an end in itself, but also as a means of acquiring knowledge, a view that will facilitate integration into the international intellectual community.
- An opportunity for greater choice for the future, a leveling of the playing field, and in addition, the acquisition of a set of skills that come with cultural mixing. Paradoxically there is a certain element of “payback” as well, since previously, when Latvia and Estonia were part of the Soviet Union, a good command of the Russian language was part of the ticket to success for native Latvian speakers. The work of many Latvian scientists and artists was acknowledged outside of Latvia solely because they were able to communicate with the much larger Russian-speaking audience.
- Creation within the schools of a realistic model of the cultural landscape for modern Latvia, with its many languages, working to eliminate the existing cultural segregation. We must take into account the fact that too many of our [Russian] students – and even more significantly, our teachers – have no contact with ethnic Latvians outside of school, even though they’re immersed in a Latvian-language media environment. Thus the idea of integration suffers, and there is a growing and dangerous tendency toward cultural segregation.
- A wonderful opportunity for teachers who actively support bilingual education to diversify their activities; to play an active part in the process of “life-long learning”; to raise their level of competence; to become true partners with their students in the educational process; to raise their credibility in the eyes of the students; and even to acquire valuable skills that would allow them to teach their subject in other countries.
- An opportunity for teachers from Russian and Latvian-language schools to work together as full-fledged colleagues, with the Latvians appearing not in a supporting role,

but as representatives of a rich culture that retains its significance in the contemporary world (A. Prieditis).

- An opportunity to influence Latvia's national educational policy by engaging in direct discussion, rather than through the politicized, and often incompetent, mass media.
- An additional motivation to acquire current computer skills, in light of the availability of linguistic and educational software and the existence of opportunities to participate in cooperative projects.
- A decrease in linguistic dependence on Latvian colleagues, leading to an increase in self-confidence and confidence in the future.

Of course the benefits of bilingual education are not limited to those listed above. We might sum them up as: An answer to the challenges of our times; and an active engagement in citizenship. Turning to the problem of the need for global reform in education, it should be noted that the bilingual component is very compatible with the significant features of future civilization, which according to American philosopher Gregory Bateson, will have the following characteristics:

- The evolution of man from "Homo Sapiens" (Thinking Man) to "Homo Integrans" (Integrated Man);
- The evolution of the psychology of effective communication;
- A transition in education from learning at the level of language to learning at the level of analogy;
- An explosion of scientific information and the establishment of new interdisciplinary fields of study.

The last two points highlight the stark contradiction between the obvious challenges of the modern world and our established system of education, with its solemn, old-fashioned objectives and unyielding inertia in the face of innovation. This is not only a problem for the post-Soviet countries; innovation encounters covert resistance even among representatives of the teaching profession in democratic countries who ostensibly advocate change.

On the one hand, society is aware of this disconnect between social progress

and the traditional system of education. On the other hand, the universality of the school experience, in combination with our unshakeable inner conviction that "things were better in the old days" continues to limit school education to a compulsive and mindless accumulation of required information. As a result most educational reforms lead only to the creation of a sort of monster, sometimes called a "standard", that arouses a secret satisfaction in the educational bureaucrats because they themselves won't be called upon to master it...

This is especially true of mathematics as it is taught in schools – it is hard for average pupils to master and seems to have no relevance to their present or future lives. The overemphasis on mathematics is not consistent with the nature of child development, and often even conflicts with developing the individual talents of children. A feeling arises that mathematics is something very far removed from the students and from school, and the students and school likewise become alienated from mathematics. At the same time, the effectiveness of math education is measured by dubious victories in math competitions, as though the sole object of education were the preparation of math champions.

