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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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Teachers, Classrooms, and Change

Optimists and Realists

David J. Klooster and Patricia Bloem

Teachers are optimists. We think things will get better: Students will learn. New ideas will brighten our world. Better textbooks will help students enjoy learning. Improving schools will help society change and grow. We will become better at what we do.

Teachers are also realists. Our experiences in the classroom, in the teachers' lounge, and in our communities tell us that some people never change, that some kids never learn, that each program to "improve" the schools or the curriculum also has the potential to make things worse, and that changing our own practice is harder than it looks.

In this column in the issues ahead, we hope to explore with you the ways thoughtful teachers negotiate between the pull of our optimism and the push of the realities in which we work. We want to examine new trends in the field of education as well as the abiding, enduring, old-fashioned satisfactions of the teaching life that educators have known since ancient times.

We know that teachers' optimism is justified because we have seen and heard the differences teachers make in students' lives. As parents, we've witnessed the effectiveness of good teachers in our sons' lives. As teachers ourselves, we've been gratified when our students thank us for making a difference, or when we see them succeed at higher levels of education and in their jobs. And we know through research that good teaching matters. Richard Allington (2002), president of the International Reading Association (2005-2006), notes, "For too long, efforts in improving school effectiveness have been focused everywhere but on the classroom teacher. Schools have hired specialist teachers; purchased new curriculum materials; added social workers; created discipline, attendance and homework policies; attempted to entice parental involvement; and mandated more and more testing" (pp. 67–68).

But what really makes a difference in improving schools, Allington argues, is improving the quality of teaching in the classroom. In research that addresses inequalities in Mexican students' literacy, Fernando Reimers of the Harvard Graduate School of Education reiterates "good teaching matters" (Da Silva, 2003). In fact, Reimers claims, "good teaching matters more than differences in home experiences." Teachers who truly believe that their students can learn and who have the pedagogical skill and the classroom resources to support that belief, are able to achieve high results in the learning of their students.

We've been fortunate in our careers to teach in a variety of schools and universities on three continents, and we have been honored to work with teachers in workshop settings in a half-dozen countries. In all these places, we have observed and worked beside teachers who balance their optimism, their commitment to progress, with their awareness that their work is bounded by real forces they can only partly control. In Argentina, we taught beside teachers who worked to create new international opportunities for their students by teaching the skills of language and critical thinking that would allow students to flourish in new

settings. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, we worked with university students and with classroom teachers finding their way through the excitements and confusions of newly open societies in the 1990s and the early years of the new century. In Guatemala, Armenia, and elsewhere, we have worked beside and been inspired by teachers who are so deeply committed to their students and to their work that they overcome material and economic difficulties that would overwhelm less dedicated teachers. Our lives and our classrooms have been immeasurably enriched by what we have learned from teachers in all these places.

From these colleagues and from others, we have learned several core lessons: First, a teacher's optimistic commitment to the intellectual and social growth of the students entrusted to her care can overcome nearly any challenge set in her way. We have been inspired by seeing professional teachers in difficult settings—with far too many students in a crowded classroom, or with far too little heat on a winter's day, or with too many hours to teach and too little pay. We've known teachers who go to work month after month without a paycheck, because their students need them, and because their country asks them to work for a better future. An attitude of hope, of passion for ideas, and of commitment to the profession of teaching helps teachers in many places to overcome the difficulties they face. We've learned not to complain about minor inconveniences, and instead to concentrate on the core of our vocation: bringing the minds of our students into contact with new ideas and new skills that will allow them to live fuller, richer lives.

Second, a teacher's work takes on enhanced meaning and urgency when she recognizes that she works not only for the personal development of individual students but also for the development of a better society. In our North American context, the dominant view of teaching has emphasized the personal development of students, but we have learned from teachers in other settings to value equally the development of better societies through the preparation in school of a new generation of citizens. Our students leave the classrooms to become our doctors and lawyers and politicians and business leaders. They become the teachers of our own children. And they become our neighbors. Whether we teach language or literature or law, or physics or psychology or political science, we are always teaching our fellow citizens, the generation who will next come to power in our countries. Especially in countries facing rapid political and economic change, teachers recognize an urgent need for citizens with new skills and fresh attitudes, and they know that the lessons students learn in classrooms will very quickly be applied in the laboratory of real life.

Third, both these personal and cultural changes for which a teacher works must be understood in their real contexts of limitation, challenge, and resistance. That is, while a teacher is working for a certain set of changes in her students and in her society, other forces within the culture are working in opposing directions, and it is to the teacher's and students' advantage to understand these opposing forces. For example, many of us work daily in the classroom to promote clear language as well as cogent arguments and responsible debate and discussion with others. But our students witness political and commercial uses of language that seek to conceal and to deceive—and they see that these distortions of language and logic often are successful in increasing the power and wealth of politicians and corporations. Or lessons about environmental responsibility taught in the classroom are quickly seen by students to be contradicted by the habits of people in the community and the practices of people in power. Good teachers recognize that their students will perceive these dissonances between the classroom and the world beyond the classroom, and they will suggest ways students might respond to these challenges.

Finally, we know that a teacher's commitment to change begins with the determination and discipline to change herself. We saw a bumper sticker on a car the other day: Change the way you see, not the way you look. Superficial changes are easy—we can change a lesson plan as easily as we can change a coat or a hair color. Deeper changes are more difficult. It is difficult to change our relationships with students. It is challenging to change the purposes for which we teach, or our habits of presenting information or responding to students'

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work. Yet, if we hope to make deep and long-lasting changes in our students and in our societies, we must be willing to change fundamental habits and practices in our daily life in the classroom. That is no easy matter.

In the months ahead, we will explore topics in this column that help us understand the ways teachers, students, classrooms, and cultures change. As we've worked with and listened to teachers in various settings, we have come to understand the need for a theory of change, a way of conceptualizing and trying to negotiate the multitude of changes in which we live and work. In particular, we expect to examine these ideas in future columns:

Teacher Change: How, over the course of a career, do teachers adapt their role, their identity, and their classroom practices to the changing contexts of their work, the emerging awareness of best practices from other settings, and the changing needs of their students? How do teachers find and maintain the inspiration to change themselves, their knowledge of their discipline, and their role in the classroom?

Student Development: As we become more fully aware of the changing conditions of our students' lives, how do we work to integrate the lessons we teach in school with their holistic development as intellectual, emotional, social, political, and spiritual human beings?

The Changing Classroom: In the past decade, teachers in many cultures have identified "teaching for democracy" as a goal. Increasingly, we know that preparing students for democratic life means not just teaching *about* democracy as a political system, but also creating democratic *experiences* and *practices* within the classroom. How can our lives with students in classrooms become more democratic? How can human relationships within the classroom help to prepare students for the demands of democratic life they will assume as school graduates? How can we create classroom culture that encourages discovery of opportunities, deliberation about the best outcomes for the group, responsible individual actions, and the uses of information and communication of ideas that advance democratic purposes?

School and Society: What changes in our societies do we seek to contribute to through our work as teachers? What social and cultural changes work against us? How does social change affect our work in schools? How do changes beyond the borders of our own countries influence our work?

We believe it is essential for teachers to be optimistic. Teachers are at their best when they walk into the classroom each day in a hopeful frame of mind—open to new ideas, willing to change themselves, optimistic that even the most difficult students will learn new things, confident that their society will be well served by the work of schools. We believe this optimism can be maintained throughout a career when teachers are also realists, when they have their eyes open to the difficulties they face from the culture in and around the school. If we ignore the forces that challenge us, we will be overwhelmed. If we confront these forces with knowledge and effective strategies to counteract them, we and our students can prosper.

In the months ahead, we will be offering some of our own emerging answers to these questions, and we will report on the most promising trends we see in the professional literature. Because we have learned so much from the teachers we've worked with in various places, we are also eager to learn from our readers in *Thinking Classroom/Peremena*, and we welcome your responses, feedback, objections, and agreements.

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Roberta A. Heydenberk, Warren R. Heydenberk, and John A. Bochnowicz

Improving Class Climate With the Check-In Strategy

In an urban neighborhood of an eastern U.S. city characterized by extreme unemployment, poverty, and violent behavior—even among elementary students—a team of teachers faced the challenge of restoring a sense of safety and community. Change was in order and it was urgently needed.

Initial pretesting of students revealed a consistent pattern of alienation, low level of school attachment, and little sense of belonging. School attachment is a significant predictor of student success and resilience. Longitudinal studies show that attachment predicts resilience and success despite the presence of other risk factors in the child's environment (Resnick, et al., 1997). In fact, "several studies have revealed that children raised in environments in which they are exposed to multiple risk factors have nevertheless become productive, contributing members of the community. In interviews with these young people, they inevitably note that someone took an interest in them…established a bond of affection, and cared enough to reach out. Research has shown the protective factor of bonding" in childrens' lives (Hawkins, 1995, p.14).

Conversely, research on school success and resilience consistently shows that a lack of attachment or bonding is perhaps the most significant risk factor for any child (Hawkins, 1995). "Alienation…and lack of bonding" produces "young people who feel they are not bound by rules, don't believe in trying to be successful or responsible [and] are at higher risk for drug abuse, delinquency, violence, and school dropout" (Hawkins & Catalano, 1993, p. 8).

The majority of students in this urban school reported feeling fearful in school at the time of the pretest, responding negatively to "I feel safe in my classroom" and other questions related to school safety. Most of the students did not feel that their classmates liked or respected each other, and many students did not feel hopeful about the future. A feeling of safety is essential to academic success. Creating an environment that is physically, psychologically, and socially safe is the first step in restoring hope and achievement (LeDoux, 1996). In a threatened state the brain downshifts, with brain activity directed to the lower brain instead of to the cerebral cortex where critical thinking occurs (Goleman, 1995; LeDoux, 1996).

Fear and hopelessness prevent students from risk taking and cooperative inquiry, both of which are requisite for learning (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2000). As Gamon's 2004 review of the research on the relationship between stress or anxiety and learning states, "Stomach-churning anxiety and healthy curiosity are so incompatible that it is virtually impossible to feel both at once. Acute stress switches off brain networks used for complex thought, abstract problem solving, and knowledgeable retrieval" (p. 3). Within varied IQ categories, the children who "possess higher hope perform better in the scholastic and athletic arenas" (Snyder, 1994, p. 195). Students who feel alienated may be uninterested or unwilling to learn, and students who are fearful are often unable to learn. Increased communication and restoration of a sense of hope and safety were among the team's first goals.

The team of teachers began with a program that included training in problem solving, communication skills, and development of affective vocabulary. Skills were then reinforced and practiced by the teachers through daily integration into language arts and other areas of the academic curriculum. The students often struggled with I-statements and affective vocabulary or feeling words, as students preferred to call them. Students struggled with self-expression, unable to build the social networks essential to their well-being. Teachers examined a number of strategies to improve students' affective vocabulary.

The teachers found one simple activity—the verbal check-in—that significantly transformed students' vocabulary, communication skills, and level of school attachment. The verbal check-in allowed students to briefly communicate about their feelings at the beginning of each school day. The check-in required no materials and little preparation time, and the process took little time from the curriculum. The students who used the verbal check-in strategy every day showed statistically significant increases on measures of social skills, school attachment, and moral reasoning. (Heydenberk, Heydenberk, and Perkins-Bailey, 2003). Furthermore, their teachers reported that students' behavior and classroom climate improved.

Three fourth-grade classes, with approximately 30 students each, participated in the evaluation of the two check-in strategies. Two teachers implemented two forms of the check-in activity in order to assess the strategies' effectiveness for increasing the students' affective vocabulary. The third teacher's classroom served as a comparison group, and therefore did not use any form of check-in activity.

The first check-in variation, termed the verbal check-in, required students to choose a feeling word from their affective vocabulary list (posted in the room—see Figure 1), and to create an I-statement to share with the whole class each morning. For instance, "Today I feel excited because my grandfather is coming for the weekend," or "I feel anxious about the math test." However, students were not allowed to use I-statements to complain about a specific person or blame anyone for how they were feeling, such as, "I feel angry when Joey laughs at me." Also prohibited were certain over-used vocabulary choices that describe physical states rather than feelings, such as tired, hot, cold, or sleepy.

Figure 1

Affective Vocabulary Reference List

appreciative, ashamed, angry, afraid, anxious, brave, bashful, cold, confused, cheerful, curious, delighted, disappointed, disgusted, depressed, embarrassed, excited, enthusiastic, empty, frightened, foolish, friendly, frustrated, guilty, grateful, hateful, hopeful, happy, helpless, heartbroken, impatient, independent, inspired, insulted, intimidated, jealous, joyful, loving, lonely, left out, miserable, nervous, nice, optimistic, pleasant, proud, panicked, regretful, shocked, sorry, sad, shy, surprised, secure, suspicious, sympathetic, self conscious, sedate, tense, timid, tenacious, unworthy, uneasy, victimized, vindictive, wary, worried, worthy.

The second check-in variation the team reviewed was the journal check-in, which involved journal writing. In this variation, students used the same affective vocabulary list to describe how they felt each day. Students took a few minutes each morning to record their thoughts silently in their journals; they did not share their thoughts with other students as a part of the activity. In the comparison classroom, the teacher did not conduct the check-in activity in any form.

When using the first check-in variation, the verbal check-in, students often disclosed important events in their lives, such as "I feel scared because my sister is having surgery." The verbal check-in activity often included comments about subjects that they normally would not have had an opportunity to discuss during the school day. The teachers discovered helpful information about the challenges students faced. Although the important issues students divulged were not often dealt with in the context of the check-in, they were discussed with students at a more appropriate time or the issue was referred to a counselor for further discussion. Teachers limited their responses to each student's check-in by simply thanking the student and by occasionally paraphrasing for clarity. After an

initial period of adjustment, the verbal check-in could be conducted in a matter of minutes, and the procedure quickly transformed the students' level of school attachment.

In the verbal check-in group, additional affective vocabulary or feeling words were provided by students as the year progressed. Increased cultural awareness among students was an unexpected benefit because the new words students chose often provided insights about cultural differences, transcending the usual words found on affective vocabulary lists. For instance, students often mentioned their excitement about their families' cultural celebrations such as Kwanzaa and Cinco de Mayo. The verbal check-in treatment teacher reported that she often heard students asking each other about their check-in comments. For instance, "How was your sister's surgery?" As the verbal check-in evolved, students began to better understand themselves and each other. Furthermore, students developed empathy for each others' issues and feelings. During one check-in, for instance, several students left their seats to hug a girl who disclosed the death of her grandmother.

As students changed, so did their teachers. The Critical Incident technique, which asks teachers to list the three most significant changes in their environment, was employed to identify effects on classroom teaching. The verbal check-in teacher reported notable changes related to increased cooperative learning strategies. The finding is particularly important in an at-risk, urban population less likely to experience the freedom and self-direction of a cooperative learning environment. At-risk students are often denied opportunities for extensive cooperative interaction in schools; they are essentially punished for lacking the communication skills needed to make such cooperative learning successful.

In the verbal check-in classroom, the teacher reported that she had strategically changed her teaching methods, increasing cooperative learning as students increased their cooperative communication skills. Furthermore, students began to accept responsibility for their actions, socially and academically, as they practiced their I-statements and affective vocabulary, both of which were posted in the treatment classroom.

Empowered with their new communication tools, students used the check-in strategy to chart their academic progress in their cooperative group work with statements such as "I'm worried that we need to complete our work quickly this week. Let's go around our group and check in to find out what everyone is working on now." Although students used I-statements to discuss concerns and avert possible misunderstandings, they also used the check-in strategy to acknowledge and show appreciation to their classmates, for instance, "I'm happy about the new charts we have to show Greek and Roman architecture. Where did you find these pictures?" In the context of both the social and the academic domains, the check-in provided new communication skills and new vocabulary, which started an upward spiral of ideas and attachment in the classroom. The students' new-found ability to cooperate transformed the classroom teaching methods. Students began to look forward to coming to school, and they expressed more hope about their future, as evidenced by posttest measures.

The verbal check-in group showed statistically significant increases in school attachment from pretest to posttest using a t-test with an alpha level of .05. There were no significant differences between any of the classrooms at the time of the pretest**.** The instrument used for the pre- and post-testing was the Student Attitudes About Conflict scale. The instrument was standardized by the New Mexico Center for Dispute Resolution to measure the effects of a statewide conflict resolution education initiative. The four subscales identified by the test developers were: school attachment, conflict resolution skills, peer relationships, and social skills.

The students in the journal check-in, and no check-in treatment classrooms could list several feeling words; however, their level of school attachment and cooperative interaction did not increase. Negative responses to questions such as "I think most students at school like me," "My classmates respect each other," and "I like school and I look

forward to coming to school on most days" remained unchanged on assessment instruments. As well, responses to questions reflecting moral reasoning such as "I treat others as I would like them to treat me" and "I'm a fair person, and people can always trust me" remained unchanged in the comparison classrooms (Heydenberk, Heydenberk, & Perkins-Bailey, 2003).

Further confirmation of the power of the verbal check-in strategy was evident when the journal check-in teacher began implementing the verbal check-in strategy. The attachment scores in her classroom significantly improved. Within weeks the amount of time her students spent working in cooperative groups increased. The gains attest to the importance of directed social interaction among students. Because of its solitary form, the journal check-in variation did not provide opportunities for developing perspective-taking, understanding, and empathy among students.

In both of the check-in conditions, the verbal method and the journal method, students had opportunities to identify their emotions and to communicate about their feelings. However, in the verbal check-in, students routinely reflected on their classmates' feelings and perspectives as well. The outcome of their reflection transcended expectations. Students developed empathy and compassion for each other, and they began to develop an understanding of cultural differences within the classroom, and from this a sense of community developed.

By the end of the first year of program implementation there were dramatic reversals in students' sense of safety and hope, as well as statistically significant changes on the Student Attitudes About Conflict scale. Empowered with new communication skills and vocabulary, students began to enjoy working with each other, which in turn elevated their interest in school. The hopeful, hard-working students felt safe, and teachers reported that students spent more time on their school work and less time in conflicts. The challenges of the neighborhood remained, but the students' new-found abilities to face the challenges posed within the school and within the community had transformed their school attachment, and consequently their ability to learn.

School Lane Charter School received its charter in 1998 with the mission of creating an environment characterized by physical, social, and emotional safety to encourage cooperative learning and critical thinking. The mission of this suburban charter school was to create an educational sanctuary for active learning. Understanding the power of the check-in strategy, all of the teachers for School Lane's 500 students were trained to conduct check-in morning meetings. The students begin each day with an extended check-in classroom meeting to discuss school issues, group projects, and student concerns. For five years the School Lane students continued to show high levels of school attachment (using the same standardized scale employed in the urban study). Year after year, student evaluations reveal that the majority of students identify their class meetings as the most important part of their day. Furthermore, School Lane students gained an average of two or more years on nationally normed achievement tests during their first year in their new school environment.

Decades of attachment research has revealed that "not only does better communication address the risk of antisocial behavior, but it also presumes that people who communicate well can more easily form bonds with others" (Hawkins & Catalano, 1993, p. 15). Translating feelings and concerns into language allows students to process problems effectively, freeing them from the emotional blocks that interfere with cognitive functioning (Pennebaker, 1997). Cooperation and "creativity thrive in a rest and digest brain state [rather] than a fight or flight" condition (Gamon, 2004). These findings should allay the fears that the time taken to develop affective vocabulary and to build community among students detracts from academic goals. Instead, such programs may be essential to academic achievement, school attachment, and social success.

One of the teachers who used the verbal check-in strategy stated, "We have always tried to be there for our students. Now we found a way to help them be there for each other."

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Glenda W. Crawford, Deborah T. Long, and Bird B. Stasz

Cross-Cultural Professional Development for Teacher Preparation:

A Model for Sustainable Change

Let us not be content to wait and see what will happen, but give us the determination to make the right things happen.

Horace Mann

Introduction

This article describes a Cross-Cultural Professional Development Model designed for teacher preparation at the higher-education level in Tajikistan as part of a larger PEAKS initiative (Partnership, Education, and Knowledge Strengthening in Central Asia). Implemented with teacher educators in Tajikistan by a small team from Elon University in the U.S., its uniqueness and potential impact for sustainable educational reform lie in four areas:

1. Interactive seminars shaped around essential and universally shared questions with a concerted effort to honor the traditions and beliefs of the past while envisioning new theories of teaching and learning.
2. The modeling of active participation in and critical analyses of student-centered learning experiences.
3. The realistic consideration of local needs and availability of resources.
4. The use of technology to support communication across differing cultures and languages.

The PEAKS initiative

The PEAKS project, a consortium of NGOs funded predominantly by USAID, affords an opportunity for teacher educators to work together to promote student-centered practice. The three-year project is in place in Central Asia, and our vision is that at the end of three years, each country of this region will have moved measurably closer to its objectives of quality education for all, with a strengthened teaching corps, relevant curricula, increased involvement by parents and other community members, strengthened capacity at all levels, and improved school infrastructures.

One of the stated outcomes of the PEAKS project is to improve education by implementing effective programs, ideas, and strategies. The project is multifaceted and uses a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches to implement reform at all levels of public education. Best practices, resources, training, and cross-border affiliations are examples of the strategies employed. Criteria for approaches used in the PEAKS project are that these must be participatory, sustainable, and contribute to the strengthening of existing NGOs.

Changing paradigms

Just imagine for a moment two rooms in the same school with each representing a distinctly different approach to education. In the first room, the teacher stands at the front of the class and delivers a lecture. The students sit quietly at tables, rise to recite when addressed, and busily write in their copy books. In the second room, just down the hall, the students are working in groups and discussing possible strategies for solving a problem. In the middle of the table are a variety of materials that students can use to accomplish their task. The teacher is not immediately evident because she is circulating among the groups, occasionally stooping down to speak with individual students at their eye level and thus disappearing from view.

Quality education, as referenced in the PEAKS project mission statement, is manifested by a move away from the teacher-centered approach prevalent in the former Soviet Union and toward student-centered pedagogy—in short, towards the scenario outlined in the second classroom. The models used to exemplify student-centered education are the International Step-by-Step Association (ISSA) program, sponsored by the Open Society Institute, and a program for early childhood sponsored by Save the Children UK. The focus of the PEAKS project in Tajikistan is to "concentrate on teacher training and strengthening a diminished teacher corps."


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Tajikistan's unique challenge

The social and political infrastructure of Tajikistan, severely impacted by a devastating civil war, poses an array of problems and barriers to educational reform at the teacher preparation level. Conditions such as inadequate school buildings, many of which need roofs and desks; the lack of teaching materials; adherence to a rigid and dated curriculum; low teacher wages; and sporadic electricity and problematic water supply focus attention, energy, and resources away from reform considerations that embrace a student-centered philosophy and methodology. In spite of the reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education, Tajikistan schools continue to face the challenges of a not totally qualified teaching staff and, for a variety of reasons ranging from poverty to transportation needs, a marked and growing decline in the enrollment of school-age children (UNDP, 2002).

The historic, political, and economic circumstances of Tajikistan further present unusual challenges for educational reform in teacher preparation. Most faculty members in the teacher training institutes and pedagogical universities were educated under the former Soviet system, which was based on a teacher-centered pedagogical model. Under the Soviet Union, schools in Tajikistan were highly centralized, the curriculum was dictated by Moscow, and teacher training reflected an emphasis on content and structure that held the teacher at the center of the educational experience. Choices were limited and students were generally expected to learn the material through lecture and recitation. Classroom management reflected a precise and immediate adherence to rules and regulations, likewise set by a centralized body. This historical context makes the task of moving toward more progressive student-centered practice a challenging one.

More positively, as part of PEAKS, a number of professional development schools (PDS) have been identified where student-centered practice is established through the successful efforts of the International Step-by-Step Association (ISSA) program. The critical need remains, however, to staff additional classrooms with qualified teachers trained in student-centered methodology. The challenge is to change the way teachers are prepared in the teacher training institutes. This task was the impetus for the PEAKS-supported partnership between the U.S. university's teacher education faculty and the Tajikistan teacher educators.

A cross-cultural professional development model

Despite the plethora of research touting the advantages of student-centered practice, teacher learning, as a research topic, is relatively new. One can legitimately assume, however, that "the principles of learning and their implications

for designing learning environments apply equally to child and adult learning . . . . [Unfortunately, many professional development programs for] adults consistently violate principles for optimizing learning" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 27). Activity theory posits that "rather than learning before acting, as traditional theories prescribe, activity theory believes *a priori* that the human mind emerges and exists as a special component of interactions with the environment, so activity (sensory, mental, and physical) is a precursor to learning" (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999, p. 62). Learning opportunities for teachers should strive to be student-centered. They should also be based on the experiences, needs, interests, and strengths of the teachers; be focused on pedagogical content knowledge; provide opportunities for teachers to try out new ideas and receive feedback; and encourage collaboration. Explicitly stated, professional development programs should not only teach about student-centered practice but also model student-centered practice.

Typically inherent in many cross-cultural conversations are potential barriers of language, culture, and philosophical beliefs. It is thus important for all involved to find common themes and questions that define their concerted work. For professional development to have impact and potential sustainability, it must be illuminated by the needs, queries, problems, issues, and expertise of local teacher educators as they engage with educators from other countries. Cross-cultural professional development must be extended in the manner of partnership with the purpose of finding common ground where conversation can begin.

A successful professional development model must thus take into consideration participant beliefs. Beliefs about the nature of learning and the teaching/learning process have been internalized, through cultural transmission, early on in the lives of teachers, and these beliefs have a profound impact on teaching practices (Pajares, 1992). This phenomenon mandates that any professional development model begin with a sensitivity to and appreciation for participants' current beliefs. Marchese (1997) further notes that teachers' prior beliefs appear to be especially impervious to didactic approaches. Accordingly, a professional model should incorporate instructional strategies that are based on current theories of human learning that promote participation and interaction.

Professional development programs must additionally be realistic, that is, based on what is possible within the economic, cultural, historical, social, and political context of the participants. The design of a professional development program for a cross-cultural setting, therefore, must be predicated on this conversation among educators in an attempt to connect with participants' prior knowledge and experiences, and to progress toward new learning and understanding.

Interactive seminars, shared questions, and honored traditions

The U.S. university-Tajikistan professional development seminar involved 42 teacher educators from Teacher Training Institutes (TTI) and pedagogical universities across Tajikistan and a team of three teacher education faculty from Elon University, U.S.A. The purpose of the seminar was to present the participants with student-centered theory and practice as it applies to teacher preparation at the higher-education level, and also to model and promote innovative pedagogy to support sustainable and systemic change in teacher preparation for work in schools participating in the PEAKS project.

Genuine effort was thus made by the U.S. team to shape the content of the seminar around essential and important questions about student-centered practice and teacher preparation. These key questions included but were not limited to:

- *What is meant by student-centered education?*
- *What new theories of learning support student-centered practice?*
- *What are student-centered, research-based pedagogical practices?*
- *How can we prepare teachers to teach in student-centered classrooms?*

An essential part of maintaining the conversation was to include related and

pertinent questions raised by the Tajik constituency, which included:

- *We all want what is best for our children but how do we know this is the best approach?*
- *This new pedagogy may be innovative but how can we critically engage in it and how is it appropriate given our setting?*
- *What are the implications for student-centered practice in secondary schools?*

The most critical questions arose when student-centered pedagogy seemed at odds with the cultural context. At one point, an impassioned Tajik educator rose to his feet and said, "This [Comenius' model] has worked for 300 years, why change it?"