How is mathematics related to the problem of bilingual education? The connection is quite direct – mathematics, like language, is predicated on a distinct system of signs, which we don't acquire naturally (like the first or native language) but which benefits students by broadening their functional skills, much like a second (or third) language. Mathematics serves as a universal means of communication, particularly in the world of information technology, demonstrating that any language can be both an end in itself and a means to an end. Mathematics creates and describes ideal objects through its own special language – a language that unfortunately is alien to most pupils, no matter what their language of instruction. Therefore math can be considered a kind of second language, which can be mastered only through practical application. Thus the modern approach to mathematical education, encompassing a reasonable range of study so as to be accessible to the vast majority of students, comprises:

- Math problems that do not have a single correct answer;
- Wide use of mathematical methods in other subject areas;
- Maximum use of visual aids, such as graphics, tables, and maps;
- A combination of individual and group work;
- An instructional approach based on the assumption that mathematics can be understood by all students, not just a select few (as is often assumed in the exact sciences);
- Support for slow learners;
- A continuous linkage between math and the students' everyday problems, which allows children constantly to apply their knowledge, and motivates them to extend that knowledge;
- The use of computer technology for calculations.

This list of characteristics of an intelligent modern approach to teaching mathematics coincides to an amazing degree with the main principles of bilingual education, with its emphasis on correspondence with nature (education that is developmentally appropriate and cognizant of human nature), correspondence with culture (balancing contemporary individuality with the demands of society, and providing an opportunity for communication based upon common human values), and creative adaptation (the system of education takes into account the individual characteristics and creative strengths of the students).

Such an approach requires a change in the way the very problems in our math courses are formulated, so that word problems tell a story – with a plot that doesn't involve ploughed hectares and hypothetical travelers going from point A to point B for some unknown reason – and thereby can arouse interest in the great science of mathematics, in the search for a logical understanding of oneself and the world. Tedious, boring problems rob the learning process of its fascination, not only for the pupils but for the teacher as well. Perhaps that is why teachers, whose creativity has long since been squelched, and who have the administrative sword of Damocles hanging over them in the form of a state exam, naturally reject everything new –

bilingual education, new approaches to mathematics, and the intrusion of computers into their one sacred place, the classroom. The failure of many of our longstanding assumptions – including the role of the teacher as imparter of information to be memorized, and the ideal of education in one's native language – has placed teachers in a very difficult situation. The old question, "What do we do now?" is again demanding an answer, accompanied by another old question, "Who is to blame?"

To give a single answer to these questions would contradict the essential spirit of our educational quest, our contention that we need a more productive integrated approach to education. This means that rote instruction must be replaced by practical work, with pupils working independently, and producing representations of their thoughts (shapes or symbols, utterances, opinions, verbal reasoning) in two or three languages. Naturally these languages should be used appropriately, expanding, rather than diminishing, the students' communicative abilities. Students are central to the process, through their strengths and their emotional investment in the situation. As a result, students are directly involved in constructing new and relevant knowledge as a means to discovering the world for themselves.

Proceeding from these assumptions, we have an opportunity to create a model bilingual school that satisfies the needs of modern Latvia (and perhaps other countries with similar problems), based on several principles.

The first principle is unity, or integration of various elements of the educational system, moving along a continuum from the level of the word to the level of the subject, from the empirical to the conceptual, from minor issues to major issues. This allows for the integrated development of the students, acquaints them with cultural values, and helps them adopt the style and methods of cooperative education. Integration is thus the primary means for organizing educational content, in accordance with universal laws of nature. We are trying to bring together and integrate the intellectual, knowledge-based aspect of education with the personal aspect, to



Photo: PhotoDisc, Inc.

develop individuality and personality on a new level of consciousness. This requires a high degree of interaction, and coordination of all the elements of education into a single objective: to provide the most suitable education for each individual student. Our model integrates varied educational content with the flow of information in various languages – the student's native language and the Latvian language, as well as other foreign languages – a situation that motivates pupils to engage in a search for knowledge that will be personally meaningful to them.