In order to model a student-centered approach, our response was to ask another question directed to the whole group, which was, "Is it possible to honor the past and move forward based on the changes in Tajikistan and what we now know about human learning?" The Tajik educator jumped to his feet and answered heatedly, "When I ask a question, I expect an answer!"

This cultural clash proved to be the perfect, authentic opportunity to model student-centered practice. The result was a lively and rich discussion at the end of which the Tajik educators had resolved the issues themselves. Through debriefing, participants were able to make the connection between the process used in the workshop to resolve this issue and the process that is facilitated by the teacher in a student-centered classroom. This scenario is just one example of many that illuminated the paradigm shift that needs to occur as teacher educators examine the changing role of the teacher in the student-centered classroom.

Through a comparison of older and newer theoretical models and sustained, roundtable discussion of questions raised by the participants, all engaged in an enthusiastic and intellectual exploration of questions that puzzle educators worldwide. Wrestling with the universal question of theoretical constructs as applied to real students in real classrooms, the group took on the global issues of educational reform that have plagued the profession since its beginning.

This cross-cultural discussion of universal questions related to theory and practical application served to strengthen the conversation among team leaders and Tajikistan participants, and thus positively affected the quality of the seminar. Reform by its very nature redefines tradition; thus a more authentic effort is needed to honor the traditions and beliefs of the past while envisioning new theories of teaching and learning. By exploring the theories of Comenius, Vygotsky, and Piaget in relation to more current student-centered pedagogy, for example, the team and participants were able to reconcile what had "worked for 300 years" with what is new. And, perhaps more importantly, the participants lived the process and thereby gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for the power of student-centered learning.

Modeling, active participation, and critical analysis

The seminar was designed purposely to enable participants to experience student-centered pedagogy firsthand before making relevant connections to supporting theories of human learning. Rather than explain current research and then describe the application in practice, the U.S. team immersed participants in active-learning experiences that modeled student-centered practice initially, and followed with shared discussion of the theoretical

relevance. This approach promoted a higher degree of critical analysis as the participants deconstructed the shared experience in the context of personal experiences and background knowledge. The model included the following: Presentation of a relevant, authentic task; placement of participants in small groups to complete the task; presentation of group work to the larger group; and discussion.

An example

Presentation of a relevant, authentic task: Participants were asked to map the outdoor courtyard of the conference center. They were then asked to consider specific ways they could teach their curriculum by using the environment of the courtyard.

Placement of participants in small groups to complete the task: For this experience participants were strategically placed in groups so that multiple disciplines were represented.

Presentation of group work to the larger group: Lesson ideas were attached to the maps and posted around the room. A "walk-about" strategy was used to encourage participants to circulate and discuss the many ideas that were generated from each group and to add others and post queries using sticky notes.

Discussion: Participants returned to the larger group for discussion that focused on an exchange of ideas and insights. The seminar leaders facilitated the discussion by drawing attention to key ideas and providing guiding questions that related to theoretical underpinnings. These questions included:

- Is it possible to teach the curriculum with minimal materials? How?
- In what ways can you use your "backyard" (environment) as a resource for your students?
- In what ways would using the students' environment enrich the curriculum?
- Would this approach be interesting and motivating for students?
- What theories of learning support this pedagogical approach?
- How does this approach to the curriculum reflect student-centered practice?

The tasks for the seminar were carefully selected based on what would be meaningful to the participants. For example, Tajik teacher educators are working with minimal resources, and the mapping activity provided them with a new way to meet this challenge. The task was open-ended (Stepien & Gallagher, 1993). There were many ways to approach it, with no one way being correct. The task furthermore required collaborative decision making and problem solving. The groups were mixed, thus resulting in a rich variety of ideas. Finally, the role of the seminar leader was that of facilitator, ensuring that key ideas were made explicit. This model of student-centered pedagogy was based on what is known about how people learn, and therefore was accomplished not through didactic instruction, but by selection of tasks with goals in mind, placement of participants in groups that encouraged diversity of thought, and debriefing through questioning (Brown & Campione, 1994). Seminar participants had the opportunity to experience personally what it is like to be a student in a student-centered classroom while simultaneously discovering the underlying principles that frame student-centered education.

Realistic consideration for local needs and resources

Realistic consideration of local needs and availability of resources is an important component of this professional development model. The availability of classroom materials can be an issue in cross-cultural settings, especially when the economics are as different as those of the United States and Tajikistan. At times these differences make it easy to dismiss ideas on the basis of economy. Rather than promote materials that rely on one country or another, in this model it is important to utilize materials that are, as much as such is possible, culturally neutral, and that are available at little or no cost. The mapping exercise, described in the previous section, illustrated that it is possible to use the environment as a teaching tool. The ideas that were generated were imaginative and represented a full range of disciplines and areas of study. One participant, for example, used the fountain as the basis of a physics

lesson. A biologist used the rose garden as the basis for an ecology lesson. Mathematics lessons for primary students sprang from an examination of the courtyard tiles. Stories evolved from the name of the local mountain peak visible from the courtyard.

Another strategy that proved successful with regard to the creative use of local resources was the sharing of ideas for ways to involve parents and the local community. The use of video clips of Step-by-Step projects provided visual examples of parents' involvement in settings as varied as Haiti, Mongolia, and Ukraine. The video clips showed parents sharing produce from local gardens and preparing hot meals for school children; grandparents sharing musical talents with primary students; and community members making and painting building blocks to be used as learning tools.

The need to involve parents in schools is universally recognized; yet the conversation is facilitated more easily through consideration of culturally adaptable strategies. It is important for participants to see how other people solved similar problems and then to have an opportunity to figure out ways to solve their own. Furthermore, none of the examples on the videos were high cost or culturally unique. For example, all children benefit from a hot lunch, and all children benefit from grandparent participation. The point of the videos was not that the problems were unique or the solutions extraordinary, but precisely the opposite—ordinary people were solving common problems in creative but replicable ways.

Technology as a cross-cultural tool

The U.S. team chose PowerPoint as the software backdrop for the seminar. Colorful slides of key points, key questions, and examples provided a visual reference point for translation. Clip art, photographs and video clips were included for illustration. Technology can be a tool to support communication across cultures and language if attention is given to the culturally sensitive selection of terminology and visual images. Thinking about the meaning or implication of a particular word, concept, or example when it is translated in another language or differing cultural

context is critical. Certain questions must be considered: Is the choice of language culturally neutral or pertinent within a different setting? Whose theory is relevant to another culture's historical and collective knowledge base and why? Is the example applicable with regard for local resources or capabilities? How does an idea play out in a different locale? What does *community involvement*, for example, mean in the economically deflated regions of Tajikistan? What issues, problems, and themes are universally recognized?

Consideration for terminology, reference, and example were strategically enhanced by the thoughtful selection of supporting visual images. The Step-by-Step video clips and digital photographs of schools, teachers, school children, and locale brought an element of authenticity as cultures were bridged. By incorporating photos of the countryside, the tea rooms, and area citizens, old and young, the material had a feel of the familiar. Clip art was included that represented multicultural and global perspectives. On the fourth day of the seminar, a slide show of the participants engaged in their own learning during the previous days was projected and accompanied by local music. In these ways, technology became a powerful and relevant vehicle of communication and connection.

Concluding thoughts

If sustainable change is to take place as a result of higher education global partnerships, the conversation must begin with the search for common ground. This opportunity to develop a model for a professional development seminar in a cross-cultural setting was no exception. At the heart of the enterprise was a need to find the universal themes and language that connect educator to educator. When these connections are established, a more authentic partnership is formed. Furthermore, professional development models should reflect what educators know about how people learn and the cultural and political context within which learning takes place.

This article has described a partnership for sustainable educational reform between the PEAKS team, teacher educators in the country of Tajikistan and teacher education faculty from the United States. The complexities of this undertaking were immense and the challenge to create a professional development model for sustainable change afforded a learning opportunity for all involved. Key design features have been identified that contributed to the effectiveness of the model. These are:

- Interactive seminars shaped around essential and important questions with a concerted effort to honor the traditions and beliefs of the past while envisioning new theories of teaching and learning.
- The modeling of active participation in, and critical analyses of, student-centered learning experiences.
- The realistic consideration of local needs and availability of resources.
- The use of technology to support communication across differing cultures and languages.

These design features, applicable to any cross-cultural model of professional development, are critical contributors to the viability and sustainability of educational reform.

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Beth L. Virtanen, Sola Owonibi, and Ayodele Bamidele

Sharing English Theory and Pedagogy Across Cultures:

Exchange Among Nigerian and American Faculty Members

Faculty members from Nigeria and the United States worked together recently to help prepare Nigerian students to attend American universities—and in the process learned much about theory and pedagogy in the cross-cultural teaching of English.

The project, at Kogi State University (KSU) in Nigeria, was directed at students who expected to enter U.S. exchange programs, to help them succeed both in transfer arrangements and in their work on U.S. campuses. But our team—initially two American and three KSU faculty members—interpreted its task broadly, and this allowed us to see some wider implications of cross-cultural instruction. Essentially, we modeled what the students should expect while spending one or two semesters overseas, but with great care not to disrupt their current education at Kogi. Through the process the Americans gained some useful ideas from the way things were done at Kogi.

We could see almost at once, by examining the curriculum required by the Nigerian Higher Education Commission and the testing requirements written in Great Britain as well as by the cultural and physical constraints on instruction, that American-style theories on teaching English and writing could not be imported intact into the curriculum at Kogi State University without having instruction go significantly awry.

We could also see that in some ways certain aspects of American-style theory and pedagogies were already in use. The problems that theories of teaching have to address include the social and political context of higher education as well as the practical constraints of the classroom. The process of sharing across cultures also required specific effort, particularly for those of us who had not previously engaged in cross-cultural dialogue.

Our five-member team comprised three faculty members from the KSU English Department (two full-time and one part-time) and two visiting American professors. Most of the work, however, fell to three primary members of the team: Beth Virtanen, a visitor with a PhD in rhetoric and writing; Ayodele Bamidele, the department chair, who holds a master's degree in literature; and the only other full-time faculty member at KSU, Sola Owonibi, who holds a master's degree in English as a Second language and who is completing his PhD in creative writing.

Reflecting a process of collaboration, our presentation here requires a careful explanation of the circumstance of the exchange as well as a discussion of what we learned. Further, this sharing occurred not as a visiting team coming to correct Nigerian practice, but as the equal collaboration of professionals trying to bridge a cultural gap between the two, with the Nigerians well-versed in Nigerian educational practice and the Americans well-versed in American practice.

Thus, together we sought to make a "bridge" over which students would have to pass in order to complete their educational goals. In creating this bridge, we all had to bring our knowledge to the discussions. While we were not looking for seamless transfer, we were concerned with preparing students to address the differences they would encounter in the transition. What follows, then, is a discussion of the context of the collaboration, a demonstration of the mutuality of that sharing, an examination of the limitations and promises of theory and practice

to prepare students in one context to compete in another, and finally our evaluation of the significance of this project.

The context of Kogi State University

Kogi State University is a four-year, state-run university with programs in arts and sciences, social sciences, business, agriculture, and law. Its student population at the time of this study was 2,500, with a planned increase of 1,000 per year for the next few years. KSU is located in Anyigba, a town of about 15,000 about two hours from Lokoja, the capital of Kogi state, and about three hours from the national capital of Abuja. On campus, three new dormitories accommodate students, and faculty live in on-campus, single-family housing units. The campus itself sprawls across several hundred acres.

On the campus, classrooms accommodate from 50 to 800 students, while the new lecture theaters (modern structures with theater-style elevated seating to maximize acoustics) hold 500 students. Small classrooms are furnished with desks in parallel rows of three or four with students seated next to one another in fixed rows. The largest classrooms seat students on backless benches, evidence that growth in the student population has outstripped development of infrastructure.

Nevertheless, teaching must address these arrangements. The students have studied English through primary and secondary school. Because of the numbers of local languages in use, English serves as a language of education, of business, and of politics. In these roles, English serves across often-troubled tribal boundaries, even while it carries baggage as the language of the colonizer and oppressor. Because English is used so widely across Nigerian society, students tend to come to Kogi State University with high levels of proficiency, and they had little or no difficulty interacting with the team of academics.

The basis for intercultural discourse

> *The capacity for culture is peculiar to man [sic]. . . . This uniquely human survival technique explains the fundamental sameness of all cultures: they all meet a common set of basic human needs. Such an assumption also provides a frame of reference that makes it possible to study the most exotic way of life with a satisfying feeling of sharing as well as scientific purpose*. (Hammond, 1964, p. i)

The recognition of culture and cultural exchange contributes to our understanding of one another as we progress at a breath-taking pace toward becoming a global village.

Scholars believe that language is as old as human culture itself and that it plays a unique role in culture. Hammond (1964, p. i) says, "Indeed we take this ability to communicate as being a precondition to human society, and it is impossible to conceive of culture without it."

While there is unresolved and probably eternal debate among linguists about the primacy of language over thought and the empiricists' stand that experience conditions language patterns, it has never been in doubt that language is a factor and an actualization of a people's culture (Jacobs, 1964; Owonibi, 1996).

As argued elsewhere (Owonibi, 1998), language is the nucleus of socialization and the channel for transmitting and perpetuating socio-cultural norms. While we share Cooper's (1973) view that it is a mere exaggeration to say that a person can only think in the terms that language dictates, we see the relevance of language in the fact that it influences thought, placing this premise at the beginning of our interactions (Krontiris, 1991). If we agree that there is no thought without language, then we must also agree that we can hardly speak of a language without expressing an aspect of the culture of the users of the language.

Synonymous with the Whorfian hypothesis (Whorf, 1956), this view postulates the idea that language is an integral part of the symbolic order through which human beings acquire their social identities (Lacan, 1977). In every culture, language presents, transmits, and perpetuates all modes and categories of social existence. For our purposes, the relationship between language and culture required our starting point to be learning about one another by sharing with each other how we perceived the educational enterprise.

Most of the differences were subtle, but included appropriate classroom behavior for faculty members and effective faculty interactions with students inside and outside the classroom, topics we take up below. In addition, though, the visiting faculty members needed to understand the cultural norms of their students, for example, that students thought it was

a very nice gesture to carry professors' belongings for them from class to class. American professors, however, may perceive students collecting their belongings as a threatening gesture. These cross-cultural understandings needed to be developed in order for the exchange to function smoothly.

While we felt as though we were just sitting around talking for much of the time during the early meetings, it soon became clear that we were framing the groundwork for the analysis that would follow. In the meantime, the visiting faculty delivered guest lectures in English classrooms at KSU. KSU faculty provided invaluable assistance in making these lectures successful, in one instance by helping gain order in a classroom of 800 students. They also explained the norms of social interaction between students and faculty, for example by sharing the fact that Nigerian students may echo a reading from a text if they are enjoying the lecturer's delivery of it.

In addition, the KSU faculty provided background information on the types of instruction used in the classroom, including small-group discussion in small classes, whole-class discussion, lecture, and other methods. Americans also had opportunity to view Nigerian professors in action in the classroom. The primary method of presentation was lecture because of a shortage of books on campus, and perhaps that is why professors spoke with greater drama and affect than is common in American classrooms—the Nigerians enacted a lecture rather than merely delivering it. These discussions and early interactions, however, demonstrate our mutual learning as we construed the exchange as an opportunity to observe and study how another group of people deals with problems that are common to all. In other words, Nigerians and Americans alike learned from the interaction.

The three core faculty met in the office of the department chair, Professor Bamidele, a co-author of this article, where we shared information on testing, placement, and course content and sequencing. We discussed how these issues were handled at American colleges and universities as well, looking particularly at the materials and knowledge brought from places where the American professors had taught, including Minnesota State University at Moorhead, North Dakota State University, the University of Alaska, Michigan Technological University, and others.

Additionally, KSU's similarities with and differences from other Nigerian schools were discussed, and it was compared and contrasted with the University of Ibadan and other more established schools in Nigeria upon which KSU appears to be modeled. This analysis within and across cultures was essential for all of us to understand the specific constraints on education within the context where we were working as well as helping us to understand the relationship of this university to its surroundings.

Further, it is noteworthy that the English language is viewed as a symbol of imperialism in Nigeria and other African countries. The language is one of the relics of colonialism in Nigeria and is seen as a permanent acknowledgment of the 15th-18th century slave trade that ravaged some African countries. This sentiment can still be seen in the classroom in Nigeria in spite of the enormous role that the English language performs in facilitating communication in this multilingual society. It is both a reminder of a colonial past and the tool by which many secure access to the means of economic improvement.

Nevertheless, English is the language of education; hence, it is prerequisite to gaining admission to universities and tertiary institutions in the country as stipulated by the National Policy on Education (NPE). Furthermore, English is the language of trade and commerce in Nigeria and the language of government. It is also the language of social integration and the official language in the multi-ethnic nation. While it fulfills these functions, English still bears traces of its earlier colonizing role, which makes instruction in its use problematic. The typical Nigerian deals with English and its requisite bias in and outside the classroom, which further complicates instruction.

In terms of the team's collaboration, there was little difficulty with language per se, but rather with the cultural norms underpinning language, and with issues such as arranging meeting times or understanding a colloquialism. The Nigerian team often said in response to a question, "By the grace of God," meaning

that the speaker hoped something would happen, but thought it unlikely. The American team took a little time in coming to understand that the response meant "probably not," as they emphasized in their perception the positive connotations of the explicit hopefulness implied in the statement. In addition, the overt friendliness of Nigerian students who pressed for opportunities to practice speaking with Americans was a little overwhelming for the American team at first, until they accustomed their dispositions to local friendliness and their ears to the rich accents and the British influence on language use. In spite of these small negotiations, the hoped-for outcome of this exchange was to enable those from both cultures to have more robust interactions in and outside the classroom. This cross-cultural understanding is made easier through a harmonization, but certainly not duplication, of the curricula of both cultures.

Sharing English theory and pedagogies

During evaluation, the three of us, Beth Virtanen, Sola Owonibi, and Ayodele Bamidele, considered the application of a variety of theories of teaching English, including process, collaborative, cultural, and critical models, to the English courses at KSU. Our analysis incorporated examination of the course content, of the sequencing of content, and of instructional methods. We also considered the balance among American, British, Nigerian, and other world literatures in English. In terms of service courses, such as The Uses of English, the composition sequence, and upper-level writing courses for majors, we examined the content and current delivery methods, the sequencing and physical constraints, and the theoretical underpinnings of the courses.

In analyzing the theories, we soon came to realize that they cannot (and should not) be moved intact to the Nigerian classroom from an American one where they serve a particular set of cultural, political, and educational goals. Thus what follows is a rethinking of the broad categories of writing theory in terms of the demands placed upon them in the variety of English classrooms at KSU.

Process theories locate the student at the center of the writing endeavor and at the center of the writing classroom. Developed in the United States in the mid-1960s as a departure from teacher-centered practices then in use, process theories acknowledge that each student engages in a writing process that cycles and recycles through pre-writing, writing, revising, and editing phases. It de-centers the composition classroom and places the instructor in a coach position by focusing on the development of students' writing, and it asks for peer review and discussion of student works. (Tobin, 2001)

For the writing classroom at KSU, the inclusion of process theory challenges the social hierarchy embedded within the educational culture. If process theory rests too closely on its reputed "anti-institutional" foundations that call into question the authority of the instructor and the institution itself, it is likely to encounter much resistance from both faculty and students. Simply, faculty members rely on their explicit authority to deliver important content via lecture and to overcome, among other things, the lack of available textbooks. Their authority also allows them to manage classrooms of 800 students without a public address system or even a functional blackboard or overhead projector.

Application of process theory would have to address the unmovable desks in the classroom that will not easily accommodate small-group activities, as well as the few computers available for student writing practice. It would also have to accommodate Nigerian communication styles where authority is revered and perhaps feared. Finally, process theory has to accommodate the number of papers that students write; faculty in large courses may only lecture about the writing process rather than require multiple-draft assignments. In other courses, such as creative writing or advanced composition, class time may be devoted to a focus on drafting writing assignments.

However, because the full-time faculty in English teach 12 credits each semester (including the large Uses of English courses), there is little time for them to grade multiple drafts. In the Uses of English courses, a move toward process theory would probably not take the form of students receiving feedback from instructors on their essays during the semester; instructors are usually so far behind on grading that they use the

period between semesters to catch up and turn in students' final grades. Thus, implementation of process pedagogy that fosters revision of student work remains a goal that can be reached only when the university can reduce student numbers in compulsory classes that meet general education requirements. In creative writing and other courses taken only by English majors, process pedagogy of a sort is already in place as Nigerian faculty, the same as faculty the world over, know and reflect in their teaching—when it is possible—that good writing requires a process of rethinking and revision.

Like process theories, collaborative theories show potential for use at KSU as they acknowledge the socially constructed nature of knowledge and use that social construction as a tool in the classroom. According to Andrea Lunsford (1991), collaborative pedagogy suggests that knowledge and reality are "mediated by or reconstructed through language in social use, as socially constructed, [or] conceptualized as… the product of collaboration" (p. 56). Collaborative pedagogy, as noted by Kenneth Bruffee (cited in Howard, 2001, p. 56), "provides a social context in which students can experience and practice the kinds of conversation valued by college teachers."

The Uses of English class is designed to cover everything from introductory forms of public address, business letters, and reports, to forms of the essay and other academic kinds of writing, and thus serves as the introductory course in English that fulfills university general-studies requirements. Working collaboratively in this class, students could develop group projects to meet the specific goals of each unit, creating larger but more coherent blocks of text with multiple authors. The result might be modules created and written by students that serve overlapping functions but meet particular curricular goals. While increasing the coherence of the work produced by students, this would also decrease the grading load for the individual instructor. By introducing thematic units on various topics, such as business communications or types of essays, instructors could assign joint projects to groups of three or four to complete a sample of work on each theme. Thus, the business communication section could include "good" and "bad" newsletters as well as interoffice memos on the topic of hiring new employees to a hypothetical company.

Outside of class, students could be required to collaborate on these units to improve the quality of the products that are turned in. The same groups could create jointly written essays that approach a specific topic employing differing styles. Such collaborations offer opportunities for discussion of the utility of each style for each specific task, but they also might result in more sophisticated prose and content. Simply put, if knowledge is socially constructed, then greater social interaction may result in higher quality work.

Cultural studies theory also holds promise. The foundation of cultural studies, according to Diana George and John Trimbur (2001), rests on the notion of "culture as a way of life, a set of ordinary, everyday practices linked in creative and consequential fashion to the social order and the formation of class consciousness" (p. 73). The founders of cultural studies, including Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson, wanted to wrest culture from "its monopoly by antidemocratic and elitist forces both inside and outside the academy" (George & Trimbur, 2001, p. 73). As cultural studies developed, Gramsci's theories of hegemony within the negotiated relationships between the governors and the governed examine the "war of position" between the elite and their subordinates (p. 73). For those engaged at institutions of higher education in Nigeria in general and at KSU in particular, the war of position is ongoing and may be more volatile than in First World countries; thus, the potential (and real) consequences are far-reaching, perhaps including censure or termination of faculty and suspension or expulsion of students.

In the composition classroom, the key questions of cultural studies have concerned discussion of "social communication, the production of common sense, and the determination of popular discourse and practices in daily life" (George & Trimbur, 2001, pp. 76–77). Overall, according to George and Trimbur, cultural studies make available to us a nonlinear model of communication that acknowledges "the relatively autonomous and variably negotiated moments of production and reception [of communication]" (p. 78). This removes the study of culture

and communication from the elite and places it in the hands of ordinary people.

This shift in theory has given rise to the study of the choices ordinary people make in their linking of the professional to the mundane, for example, linking "critical education and work experience" (George & Trimbur, 2001, p. 79). In composition classrooms, cultural studies theories have been used to locate as the object of study artifacts of popular culture, items with which students have personal relationships. This movement shifts "emphasis from the personal experience of the individual to the lived experience of participants in the larger culture" (p. 79).

Essentially, writing classes that take the cultural-studies approach are uncommon at KSU. The emphasis thus far in writing classes has been for students to acquire the discourse of the elite. In terms of literature courses, KSU has a very good curriculum, with nine courses focusing on African and/or Nigerian authors, which could be considered vernacular or ordinary works, in addition to several courses in British Literature, which could be considered elite works. Thus, in practical terms, cultural-studies theories inform the curriculum even while they are in limited use as pedagogical orientations in the classroom itself.

Because entrance into university in Nigeria is based on a student's ability to score well on standardized entrance exams that are graded in England, acquiring elite discourse remains a high priority for students. Thus, further study and validation of the popular, beyond the current inclusion of Nigerian and African works in the curriculum as cultural-studies pedagogy would support, might have great personal ramifications for students as well as political ones for Nigerian society. For students, preference for the popular over the elite might cost them access to higher education. Politically, the shift from focus on the elite to regular citizens fosters the egalitarian spirit of the new democracy that promotes the continued development of a Nigerian national literature. But it remains to be seen if KSU and Nigeria will take control over access to their universities by instituting their own entrance exams.

Global recognition of Nigerian authors, such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogumyemi, and Jayne Ifekweunigwe, as well as the burgeoning studies in diaspora theory, move to the forefront of attention in academia the important works by Nigerian authors. This trend, we think, will eventually result in a greater emphasis in English Studies on Nigerian works in English. This will not occur, however, as a result of conscious effort to require additional units for graduation, but by fostering interest in the current and ongoing developing awareness across Nigerian society of the value of indigenous Nigerian literary arts.

Like cultural-studies theories, critical theories move from studying elite culture to studying the culture of the ordinary, but the mission of critical theory is to foster democracy and to empower working people. Based on the work of Paulo Friere (1970), Ira Shor (1992, 1996), and Henry Giroux (1983), critical pedagogy, Ann George asserts, fosters a "critical consciousness—the ability to define, to analyze, to problematize the economic, political, and cultural forces that shape but, according to Friere, do not completely determine our lives" (George, 2001, p. 93). According to Friere (1970), this focus makes "oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberations" (quoted in George, 2001, p. 93).

We think the impetus of critical pedagogy is to actively critique current practice, to develop in students the ability to think critically about the world they occupy. It is marked by a utopian spirit that perhaps is carried out in this project of curricular review, which strives to critically examine the educational culture at Kogi State in its context and to move it toward a more useful and egalitarian one where students' specific needs are addressed. In some ways, by prioritizing the needs of students, this project, at least, asks administrators and teachers to rethink what they do in light of student objectives. Perhaps this step in addressing the needs of the least powerful will foster other critical activities that will move faculty, staff, and students toward a critical rethinking of education.

Nevertheless, for those at KSU, the liberating potential of a critical pedagogy must be balanced against the risk to people's positions in an unstable economic and political circumstance, one

in which university classes have been suspended because of protests concerning faculty salary and working conditions. It also calls into question the diversion of needed resources from educational materials and development of infrastructures to this program of curricular review that is not perceived as needed by faculty or students—even though both groups were pleased by the interaction that resulted from collaboration that they did not solicit.