The second organizing principle is individualized education. Individualization comes into play in bilingual education at several different levels, since pupils normally differ not only in their content area knowledge but also in their command of the official state language. This situation means that we must, on the one hand, address their second language abilities, and on the other hand, create conditions that minimize the differences in their language skills. Thus, in a group work situation, pupils with a sound knowledge of the official state language can perform the function of language consultants. They can be given more linguistically complex assignments, while also supporting their less knowledgeable classmates.

Such an approach, however, should not endanger the progress of the advanced pupils. Teachers can motivate less accomplished pupils to strive for objectives slightly beyond their abilities

through creative use of student partnerships (using students' artistic talents and other skills). It is very important to have appropriate incentives, to reward the achievements of both average and gifted students. In our high school a system of bonus points has proven to be a successful source of additional motivation. By monitoring the work of each pupil individually, the teachers encourage them toward a better understanding of what they are doing; and the use of two languages provides for a natural repetition and reinforcement of concepts, particularly important in teaching subjects such as mathematics.

The third principle of our approach is motivation. Motivating students to study and learn in a bilingual environment is, to a certain extent, a matter of eliminating negative attitudes, which are often related to social prejudices. In fact, we have to change the students' attitude from an openly negative one to one that acknowledges the benefits of bilingualism, through a conscious understanding of the current social situation. Creating positive motivation is a complex process, particularly in the face of youthful opposition, which is only strengthened if there is an element of imposition. Therefore, the teacher has to emphasize and encourage the students' own self-interest by providing students with a critical mass of positive examples, including successful graduates, historic figures and other possible models that the students would consider relevant. The

English term for this process is *advocacy*, which involves promoting a notion and also countering attacks on that notion with solid arguments.

This naturally leads to the question: what are we to do with those teachers whose knowledge of the official state language is inadequate to this task? We believe in T. Scutnabb-Kangas's concept of the so-called "competent" bilingual teacher, who is not truly bilingual, and may in fact never become bilingual, but who is able to teach a subject in two languages with the help of various methods including:

- Using bilingual students as teacher's helpers whenever possible. Such students make up about 15-25% of all Latvian schools, thanks to the considerable number of intermarriages.
- Using an appropriate combination of visual aids in both languages.
- Consulting specialized subject dictionaries.
- Employing an integrated unit approach to presenting subject material.
- Using group work methods, with students serving as consultants.
- Cooperating with teachers of the Latvian language.
- Gradually increasing their own level of language competence (which would correspond with an increase in the general level of competence in the Latvian language observed in the last few years).
- Regularly consulting with colleagues who are fluent in Latvian, and maintaining an open mind toward these contacts, with both parties approaching problems critically and rationally.
- Using materials that students find relevant and interesting, and encouraging in the students a competitive spirit in the face of language difficulties, with the teacher serving as an example of one who has faced those same difficulties.

We believe that such a combination of modern principles and methods will help accomplish the primary goal of education – a dialogue between a teacher and a student – a dialogue that will enrich its

participants, bring them closer together, and widen their horizons, while at the same time helping to lift the burden of groundless, negative preconceptions surrounding bilingual education.

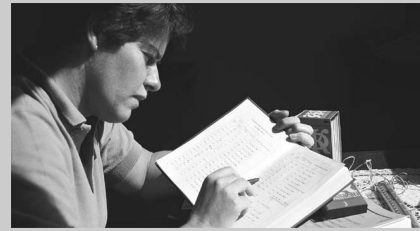
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Roman Aliev, Ph.D. in teaching, is principal of the Riga Classical Gymnasium, author of several books on the artistic talents of pupils and the concept of classical education in Latvia; and consultant for the Soros Foundation educational program "Open School".

Natalie Kazhe is head of the bilingual center at the Riga Classical Gymnasium, and author of specialized dictionaries and professional training programmes for bilingual teaching and the development of textbooks and manuals.