Conclusions

In essence, the intercultural discourse on curricular development and the sharing of theories and pedagogies of English rested on the ability of our team—including two Nigerians and an American— to be amenable and sensitive to the needs of Nigerian faculty and students within their particular political, cultural, and physical environment. Throughout the collaborative effort, the visiting faculty took care to avoid upending current practice, which is doing much to foster academic excellence and growth, while moving toward the development of sound educational programs. As a team, we worked together on the premise that we would do no harm, and the recommendations we made concerning the state of education at KSU noted the limitations as well as the remarkable courage and strength it must have required of administration, faculty, and students to progress from a cornfield to a functioning university in three short years.

From a Nigerian perspective, the interaction resulted in a higher degree of understanding of the minds of American faculty members and a developing sense of what American academics, and perhaps in some ways Americans in general, are like. The Nigerian participants were also able to appreciate and accommodate the views of the visiting faculty members because of the visitors' careful respect for the sovereignty of Nigeria and the individual talents of KSU faculty members. Also, through the interaction, the Nigerian participants were able to understand more fully that it is indeed possible to attain a mutual understanding and collaboration between the hitherto "oppressed" and the "oppressors" by erasing the old cultural boundaries through authentic collaboration. Again from a Nigerian perspective, we came to understand education as the vehicle for development that can be instrumental in overcoming cultural boundaries, and in helping both populations understand one another's cultures in ways that foster student success across educational systems. This will be particularly true if the result of this collaboration is adopted by the policy makers of both nations and other relevant agencies, and if we are able to find means to share the results of this collaboration with others.

Based on our collaboration, we uncovered two specific and significant strengths in the Nigerian teaching repertoire—skill in lecturing and ability to merge professorial authority with empathy in interactions with students. Drawing on our observations in Nigerian classrooms, we would like to see at American universities a greater variety of lecturing styles to large classes to foster student participation and thus learning. We also think that the respectful yet authoritative interaction between Nigerian faculty and students lends itself well to the broad teaching/learning situation and could be emulated by young professors across the globe. Drawing on her interaction with the Nigerian faculty, Dr. Virtanen found herself experimenting with a more interactive style of lecturing to improve student learning when lecture was required by class size; to do so, she incorporated some of the conversational lecturing style of her Nigerian colleagues that invited greater engagement of her students in the presentation. She also found herself open to a broader interpretation of texts based on her developing understanding of student perspective in a more global spirit.

From an American perspective, we discovered much positive in the curriculum that will serve students well as they make the excursion to the United States. In terms of their literature backgrounds, students will be well-versed in the traditional English literary canon, and will have as well an excellent background in Nigerian and African literature. Not surprisingly, the Nigerian students will be much ahead of their American counterparts in terms of exposure to African and Nigerian literatures, something perhaps American universities might remedy by adding additional courses in these important areas of literature.

As English majors, Nigerian students will be exposed to classroom exercises using process methods as well as implicitly having experience with a cultural-studies awareness that has undergirded their educational experiences. In service courses at KSU, such as the Uses of English class, students' experiences will not reflect mainstream practice in American universities. With such limited feedback on their work in this specific class, it is recommended that students who are planning to study in the United States elect a course or two in their American English Department in an upper level, so that they can expose themselves to and take advantage of the benefits of working in classrooms informed more directly by process approaches that are augmented by collaborative and sometimes critical and cultural-studies theories.

Together, we see Kogi State University's effort in the area of intercultural exchange and development as commendable and as a practice that should be encouraged. Particularly, as we pen this article, we realize the broader significance of collaboration—that is, the intercultural collaboration and its resulting contribution to knowledge for ourselves and our readers.

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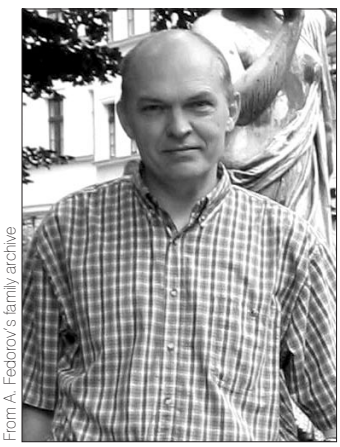
Media Education Must Become Part and Parcel of the Curriculum

Interview with Alexander Fedorov,
President of the Russian Association for Film & Media Education



From A. Fedorov's family archive

Today both his adherents and his critics refer to Alexander Fedorov as the "main proponent of Russian media education." He is the chief editor of the specialized journal Mediaobrazovanie *(Media Education), president of a professional association for media educators, winner of many prizes, director of several research projects, author of a dozen books and hundreds of articles on the theory, history, and problems of film and media education in and outside Russia, Pro-Rector of Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute… The list is far from complete, but even this small part of it is enough to make it evident that here is someone well informed about what is currently going on in the world of media education. Our editors,* ***Natalia Kaloshina*** *and* ***Alison Preece****, interested in his perspective on this topic, asked Dr. Fedorov a few questions. We hope that his answers will help our readers examine the processes of modern media education and decide for themselves to what extent matters of media literacy concern any one of us—for we all, either teachers or students, live under a continuous shower of media texts, widely ranging in their form and content…*

N.K. *Dr. Fedorov, as you are a recognized expert in media education, well-known in educational circles within and outside Russia, the questions that Alison and I are going to ask you will be related to this sphere. Nowadays the term* media education *seems to be known to everyone—however, many people tend to understand it differently. Let us first of all define the topic of our conversation. Does* media education *stand for knowledge of the means of communication, or the ways of their functioning, or their application, or something else?*

A.F.: In 2003 I interviewed 26 media educators from different countries, and, of all the definitions available, 25 gave preference to the UNESCO definition[1]:

Media Education

- deals with all communication media and includes the printed word and graphics, the sound, the still as well as the moving image, delivered on any kind of technology;
- enables people to gain understanding of the communication media used in their society and the way they operate and to acquire skills using these media to communicate with others;
- ensures that people learn how to
  - analyze, critically reflect upon and create media texts;
  - identify the sources of media texts, their political, social, commercial and/or cultural interests, and their contexts;

[1] Recommendations Addressed to the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization UNESCO. In *Education for the Media and the Digital Age*. Vienna: UNESCO, 1999, p.273-274. Reprint in *Outlooks on Children and Media*. Goteborg: UNESCO & NORDICOM, 2001, p. 152.

- interpret the messages and values offered by the media;
- select appropriate media for communicating their own messages or stories and for reaching their intended audience;
- gain or demand access to media for both reception and production.

In my view, this definition provides a reasonably complete characterization of the main goals of media education.

There are several directions that can be distinguished within media education: (a) media education for future professionals—journalists (the press, radio, TV, Internet, advertising), moviemakers, editors, producers, etc.; (b) media education for pre-service and in-service teachers—in universities and teacher training colleges, and in media culture courses within the system of advanced training; (c) media education as a part of general education for secondary and tertiery school students, which may be either integrated into the traditional disciplines or autonomous (i.e. taught as a specialized or optional course); (d) media education in educational and cultural centers (community interest clubs, centers for out-of-school activities and artistic development, etc.); (e) distance education of young and adult learners through television, radio, and the Internet; an important component of which is media criticism, a specific sphere of journalism engaged in evaluation, analysis, and criticism of the mass media; (f) autonomous continuing media education, which in theory can be life-long.

N.K.: *If you were to compile a list of the main objectives of media education and arrange them in the order of their importance, what would be the first three points on your list?*

A.F.: First, to develop the person's critical thinking skills and critical autonomy. Second, to develop abilities to perceive, evaluate, understand, and analyze media texts of different forms and genres (including their moral implications and artistic qualities). And third, to teach students to experiment with the media, to create their own media products or texts.

N.K.: *Are there many people who are still skeptical about media education and who perhaps question its contribution to society? How do you answer them?*

A.F.: Yes, there are many skeptics, and some of them are well-qualified and educated people. For example, in *Mediaobrazovanie 2*, 2005, we published an article "What Is Media Education?" by Professor Kirill Razlogov, Director of the Russian Institute for Cultural Research, who holds a PhD in cultural studies. He thinks that there is no sense in formal media education for all, because those who are really interested receive this kind of education spontaneously all through their life... Some people are certainly able to effectively develop their own media culture. However, public opinion polls show that the media competence of the majority of the audience, especially the younger generation, leaves much to be desired. True, there are some gifted individuals who successfully educate themselves without attending schools or universities—however, this is no cause for closing formal educational institutions… I have no doubt that all universities, especially pedagogical ones, need media literacy courses, and media education must become part and parcel of the curriculum—and in Canada and Australia media education is already officially included in the school programs.

A.P.: *What are the advantages of media literacy for an individual? Or perhaps it's better to ask, what are the risks of "media illiteracy," of the person's lack of awareness of how the media operate?*

A.F.: I understand media literacy as the result of media education. In general, predominant among media education concepts are the cognitive, educational, and creative approaches to the use of mass media potential. However, at the implementation level most media education approaches integrate the three components. These are:

- acquiring knowledge about the history, structure, language, and theory of the media—the cognitive component;
- development of the ability to perceive media texts, to "read" their

language; activation of imagination and visual memory; development of particular kinds of thinking (including critical, logical, creative, visual, and intuitive); informed interpretation of ideas (ethical or philosophical problems and democratic principles), and images—the educational component;
- acquiring practical creative skills for working with media materials—creative component.

In each particular model these basic components are realized differently, depending on the conceptual preferences of the media educator.

The learning activities used in media education are also different: *descriptive* (re-create the media text, reconstruct the personages and events); *personal* (describe the attitudes, recollections, and emotions elicited by the media text); *analytical* (analyze the media text structure, language characteristics, and viewpoints); *classificatory* (define the place of the text within the historical context); *explanatory* (comment on the media text or its parts); or *evaluative* (judge the merits of the text on the basis of personal, ethical or formal criteria). As a result, the learners not only are exposed to the pleasurable effects of media culture, but they also acquire experience in media text interpretation (analyzing the author's objectives and discussing—either orally or in writing—the particulars of plot and characters, ethical positions of personages or the author, etc.) and learn to connect it with their own personal experience or that of others (e.g. putting themselves in the place of this or that personage, evaluating facts and opinions, identifying causes and effects, motives and consequences of particular actions, or the reality of events).

Moreover, while working with media texts young people have many opportunities to develop their own creative habits and skills. For example, they may write reviews or mini-scripts; they are exposed to representations of their cultural heritage—and through these to various personal, historical, national, global and other perspectives on those events. While studying the main media genres and forms, tracing the development of a particular theme within different genres or historical epochs, becoming familiar with the styles, techniques, and creative activities of the great masters, etc., they acquire much relevant knowledge and learn methods and criteria for evaluating media text. All of that contributes to the development of the student's aesthetic awareness, artistic taste, and creative individuality and influences the formation of civic consciousness.

As for "media illiteracy," I see its main danger in the possibility of a person becoming an easy object for all sorts of manipulation on the part of the media… or becoming a media addict, consuming all media products without discrimination.

***N.K.**: Now let us suppose that some of our readers—persuaded by your arguments—have just decided that teaching media literacy is going to become an integral part of their work with students. Where do they begin? What goals should they pursue?*

A.F.: It would make good sense to begin by studying the theory and methods of media education—I mean the works of such well known media educators as N. Andersen, B. Duncan, J. Pungente, C. Bazalgette, L. Masterman, A. Hart, D. Buckingham, D. Considine, R. Kubey, W.J. Potter, K. Tyner, J. Gonnet, Y. Usov, L. Zaznobina, O. Baranov, S. Penzin, A. Sharikov, N. Khilko, Y. Polat, G. Polichko, L. Bazhenova, Y. Yastrebtseva, and others. The main goals of media education are provided by the above UNESCO definition, but the particulars of their realization certainly depend on the working conditions and individuality of the teacher.

***A.P.**: And how not to teach media literacy? What cautions would you offer teachers trying to introduce this topic with their students?*

A.F.: I see two approaches to media education that are very popular, but quite wrong. The first one is trying to screen the students from the "harmful" effects of the media by immersing the audience in the teacher-selected world of "masterpieces" (the "protective" approach). The second and perhaps even

more prevalent approach (the "practical" one) is confining media education to the use of various media apparatus and computers in class as teaching aids, without critical analysis of media texts themselves. In this case the media texts are only illustrations of the content under study, for example, to some physical or chemical laws.

***N.K.**: What is now going on in this sphere in Russia? Are there any results that can be identified as concrete achievements of Russian media education?*

A.F.: In Russia we now have several specialized web-sites offering materials on media literacy to all teachers—and your readers, too. In 2000, the first two bilingual Russian/English sites on audio-visual media education were created (www.medialiteracy.boom.ru and www.mediaeducation.boom.ru), then a Russian site (www.mediaeducation.ru). Later Mediatheka of the School Sector (http://school-sector.relarn.ru/efim/mainframe.html), the School Mediatheka (http://www.ioso.ru/scmedia), and other sites appeared. In March 2004, the website of the Russian Association for Film and Media Education (http://edu.of.ru/mediaeducation) organized the first all-Russian Internet conference on media education. In recent years, Russian media educators have become active participants in international conferences, many of them publishing the results of their research in specialized journals and academic publications concerned with current problems of media and media literacy in the U.S., France, Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, Canada, Australia, and Norway. In Russia itself, the last five years have yielded no fewer than 20 monographs and study guides on media education, and dozens of articles and teaching programs in books and journals on research and education. In 2002, *media education* was officially registered as a new university specialty—which I think is a really important achievement. In the autumn of 2002 at Taganrog State Pedagogical Institute we began to train future media educators. Some Russian universities offer their students courses in media education. Several departments of the Russian Academy of Education actively promote media education in schools; in 2004, media education centers were established in Perm and Chelyabinsk. In the autumn of 2004, the South-Ural Center for Media Education held an all-Russian roundtable conference, in which representatives of UNESCO and the Russian Association for Film and Media Education took part. One of the outcomes was the initial publication of the new specialized journal *Mediaobrazovanie*—you may read the full texts of all its issues at the website of the UNESCO Information for All Program (http://www.ifap.ru/projects/mediamag.htm).

***A.P.**: Perhaps you could describe some particularly impressive teaching efforts that you have seen implemented in Russia?*

A.F.: Many projects have been realized by my colleagues from the Russian Academy of Education. A network of school mediathekas (libraries containing books, journals, audio and video cassettes, CDs, DVDs, etc.) has been created in recent years, and a number of most interesting creative network projects for schoolchildren have been launched—these directions are guided by Y. Yastrebtseva. Her colleagues, L. Bazhenova and Y. Bondarenko, aim their efforts at promoting media educational work in Moscow schools. During the lessons, play activities are often used (especially with younger children), students perform creative tasks (making a short video film, a photo collage, etc.), and have collective discussions of media texts. Similar work is going on in schools and universities in other Russian cities—Tver, Voronezh, Samara, Perm, Chelyabinsk, Rostov, Taganrog, Tambov, Krasnodar, Yekaterinburg, Volgodonsk… For example, the recognized symbol of media education in Voronezh is the Student Film and Video Club, where participants come to discuss especially significant or controversial films—the club is led by S. Penzin, an art critic and assistant professor of the Voronezh State University. Professor G. Polichko from the State University of Management is the organizer of annual media education festivals for schoolchildren—with master classes, talks given by well-known

figures of media culture, and collective discussions… Such festivals have taken place for about 10 years in different Russian cities. In 2005, the Center for Media Education in the city of Togliatti organized a *Virtual Tour of Media Land*, an Internet game for schoolchildren (http://mec.tgl.ru/modules/Subjects/pages/igra/priilog_1.doc). The participants form teams, visit some Russian media education websites, study their content, answer questions, accomplish creative tasks, and create presentations. To find out more about the methods used in particular media educational classes your readers may visit the *Biblioteka* (Library) section of the Russian Association for Film and Media Education website.

***N.K.**: Dr. Fedorov, as a person who has worked in many countries, you are in a position to evaluate and compare the level of media literacy and the trends in media education development in Russia and in other countries. Are there essential differences—or are we all moving in the same direction at about the same speed? Who do you think could learn what from whom?*

A.F.: Both in the West and in Russia, preference in media education today is given to the critical thinking / critical autonomy development theory, and to cultural, sociocultural, and semiotic theories. Less popular is the protective theory, focusing on screening the audience from the harmful influences of the media. However, my impression is that Western media educators seem to prefer a *practical* approach (with the emphasis on teaching practical skills for working with media equipment) and a *consumption and satisfying needs* (of the audience) approach, whereas their Russian colleagues often favor *artistic* approaches in media education. Universally recognized are the achievements of our colleagues from Canada and Australia, where media education is a compulsory school discipline. The philosophy and practices of the leading British, French, and American media educators have also obtained general recognition. Traditionally strong are the positions of media education in Scandinavian countries. As for the East Europeans, the world obviously knows more about the experiences of Russian and Hungarian media educators, whereas the achievements of Poland, the Czech Republic, and Romania in this sphere remain little-known—not least on account of the language barrier. Of course, Canada and Australia are far ahead of others in making media education a reality. Here in Russia we have much to learn from them.

***A.P.**: Why do you think media education is so slow to be taken up or incorporated into mainstream education? It's not given the attention it warrants in North America despite lots of talk about its importance. Why is that?*

A.F.: I think that North America should not be regarded as a whole in respect to media education. The achievements of media education are evident in Canada… on the other hand, the progress is much slower in the U.S. Perhaps it's the U.S. domination in the world media markets—above all, the film market—that accounts for the situation: There are quite influential forces there that are not interested in the development of media education in the country. In fact, the lower the media literacy level, the easier it is to sell any media texts. As for the current situation in Russia, media education now receives backing and encouragement from the Ministry of Education and Science (I've already mentioned the registration of the new university specialty), media education projects are supported by the Russian Foundation for Humanities, by the Program of Russian President's grants "Support of the Leading Scientific Schools," and by the program of target grants of the RF Ministry of Education and Science "Development of the Scientific Potential of Universities." However, media education in Russian schools has no official status yet, and courses on media literacy are still a rarity for many Russian universities.

***N.K.**: When do you think real changes will come?*

A.F.: I'm sure serious changes are inevitable… keeping optimistic—within the next ten years.

***N.K.**: Many of our readers are connected with the RWCT project—you may read about it at our website (www.ct-net.net)—and in teaching they direct their efforts to the use of active methods and the systematic development of critical thinking. In the field of media education such practices are of vital importance; moreover, our teaching goals agree in many respects. Could you comment on their alignment?*

A.F.: As I've already said, the theories of media education as the development of critical thinking (Critical Thinking Approach, Critical Autonomy Approach, Critical Democratic Approach, Le Jugement Critique, L'Esprit Critique, Representational Paradigm) are now popular in many countries, so the there is considerable agreement with respect to goals and purposes. According to these theories, students need to develop the capacity to purposefully navigate a world of diverse and abundant information. They should be taught to consciously perceive, comprehend, and analyze it, and be aware of the machinery and the consequences of its influence upon the audience. One-sided or distorted information (conveyed in particular by television, which possesses a strong arsenal of propaganda) is no doubt a matter for reflection. That is why it's so important for the students to be able to tell the difference between the given or known facts and the facts that need to be checked; to identify a reliable source, a biased judgment, vague or dubious arguments, faulty reasoning, etc.

Such skills are especially valuable for the analysis of TV information programs: They make the viewers "immune" to unfounded statements and all kinds of falsehood. Irrespective of the political system they live in, people who are not prepared to interpret the multiform information they are exposed to are not able to give it an all-round analysis. They cannot oppose the manipulative effects of the media (if there are such effects), and they are deprived of the tools of the media for expressing their own thoughts and feelings about what they have read, heard, or seen.

Of course, we shouldn't oversimplify media education and, setting aside the artistic aspect, confine it to the development of critical thinking and to the study of TV commercials and information programs (where all sorts of manipulative techniques are the most obvious). However, I'm convinced that a developed capacity for critical thinking and mastery of such basic concepts of media education as *category, technology, language, representation,* and *audience* are the best aids in the analysis and evaluation of any media text.

***N.K., A.P.**: Thank you for sharing your ideas with us, and with our readers. We wish you continued success in all your creative efforts and in your advocacy of media education.*

Mari Karm and Katrin Poom-Valickis

Reflective Writing in the University Classroom

Today, the world faces rapid changes in different spheres of life. People have more and more opportunities from which to choose, and greater freedom of choice means that we have to take more responsibility for our lives. Learning skills are essential for coping in our rapidly changing world, and a most important skill is to learn from own experience or work by analyzing it. Although metacognitive skills, i.e. skills of reflecting on and analyzing one's actions and thoughts and making corresponding improvements, are intrinsic to human beings, it is important to develop these skills constantly, and to have ample opportunities to practice them so that they become a natural part of our professional activities.

As university teachers we expect our students to grow into future professionals; we expect them to start to think, behave and act as professionals. A hallmark of an educated person is the capacity to reflect on and learn from experience, so that the learning yields meaningful interpretations of life occurrences and informs future action. When that educated person is also a practicing professional, the ability to reflect on and learn from practice becomes paramount (Marienau, 1999, p. 135).

But do we pay enough attention to the advancement of these skills in university classrooms? Do we pay enough attention to developing the reflection skills essential for professional development? It is not very reasonable to expect that students' reflection skills will develop automatically over time. It is clear that teachers have to focus more on the development of such skills and on practicing reflection in university classrooms, so that students can select ways of reflection suitable for themselves and so that reflection becomes an integral part of their routine.

What is reflection?

The term *reflection* is widely used but its meanings vary by source. We talk of *reflection itself*, *reflective learning*, *reflective inquiry*, *reflective thinking*, and *reflective practice*. Reflection is a practice that has gained considerable attention in the past two decades, yet Dewey began this discussion early in the last century. According to Dewey, reflection includes careful consideration of one's ideas and knowledge as well as of their foundations and consequences (Schön, 1987).

Reflection is based on experiential knowledge of self—we give meanings to our experiences through the reflection process. Or as Moon (2004) stated, reflection as a process seems to lie somewhere around the notion of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as the result of reflecting—so *reflective learning* as a term simply emphasizes the intention to learn as a result of reflection.

According to Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985), three elements are important in the reflective process:

> *The first element is return to experience. It is simply the recollection of the salient events, the replaying of the initial experience in the mind of the learner [or on paper], or the recounting to others of the features of the experience. The second element is attention to feelings. This happens by utilizing positive feelings and removing obstructing ones. The third stage is the*

re-evaluation of experience. Although it is the most important stage, it is often not completed if the preceding two are omitted. Some form of evaluation might have taken place at the time of the experience and may in the learner's mind be part of the experience itself (26–34).

As we reflect, we try to understand and conceptualize the experiential phenomenon consciously. These capabilities to think, change, and learn from what one is doing are cornerstones of effective practice in the complex and uncertain worlds encountered by most practitioners today (Marienau, 1999).

Individuals do not necessarily acquire learning from experience that they can systematically and intentionally use without some forms of reflection. We learn more deeply and systematically from experience when we consciously think them over by reflecting upon them critically.

Writing as a thinking-through process: Supporting the development of reflection skills through writing exercises

Bolton (2001) says that writing is the vehicle for reflection. Writing offers ways to make personal intuitive awareness explicit—putting our awareness into words is part of the creative development of understanding.

According to Forsman (1985), writing is a process before it is a product. You can see your thinking, and this makes it possible to analyze and correct it. Writing as a means of structuring one's thinking, as well as clarifying ideas, is an important process for developing independent thinking and learning. Writing as a means of supporting thinking requires not only searching for the right words, but also searching for the right causes and solutions through these words, creating a system of values, and submitting a judgement. Writing makes thinking visible, thus helping the writer to discover gaps and discrepancies as well as expertise and innovation in his or her thinking.

However, it must be borne in mind that learners need guidance in order to gain from reflection exercises. The purposes for engaging in reflection must be clear—it is important to clarify whether learners are being asked to use reflective writing as a means of generating knowledge, or in order to learn the skill of being reflective. In many cases both the process and product are important (Moon, 2004, p. 137).

To support the development of students' reflection skills, the authors of this article sought opportunities for developing reflective writing exercises in different subjects. Suitability and different ways of implementing the exercises were analyzed with students' help.

In this article we discuss some writing exercises we used; we have selected the exercises that both we and our students judged to be most effective in supporting understanding of the material to be learned and in developing skills of analysis.

Writing a narrative

According to Hansen (2001), to be able to teach and educate in the deep and moral sense of the word, it is necessary to get to know one's own story. Through narratives—telling stories—students give meaning to self. Our identities go through a process of continuous reconstruction by means of the narrative (Heikkinen, 2002). Narratives create meaning for the professionals about their own actions and work (Hydén, 1997).

Purpose of the exercise for students: Students give meaning to self, reflect on their experience, analyze the content and development of their thinking models and understandings, record changes in them and analyze them, and draw conclusions for the future. They begin to guide their activities as learners and practice their skills of self-analysis.

Description of the exercise: First, learners are asked to write their stories; in the case of undergraduates in the bachelor's program, the story is usually about learning *("My development as a learner at the university," "How I became a student of…"*). Master's degree candidates already have experience of teaching, therefore they are asked to write their story of becoming a professional (e.g., "*How I became a teacher"*).

In order for a narrative to be useful for the writer, it has to be written honestly and thoroughly. Therefore it is important that writers know from the beginning who is going to read their story and what will be done with the text. When assigning the exercise the teacher should discuss with students whether the text will be read by the teacher only, or by their

course mates, or whether a group discussion will take place in which students can decide whether and what they wish to share.

Our experience shows that teachers should not expect thorough analyses from the first version of the narrative—it is important first to simply write the story down. Deeper analysis will take place in the second stage. To facilitate this, we provided students with guiding questions. *Why has this story/case affected you or why is it important in your development? What did you feel? How have other people affected your behavior or decisions? Which covert attitudes, understandings, or thinking patterns may have affected your behavior? Looking back, how do you evaluate your behavior? Would you do the same or react differently next time?* Students more fully elaborate their stories with the help of such questions and analyze their actions more thoroughly. Then (depending on the prior agreement) the stories are discussed with the teacher or course mates, and after that students write the final version, which is usually more clearly structured and indicative of trends in the writer's development.

The following is an extract from a narrative written by a first-year student:

> *I wish to begin by stressing that to my mind the story of my becoming a learner is not complete yet—it continues. So this narrative is rather like a part of a longer story and I would like to give it the title "My adaptation to the learner's role." This is so mostly because before coming to the university I had not engaged in learning for a long time. This is the reason why I can say that becoming a learner to me mostly means adaptation, especially since it happens in my adult life. I have learned to plan time, set priorities, and act accordingly. Most things depend on myself, my adaptability, and [my] skill of changing learning according to the changes in my life.*

The final version can be prepared in a totally different form of writing, such as a poem, short story, or other fictional piece. Some of the students have written their stories in the form of fairy tales with characters such as a fire-breathing dragon, a gray-bearded magician, or a prim princess. Retelling their stories by using archetypical characters enables the authors to take the role of bystander and view the event from a distance. This form of writing also seems safer—you can always expect a happy ending. This enables learners to place their personal experience in a wider context and highlight more general and typical patterns of thinking.

Learners who wrote a second version as a fairy tale reported in their feedback that the fairy-tale form helped them to highlight hidden aspects and motives and to understand what lay behind their decisions.