Teaching Tips



Helping Students Analyze their Writing

It is not an easy task for students to analyze and evaluate their own writing. When students turn papers in, it helps them to have immediate feedback from the teacher or from their friends, especially when they are dissatisfied with their work. The teacher can provide feedback that is constructive by asking questions like the following:

- “How did you feel while writing this piece?”
- “What are the strengths of this piece?”
- “What challenges did you have while writing this piece?”
- “How did you deal with those challenges?”
- “Would you like to ask for some advice before editing your work?”

After asking the students these questions, give them some time during the next lesson or at home to revise their work. Peer revision is important – encourage the students to look at each other’s work. The teacher can instruct the class on how to make revisions. Students should also be encouraged to read the work of their friends, and make notes and observations like these:

- An asterisk (*) is used to signify good language use. Example: **“This language is very picturesque. It is easy to imagine the characters and the setting, because of the vivid details and the descriptive words and expressions used”* or, *“The language is very natural: the conversations are interesting, the sentence structures are varied, and synonyms are used well.”*
- A question mark (?) is used to signify something that is unclear.

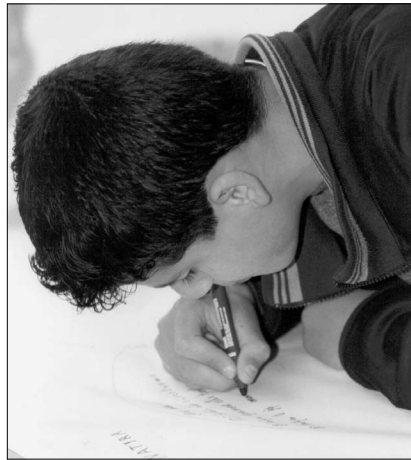


Photo: RWCT Albania

Comments should be used to specify what needs clarification. Example: *“Perhaps some dialogue would make the situation clearer”* or, *“Maybe the story needs expressions that are more precise...”*

By the time the students have finished reading, they should be ready to explain what they liked best about the work, and to ask about places that they found unclear. The students might also offer recommendations on how to improve the work. Of course, the authors are free to agree or disagree with peers’ remarks.

After revising, the students enter a final, reflective discussion of their work. The teacher can ask questions like:

- “Did you learn anything from discussing your work with a friend?”
- “If so, what was the most important new thing you learned?”
- “If not, what do you think would be more useful?”

My hope is that students will learn that analyzing and critiquing each other’s work is a valuable way to learn to improve their own writing.

Raimonda Jariene, Lithuania

Expanding Your Writing Toolbox

Often students are not aware of or do not use the rich vocabulary that our languages have to offer. If, for instance, I am trying to strengthen young writers’ use of verbs, I might take a simple verb like “walk” and begin with the sentence “I walked home.” I ask the students if they have an image of me as I walk. Can someone show me? A student then comes forward and “walks” across the front of the room.

“No,” I say. “That’s not how it happened at all.” And at this point I may “limp” or “hobble” across the room. Can anyone give me a verb to describe how I got home?

I then go on: “What about if you are late? How might you describe your motion?”

As students offer words like “race” home or “dash” home or “run” home, I begin writing them on a long sheet of paper. (Paper used in adding machines works really well for this.)

When they have added all the words they can for moving quickly, I label the paper “Ways of Getting There,” and we then include “walk” and “hobble” and “limp” to the list.

Students are then invited to think of more words to describe “ways of getting there” – amble, dance, skip, etc.

It is important to leave this paper up on the wall and as people think of new words to describe the motion (or when they come across words in their reading) that tie into your “word of the week” they are invited to add them to the list. The teacher should add words also.

Wendy Saul, USA

Teaching Tips



An Observation Game

This game is an adaptation of an activity sometimes used in foreign language classes to help students become more precise in their use of descriptive language. It encourages careful listening, questioning, joint decision-making and modification of decisions in the light of feedback.

Instructions for the observational game

In each pair, one student should receive form A and one form B. **Pairs of students must not be able to see each other's form.** Students look at and describe each picture in turn. The objective is to decide whether the picture they

are looking at is the same or different. They should question each other to clarify points of detail. When the pictures are different, the differences are sometimes very small.