What should teachers keep in mind regarding the exercise? Reflective texts are often very sensitive (personal) and require clear prior agreement on who will read and give feedback on the text. Teachers have to be very attentive and correct from the ethical point of view to avoid betraying students' trust. Students' narratives are often emotional and very open—confessions. They tend to write about painful experiences, failures, inner crises, and complex relations with teachers or course mates. As one second-year student wrote:

> *I felt free—difficult things had happened and I had talked about them to other people but now, writing them through, I became free. It felt good emotionally—I could write my feelings down.*

In their feedback, students emphasized the importance of the opportunity to write their emotions down. I think that we teachers often underestimate the role of emotions in the learning process. It seems that the enormous volume of feelings we could not foresee when giving the exercise, but which actually came forth, was necessary and valuable.

However, connected with written narratives is the danger that reflective practice can fall into the trap of becoming only confession. (Bolton, 2001). This means that despite the intimate and delicate and sometimes even painful topics, we must guide our learners from confessions to analysis, and from the analysis of the past or present to the creation of the future. We should not be content with only one version of text but should revise it based on various questions and tasks.

Work with narratives has provided us, university teachers, with a better understanding of the complexity of the learning process for the student, and confirmed our conviction that consistent guidance helps students to reach deeper dimensions in their reflective practice.

The learning journal/log

Journal writing, like all other forms of self-directed professional inquiry, is a vehicle for understanding oneself. Journal writing serves different purposes. Journal keeping is central to both the inquiry and development processes. The purposes for which you keep a journal will vary according to your needs.

Purposes of the exercise: Students learn to guide themselves better as learners, they notice their development across the exercises done, and practice skills of self-analysis.

Keeping a learning journal best suits those subjects where practical assignments are common. By keeping a journal, students better understand what, and if, they actually learned from an exercise. The essential thing is to give meaning to personal experience through writing.

Description of the exercise: We have used the learning journal in speech and drama courses, where students test their skills of presentation, and in didactics, where students give "mini-lessons."

After each exercise we give students time to make notes on their thoughts about their own or their course mates' performance. We provide them with guiding questions to help them pay attention to important aspects. The guiding questions lead students to understand their development needs and notice positive things that will help in this development. It is important that the learning journal contain information about the various stages of the reflection process, including descriptions of what happened, questions that emerged during and after the performance, and analysis of changes planned. One student wrote after conducting a mini-lesson:

> *I discovered how difficult it is to explain to other people what they have to do. Tasks should be given clearly and explicitly. And you have to select the kind of tasks that involve every learner.*

In a seminar, students were asked to organize and conduct a discussion based on materials prepared at home. As the discussion became rather heated and personal and the students wandered off the topic, at the end of the seminar we asked them to analyze the discussion process in their learning journals. One student responded:

> *What rules of good discussion did I violate? Didn't listen to others to the end. Interrupted them. Expressed a thought too hurriedly without thinking things through. Became aggressive. Wandered off the subject.*

The learning journal is an important means of facilitating metacognitive processes, and it is a tool that provides the teacher with the opportunity to help students observe and analyze their learning.

What should teachers keep in mind regarding the exercise? Teachers should make up their minds whether the learning journal remains a student's personal learning aid or whether it is to be used as a means of communication between the teacher and the student.

We chose the version of students writing to themselves, not to the teacher, and therefore we didn't want to read the journals in between the course lectures. At the end of the course, we asked volunteers to show their journals. At the beginning the entries were more general and as the course went on became more analytical, exact, and varied.

In the seminars, feedback sessions on the performance of the exercises probably affected the entries to the logs. We concluded that congruency between learning exercises, discussions (work within lectures), and individual writing assignments is important for the development of students' reflection skills. Our experience shows that the exercises foster the development of reflection skills even if the teacher does not supervise the process constantly (does not read the entries made by the learners). To get feedback, the teacher can ask learners to write summaries based on the entries made during the learning process. This provides an opportunity for students to reread their notes, analyze their growth, and observe how their thinking and analyzing skills have advanced.

Letter to myself

A way of making an entry into the learning journal is a *letter to myself* written by students at the beginning, middle, or end of a course.

Purpose of the exercise: Learners analyze their learning process, draw interim conclusions about the learning, and set new goals to be achieved.

Description of the exercise: A letter may contain thoughts, questions, or doubts about learning during the course. As agreed, the letter can be totally personal, read by the writer only, or it can be feedback to the teacher enabling him or her to deal with the questions or doubts in it, which emerge during the lectures or seminars. If the teacher and learners have agreed that the teacher is allowed to read the letters, he or she also has the opportunity to deal with the problems or questions during the course. At the end of the course, students can reread their letters and answer themselves or write summaries, which are added to their portfolios. One teacher commented in her notes:

> *The letter to myself written at the end of the course appeared to be rather effective. It contained self-analysis about students' learning and development during the course as well as planned changes and development plans for the coming months. The letters were sealed; each student wrote his or her address on the envelope and gave the letter to the teacher who posted them after a few months. Students' feedback after receiving the letters showed that although they seemed to have forgotten the content of the letters, they had started to put the planned changes into practice. Teachers joined the process of writing the letters and I must say that it is a great joy to receive a letter, even from myself.*

If learners write the letters at the end of the course, the main purpose of the writing is to foster transfer of the learned material to practical daily activities, as well as to set new learning objectives and plan future learning. The teacher may forward the letters to learners several months later so that they can reflect on the objectives they had set themselves in the beginning.

What should teachers keep in mind? It is important that learners know exactly who will read the letters and for what purpose. Therefore, the teacher may first hand out the envelopes and ask learners to write the addresses before learners start to write the letters.

Interview with postgraduates

We have asked undergraduates in year I to conduct interviews with recent graduates in the same area of specialization. Interviewing enables students to develop skills of listening and conducting a conversation, as well as drawing conclusions, generalizing, and summarizing. Students learn more about their future profession and the skills required for it; consequently, they can analyze their actions and skills and plan their further studies accordingly.

Purpose of the exercise: To get a clearer picture of self-developmental needs for

one's future occupation and to set more specific goals for studies.

Description of the exercise: Before interviewing, the teacher discusses with students the questions that should be asked and gives guidelines about how to conduct the interview.

When the interviews are completed, students write a summary and analysis of the interview and a self-analysis. The self-analysis includes two aspects: first, students indicate how they can use the information gathered to plan their studies; second, they analyze themselves as interviewers: *What did I learn from the interview? What aspects of my studies do I need to pay more attention to? What important aspects of my future occupation have I learned about? What special fields do I need to study at the university to cope better with future work? What did I notice about myself as an interviewer? What kind of a listener am I?*

What should teachers keep in mind? Students really enjoy doing the exercise because it enables them to create professional contacts, provides an experience of doing an interview, and offers interesting information. Teachers should be ready for the fact that students may hear from the postgraduates not only what they want to hear but also the things they do not want to hear (i.e., the seamy side of the profession).

Preparation of a plan for self-development

Purposes of the exercise: To become aware of the specific features of one's future area of specialization; to learn competencies necessary for coping in the area; to analyze one's knowledge, skills, and opportunities for coping in the area; to motivate oneself as a learner; and to practice reflection skills that can be used in professional work and development.

We use the exercise because students tend to value inborn talent as part of the teacher's profession—a born teacher—and underestimate the possibility of developing into a good teacher.

Description of the exercise: Before doing the exercise, students learned approaches to competence and competence models, and analyzed competencies required for teaching. They had also interviewed postgraduates in their speciality. This writing exercise required focusing on self and personal plans of development. A time period to be considered in the exercise was also given—three years for some groups and five for others. One student wrote:

> *At first, looking at the title of the essay with the 2007 announcing the year to be considered, I wanted to shout: "2007! It is miles away—who knows where I will be then!" But then I started to think and it startled me even more that it is the year 2004 already. I realized how very exactly I know where I could be by 2007. This is the year when my bachelor's studies will come to an end. I also realized how much my present studies affect my future life. It is very useful to experience this kind of "enlightening" time after time because it helps you take responsibility for yourself and pull yourself together.*

A first-year student wrote:

> *What are the things I want to have developed? Certainly self-control, control of emotions and crisis management. Calm mind and common sense are irreplaceable in our speciality. Another essential thing is the ability to plan time—I must admit that I do not have full command of the skill yet.*

And another first-year student wrote:

> *To be able to convince somebody of something you have to be able to ground your opinion, to present arguments. Therefore I need to enlarge my knowledge base.*

What should teachers keep in mind? The texts were interesting but we also noticed a problem. Students tend to express single aspects that have just popped into their mind—fragments; they do not observe themselves integrally. Next time we provided a specific model, and after that students' self-development plans appeared to be more systematic and less random in content. Teachers should decide whether they want students to follow a model in order to create a system or let them think freely, which makes the picture chaotic in the beginning but is perhaps more important for students as a means of self-examination. It would be wise perhaps to carry out the process in two stages. First, free writing with students writing down their ideas of the development plan. After that, analysis, comparison with models, discussion, and writing final versions.

Conclusions

The above-described writing exercises that support the development of reflective skills formed only a part of the tasks and individual assignments given during the course.

Our experience shows that when teachers are planning writing exercises that involve reflective skills the most important thing is to consider what the motive or purpose of the task is, and what is the output. As reflective texts are often personal and sensitive, it is also important to consider how the texts will be analyzed and who will read and discuss them. It must be kept in mind that students usually lack practical experience of working in their field of specialization. Therefore, they need to be guided to think about their future (teaching) work through learning situations and their own and others' experiences with learning. Then, during the discussion following the completion of exercises, one can help them create connections between the exercise and their future work/profession.

If we want students to produce meaningful written texts and to develop their reflective thinking, we must design meaningful assignments—tasks that encourage students to use writing to act. The major precondition for shaping good writers and developing students' reflective thinking is that they know what to write about.

By using a wide range of writing exercises, students can select the writing strategies that suit them best and foster their reflection habits. Teachers should pay more attention to making learners skilled in noticing and recognizing situations that require reflection—situations through which they can learn to develop their professional thinking abilities. Learning to deal with emotions is no less important; it is often through these that we evaluate our experiences, and emotions may sometimes block adequate analysis and evaluation of situations. According to Boud, Keogh and Walker's 1985 model of the reflection process, we should not forget the last stage of the process—finding a new meaning from the experience and learning from it.

Levander (2003) says that reflection is a learning tool and means of thinking. Deep learning cannot occur without active thinking and analysis. Thus, writing and reflecting are among the major skills students should learn in school in order to manage their later lives. These skills also bolster self-confidence, since they provide an effective means of expression and proof that the person can communicate linguistically, analyze, and learn from personal experience.

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Everybody Likes Poems!

Celebrating Poetry and Literacy in the Classroom, School, and Community

Introduction

"What's your favorite poem?" one of the two fourth-grade girls asked the burly man sitting between them. He nervously twisted the piece of paper in his hands.

"'Nothing Gold Can Stay' by Robert Frost," he replied.

"Can you read it for us?" the other interviewer asked.

"Sure," he said, and began to read Frost's elegiac poem that was handwritten on the crumpled paper: "Nature's first green is gold, /Her hardest hue to hold . . ." (Frost, 1969, pp. 222–223).

"Why is that your favorite poem?" one of the girls asked.

"I remember it from high school," he said, "and I always liked it."

The class applauded, and as the man stood he looked to the back of the room where his wife and two pre-school children also were clapping. A smile spread across his face.

This particular interview of a truck driver about his favorite poem was one of many and helped serve as part of the culminating activities to a *Favorite Poem* project. In this article we describe the yearlong project that connected—through poetry and interviews—children from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, classroom teachers, university professors, and community members. Our goal is to provide readers from different national and community contexts with a general scheme and potentially useful strategies and materials for instituting similar projects in their own schools and communities.

We have divided the article into four parts: background to the project; details of the project; what the students and we learned; and suggestions for implementing a similar project in other settings. We also include an interview format, interview questions generated by students, and a table of suggestions.

Background to the project

The three of us had been working together for several years in various ways before we began the Favorite Poem project. For example, Julie exchanged roles with one of our faculty members and taught at the university for a year. Francis and Jerry together and separately read and wrote poems with the children at the K–4 school. One year they established a Poetry Club for interested students. Membership "dues" entailed writing one poem every two weeks and reading aloud at least three poems.

As educators with roughly 90 years of teaching experience among us, we are concerned with the reasons why children **learn** to dislike poetry. Avoidance of poetry is not a natural or cultural phenomenon. Brain research from a variety of disciplines during the last quarter-century has shown that the human brain and hearing mechanism are naturally "wired" for poetry and meter (Turner & Poppel, 1983). Simply listen to infants' rhythmic babbling and to little children's spontaneous singing, chanting, word play, and reciting of nursery rhymes.

Children learn to dislike poetry because by middle elementary grades teachers neglect it, require forced memorization, and over-analyze it (Terry, 1974). An emphasis on silent reading and critical analysis of a restricted number of poems at the secondary and

university levels contributes to and ultimately guarantees a distaste for and often fear of poetry.

In 1999 Robert Pinsky, then poet laureate of the United States, published *America's Favorite Poems* (Pinsky & Dietz, 1999), a collection of poetry based on a Favorite Poem Project. Pinsky had asked people to submit their favorite poems and to explain why they had selected them. He received more than 18,000 replies and realized that he had tapped into a deep stream of American cultural life. Various respondents, ranging in age from 5 to 97, were selected, and three-to-five-minute video productions were made of them reading their favorite poems and explaining why they were meaningful. Forty of the videos can be viewed, free of charge, on the Favorite Poem Project web site (www.favoritepoem.org). Presently, 27 of the interviews with an introduction by Pinsky are on the CD that accompanies the latest Favorite Poem Project anthology (Pinsky & Dietz, 2004). Eventually, 50 of the videos will be available to teachers.

The videos embody what we believe about poetry and attempt to promote in our different teaching contexts: poetry is a gift and natural means of expression for all people regardless of age, race, or socioeconomic status. In the videos we see a construction worker, teacher, Vietnam veteran, children, young adults, seniors, former U.S. President Clinton, and others reading, reciting, and talking about poems they love.