When most of the students are half way through the game, tell them the answers for the first few pictures. Students who have got wrong answers can then work on making their descriptions and questions more precise.

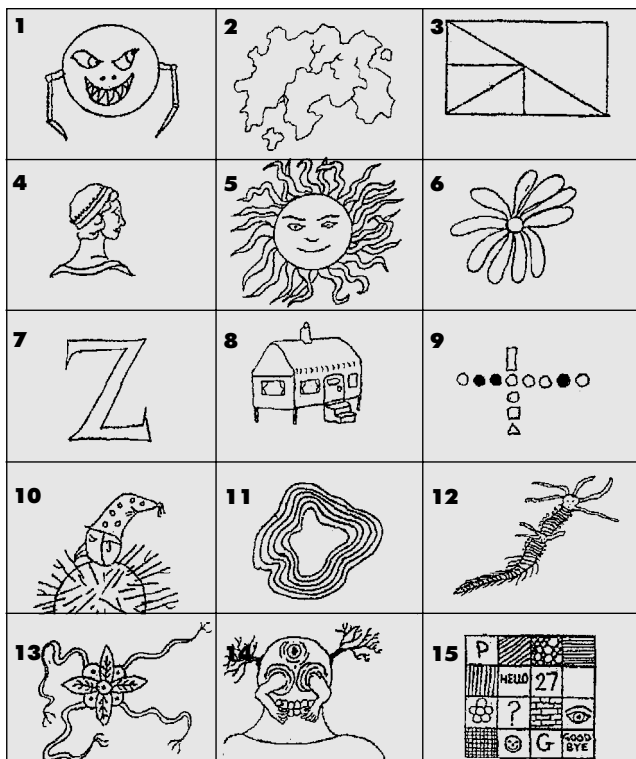
At the end of the game, students can look at each other's forms and check their results.

The game can be adapted for use across the curriculum. The forms provided here contain a mixture of images, but you can

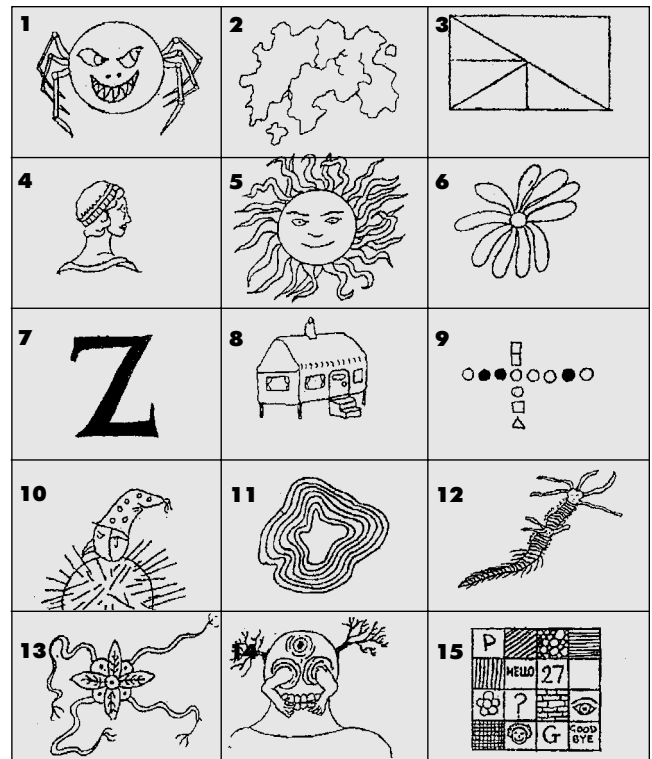
prepare forms that are subject specific. For example, students can compare drawings of insects, geometrical diagrams, country outlines etc. The content of the illustrations will determine the type of vocabulary used by the students. The game can be played with a larger or smaller number of cells, and the level of detail within each illustration can be graded to vary the level of challenge.

Answers to the example forms:
1 different; 2 different; 3 same; 4 different; 5 same; 6 same; 7 different; 8 same; 9 different; 10 different; 11 different; 12 same; 13 same; 14 same; 15 different.

George Hunt, Great Britain



Form A



Form B

Pros and Cons



Whose Knowledge?

Which Knowledge?

Reflections on Teacher Education

Ondrej Hausenblas

The relative weight given to theory and practice at teacher colleges (pedagogical faculties of universities) should be valued differently than it is at research universities and faculties. Teacher colleges and their staffs cannot properly be judged strictly by the number of pages of articles in influential scientific journals. If they are – which is currently the case in the Czech Republic – faculty members will not be motivated to involve themselves in coursework dedicated to the real pre-service training of real teachers.

If theory dominates over training, the students feel insecure on entering their teacher jobs. They know well how ill-prepared they are to face real-life situations among children and colleagues. They sense how feeble their theoretical knowledge is, as they come face-to-face with a class of adolescents. Young teachers know how little they have profited from lectures on psychological personality types or the history of 19th century Central European pedagogy.

Teachers in Czech schools who have graduated from Czech teacher colleges in the past twenty years seem to be – in the vast majority of cases – ill-prepared, both in their teaching skills and in the attitudes now generally considered to be important for life in the 21st century. The so-called *life-skills*, or *European competencies*, as well as *critical thinking* and *active learning*, are only now starting to appear as educational goals in official state documents

on educational policy. But few teachers have ever been trained to teach using these new competencies, and a significant number of them do not yet consider such skills to be important or valuable. The traditional values attached to school learning are the *knowledge of facts*, *disciplined behavior* (mostly understood as *obedience*) and the maintenance of *safety and security*.

What is knowledge, after all?

In our international community (of Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking), we need to truly understand how we apprehend the word *knowledge*, or whatever words express this concept in your own language. The point here is not to find a good translation of the English word, but rather to take this opportunity to discuss our mental concepts – and verbal representations – of “knowing about ...”, “getting acquainted with ...”, and “knowing how to ...”

Let's look at the Czech words used to express this concept. In Czech the word usually used for “knowledge” is *znalosti*, which means “remembering facts, names, data”, but the Czech language does not have a clear term that encompasses skills as well as facts. The English word *knowledge* means not only *znalosti* – remembering – but also “understanding” and “knowing how to do and being able to do”. Another Czech word *vědění* (“knowing”) is related to the word *věda* – “science” but its scope is narrower than *věda*, and it is quite a bookish word. It also means less than *znalosti*, even if this time it includes also “knowing the principles and basic concepts”. The word *ovládání* has the meaning of “maintaining, achieving skills” but in the phrase *ovládat látku*,

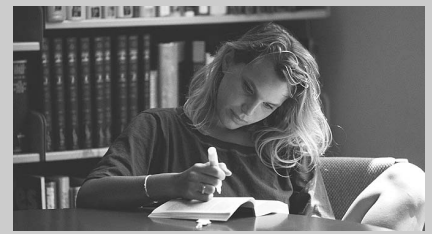
učivo it means “to have a thorough knowledge of the subject matter”, which for most teachers is equivalent to “remember many facts”. In Czech this term can actually exclude “deeper understanding” because the teachers who say *Student ovládá učivo* most often mean “She can use all the terms and give their definitions”. The words *porozumění* or *chápání* also mean understanding, but in this case teachers can ignore the application of the matter, its usage. The most general expression is the most misleading one: *umět* – “be able to”. Outside of school it really means “be able to do something, to accomplish something”. Within school it means, alas, “to respond to the teachers’ demands in the expected way” – and the student is most often expected to conform to the teacher’s own way of understanding, and to repeat the words of the teacher or the textbook, to provide products of prescribed form and content. In Czech we do not have a good expression for the combined meaning of *know and be able to*.

Even if many of the above mentioned elements of knowledge are important and have their value, they should not overshadow or even supplant the value of other educational goals: **skills, motivation, and interpersonal relations**. Therefore the activities of university teacher-training colleges cannot focus mainly or exclusively on research and building new theories, or on coining new terms for old concepts.

Bad trees bear bad fruit

1. Another argument for a change in the system of assessment of teacher colleges can be found in the results of PISA, the latest OECD

Pros and Cons



comparative study on reading literacy, mathematical literacy and science literacy in 32 countries. According to the PISA study (see *Thinking Classroom* vol. 3, no. 2), fifteen-year-old Czechs are just under the world's average in reading and maths (and still quite good in biology). Czech students do know what a text is talking about, but they can seldom say why the text was written, or for whom, what its communicative functions are, or what a text means in relation to a given situation.

2. A teacher of Earth science teaching sixth-graders in a western suburb of Prague lectures on the processes of folding in geomorphology. Just 700 meters from his classroom there is a world-famous geological site that would provide visible answers to all his pupils' questions. But he never takes the children to the old quarry, and he has no idea it is even there, right in the neighborhood.

3. A physics teacher, who happens to be on the opposite side of Prague, explains weight and measurement to his seventh-graders. He brings a precious apparatus for weighing things into the classroom to show to his pupils, but never lets them touch it. They might forget to turn off the scale, or it might get broken.

4. An older woman teaching speech and grammar in another city addresses a 14-year-old girl in front of the class – she mocks the girl's make-up, her awkward body movements, and her ability to think. The class joins in.

Where should we learn to teach?

These examples are far from rare. The teachers referred to here graduated from universities after

five years of exacting scientific studies in their fields. Their syllabi contained historical grammar, mathematical analysis or the names of all the tributaries of the Amazon River. They had to write and defend a thesis replete with scientific concepts and terms, exact quotations and scientific proofs. With the demands of their studies, they had little time to waste on finishing their own growth – on developing into wise, reflective adult persons – although they had to listen to lectures on the development of personality. They spent only brief periods in direct contact with schools and more specifically with children – most of them sat for up to a hundred hours observing in classes and only some 20 hours in their own classroom practice during their five years of university studies. The demands of their scientific efforts left them with little time for thorough discussion and reflection on their experiences, or for their own questions as learners and teachers.

Their university teachers had come through the same training, after all. Even in those rare cases where instructors had been recruited from the ranks of teachers in the field, these faculty members did not represent the most creative and inventive educators. The university professors choose the ones like themselves. The pre-service students seldom encounter a model, competent teacher. Worse than that, it is those university professors who play important roles within their faculties who often serve as models for the insecure young teachers seeking to establish authority in a classroom full of independent and self-conscious high school students.

Quo usque tandem...?

Given current educational trends, a huge discrepancy is likely to develop between school practices and the beliefs of university teachers (as well as the members of the university accreditation committees who approve the syllabi of the colleges, and the decision makers in educational policy). How can they maintain the system of college accreditation by counting the number of articles in scientific journals and the number of senior professors and their titles, while at the same time they contend that education and knowledge are not merely the sum of memorized facts? In the meantime – before this gap becomes too obvious and shameful – the fresh graduates from our teacher colleges will find better-paid jobs in business, and those who dare to address the reality of the schools will sooner or later leave, too. The quality of high school graduates – the potential applicants to the universities – will decrease, the number of future scientists will diminish, and the formerly well-regarded “scientific” universities will close down. Finding talented, open-minded young students for teacher colleges will become even harder if applicants have rarely been exposed to good and dedicated teachers in action.

Could an international discussion offer better ways to evaluate and accredit teacher colleges?

Ondrej Hausenblas, Ph.D., is a member of the Pedagogy Faculty at Charles University in Prague, specializing in literacy issues and motivation. In addition, he has worked with the RWCT program in the Czech Republic since its establishment.