We were eager to emulate the Favorite Poem Project on a local level, so we contacted the Project office in Boston[1], and staff members there were kind enough to send us a copy of the first 29 videos they had produced. After viewing them and discussing the steps we would follow, we were ready to launch the project at the beginning of the school year.

Our goals for the project were multiple. Since there was a high mobility rate at the school, many students had limited experiences with poetry. We wanted them to have positive experiences with poetry and wanted them to see that poetry is a lifelong gift for all people. We also were eager to incorporate literature and literacy into an overarching authentic context by having students regularly read and write poetry; write letters of invitation; engage in oral interviews; use different media; and present their findings in a variety of creative ways, both oral and visual.

Details of the project

Phase 1

Creating interest

We began by flooding the classroom with poetry of all kinds, both "children's" and "adults'." There was a poetry corner in which students could explore, read, and talk about poems. Julie celebrated poetry daily in the classroom, reading to and with the children and encouraging them to write a variety of forms. She then showed one of the videos (included on the Pinsky & Dietz CD) in which an animated and wonderfully expressive fifth-grade student recited and briefly discussed her favorite poem, "The Sloth," by Theodore Roethke (Pinsky & Dietz, 2004, p. 206). The fifth grader was a perfect model for the fourth-grade students, and they were eager to attempt something similar.

Modeling triptychs

We believe it is mandatory for teachers to model for students what it is they want them to do. This is especially true with writing and, in particular, the writing of poetry. If we as adults are afraid to take risks by expressing ourselves in a poetic manner, how can we expect our students to do so? Thus, we began by modeling for the fourth graders how to interview someone about a favorite poem, selectively use information from the interview, and extend the interview with photography and an original poem.

With the students gathered around, the three of us took turns interviewing one another about our favorite poems and recorded the interviews on audiotape. We demonstrated how to interview and use the tape recorder (see Appendix 1), follow up on responses, and conclude by taking several photographs of the interviewee. Each of us then took the tape of our own interview and our own photographs and worked with them. We created attractive tri-folds or triptychs (the children liked the sound of *triptychs*) on large sheets of

[1] The Project's address is on the web site (www.favoritepoem.org).

Appendix 1

Interviewing for favorite poems: Some hints

1. Prepare the person you're going to interview.
Let the person know when, where, and why you're going to interview him/her.
Give the person some time to think about his/her favorite poem.

2. Prepare yourself.
Make a list of some general questions you might ask.
Focus on "open" questions that will keep the person talking:
Why? When? Where? What? Who? How?
Practice with another person:
Taking notes.
Using the tape recorder.
Using the camera.

3. Conduct the interview.
Check the tape recorder: Be sure it is turned on!
Listen carefully.
Take brief notes.
Take two or three photographs.
Thank the person you interviewed.

4. Work with your notes, the tape, and photographs.
Review your notes.
Listen to the tape several times and take more notes.
Decide what you want to write and how you want to write it: for example,
Brief quotations from the person?
A short summary?
A poem about the person?
Write a first draft and share it with other students and your teacher.
Check if your draft will fit with the photograph(s).
Write a final draft and publish it with the photograph(s) and the person's favorite poem.

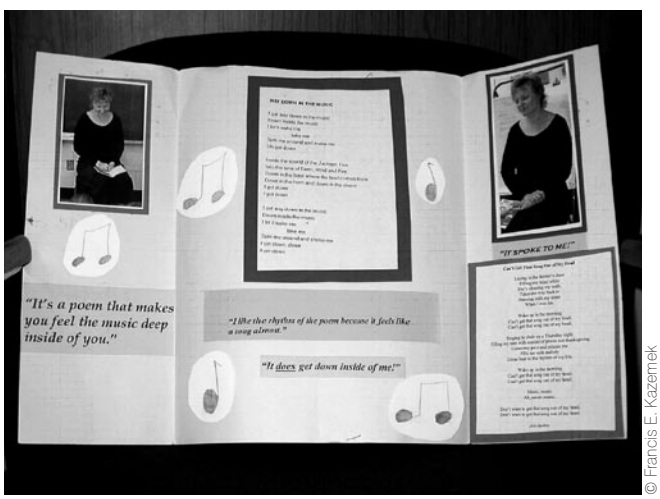

Photo 1. Way Down in the Music

construction paper which included our particular favorite poem, photographs, words or phrases from the taped interview, and our own original poem inspired by the favorite one. Julie chose "Way Down in the Music" from Eloise Greenfield's collection *Honey, I Love and Other Poems* (1978, unpaginated): "I get down in the music/Down inside the music/I let it wake me. . . ." She titled her own poem "Can't Get that Song Out of My Head": "Wake up in the morning/Can't get that song out of my head/Can't get that song out of my head. . . ." (See Photo 1.)

Students' triptychs

We shared our triptychs with the students and described how we decided to select words or phrases from the interviews and then arrange them, the photographs, poetry, and objects (Jerry had half of a daffodil bulb taped next to his favorite poem, "Daffodils," by William Wordsworth) in an attractive manner. We answered the students' questions, and then for the next two weeks they went about finding their own favorite poems, interviewing one another (most worked in partner teams but there were a few trio groupings), taking photographs, listening to the audiotapes, and constructing triptychs.

The resulting triptychs were delightful. Most of the students chose humorous poems as their favorites, but some cited songs and rhymes from such sources as cartoons and CDs. The students shared their completed works one afternoon and explained how they made layout and design decisions. "Appreciations" were plentiful and genuine, and the students then hung their triptychs on the wall just outside the classroom for others to admire.

This was the first phase of our favorite poem project. It was a worthy and viable endeavor in and of itself. Teachers with little experience celebrating poetry in the classroom or with limited time and resources might fruitfully begin by following in our footsteps. We're certain they will find that the excitement, multiple uses of language, artistic creativity, and students' joy in poetry will far surpass that of any found in a typical one- or two-week *poetry unit*. Moreover, this presents a superb opportunity for teachers to encourage students (and themselves!) to explore not only the poets from their own cultural and linguistic contexts but perhaps those from other countries as well.

Phase 2

Students interviewing adults in school

After the success of their in-class triptychs, the students were ready to step outside the classroom. First, Julie had the students brainstorm possible questions they might ask adults or other children. She helped them refine their brainstormed list into a set of "Poetry Interview" questions (see Appendix 2). Second, the students approached various adults inside the school, for example, the principal, teachers, cook, and janitor, and asked them if they were willing to be interviewed. Third, the students in teams of two or three interviewed adults using the poetry interview questions, audio tape recorders, and digital cameras. Fourth, the students worked with their adult interviews and produced a set of new triptychs. These were posted in prominent locations around the school.

The adult interviews gave the students opportunities to become more adept with the process; moreover, by interviewing people they knew they also were able to practice in a comfortable context. After they published the adult triptychs they were eager to interview people from the community outside the school. Teachers in other contexts might choose to conclude the project with the in-school adult interviews and triptychs. However, we moved on to a video phase.

Phase 3

Practicing with the video cameras

Most of the students had little experience using a video camera, and we had several for their use. We demonstrated in class how to use the cameras, including such things as close-up and middle-distance shots, transitions, and the use of a tripod. This took a substantial amount of time and practice. (If video cameras are not available, teachers can have their students continue to follow the steps in Phase 2, that is, practice audiotape interviews. It's the interviewing—with or without cameras—that fosters students' realization that poetry is important to many different kinds of people.)

The rest of the school was abuzz with what students in Julie's class were doing. Poetry, song, and rhyme were in the air. For several weeks Julie's students went into other classrooms and videotaped individual students, partners, small groups, and whole classes reading or reciting poetry. They captured kindergarteners chanting and moving; second graders choral reading different books; individual third graders

Photo 2.

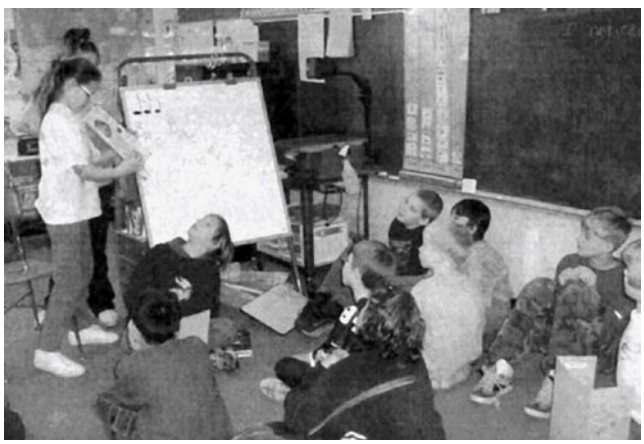

Photo 3.

Appendix 2

Favorite-poem interview

(by Mrs. Barkley's fourth-grade students)

Hi, my name is . . . . . .
What's your name?
We just finished a poetry unit at school, and I was wondering if I could talk to you about poems and poetry? Thanks!

1) Do you like poetry?
2) Do you remember studying poetry when you were little? Tell me about that.
3) Did you have a favorite poem as a kid?
4) Did you bring a poem you'd like to share with me today?
5) Why did you choose this poem?
6) When and how did you come across this poem?
7) Will you read it for me?
8) How does your poem make you feel?
9) Does your poem have special meaning for you?
10) Will you read your poem again?
11) Do you write your own poems?
12) Do you have one to share?
13) Would you like to hear a poem I wrote?
14) Would you like to hear the poem I brought to share with you today?

saying funny poems; and other fourth-grade students reading scary ones.

Finally, with their videotaping skills much improved, the students re-interviewed some of the same adults they had previously interviewed in the school. For example, the principal shared Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (Frost, 1969, p. 105) and discussed how it had helped to shape her outlook on life. The ELL (English Language Learners) teacher read a poem in Portuguese that she remembered from her childhood in Brazil. The poem brought back fond memories, and tears to her eyes.

Together with the students we then watched and critiqued these interviews in terms of their technical aspects, interviewing techniques demonstrated, and "rich" parts that might be saved. We all felt that we were now ready to approach community members outside the school.

Phase 4

Favorite poems from the community

The students and Julie worked on a letter of invitation appropriate to send to diverse individuals. They mailed a final draft of the letter to a representative selection of community members, including a truck driver, mail carrier, school board member, businessman, someone from the senior center, district school superintendent, police officer, and the mayor of the city. Most of those who were invited replied that they would be happy to come. Specific days and times were scheduled for the adults to visit the classroom and participate in videotaped interviews.

Chairs were placed in a semicircle in front of the classroom, and two or three students interviewed the invited guest. Another student or students videotaped the interview. We all were delighted at the community members' enthusiasm and at the range of poetry they shared. The woman from the senior center read Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" (Kilmer, 1994, p. 19) and then one of her own poems. The businessman shared a children's book and observed that although it might not be considered poetry, it is. The clever use of words and the delight of sounds are what poetry is all about, he said. The school board member described how a familiar poetic passage from the Bible was a solace to her when her mother died. The mayor was unable to share in person, but she sent a poem. In an accompanying letter she also said that reading and writing poetry was one of her favorite things to do as a child but that she hadn't done so in twenty-five years. She commented, "I would like to thank all of you and your teacher for helping me remember how much I enjoyed poetry."

The classroom and school were alive with the demonstrable fact that all kinds of people of all ages and occupations read and enjoyed poetry. We and the students then began to view and select sections of the videotapes that we thought could be edited into a single 10- to 15-minute production. We wanted to include pieces of interviews with adults from the community and those with children in the school. The fourth graders provided the voiceovers for the finished production.

Julie played the edited video at the beginning of the annual Poetry Festival in May. It was a public recognition of the students' diligent and creative efforts and a joyous conclusion to the yearlong project. Parents and others in attendance commented favorably, and the local newspaper ran a feature article on the project and festival. The video was an affirmation of Robert Pinsky's contention that general readers have something to say about poetry. They simply have to be asked (Pinsky & Dietz, 2004, p. xxiii).

What the students and we learned

Our insights

Through this yearlong project we learned the necessity of listening more closely to students and the importance of creating spaces for them to explore and express themselves. We found that this was best done in smaller groups. When we moved from the whole class demonstrations and began assisting teams of two to five children we were able to listen underneath their concerns that they "don't like" or "aren't any good" at making poems. We believe that just as children can learn to dislike poetry, they also can learn to like it by drawing on their experiences, memories, and imagination. By listening longer and more deeply to them, we were able to elicit their creativity and generate an unstoppable excitement about poetry.

For example, on one occasion a team of the fourth graders was interviewing and videotaping students in a third-grade classroom, and Jerry was providing assistance. A seemingly shy and quiet boy who had recently emigrated from Vietnam at first said he had nothing to share. Jerry and the fourth-grade students listened to the boy's concerns and gently asked him if he knew any song or nursery rhyme from his home country. His face lit up. He

remembered and recited a little poem in his native Vietnamese language. It was a gift and joy for everyone in the room.

The children were excited about the project because during each phase we offered choices—choices of partners, poems, whom to interview, and how to display and present their work. Moreover, we demonstrated constantly and offered different models of how to read and write poetry, use equipment, conduct interviews, and work with data.

We found that the entire school staff and wider community were respectful and supportive of the project. The other teachers were very open to granting interviews and to promoting poetry with their students. Parents and a cross section of community members came to the school to participate as interviewees or as audience members during the final video celebration. The local newspaper published an article on the project.

Children's insights

The children's excitement and pleasure were manifest in their interviews, oral sharing of poems, triptychs, and their own writing. The products of the yearlong project were emblematic of its success. However, we also interviewed the children at the conclusion of the Poetry Festival and asked them what they had learned about poetry and people. Here are some direct quotations from the interviews:

Everybody likes poems!
Many different people like many different poems.
Poems can be said in different ways. Poems could be funny, sad, happy, serious, or even mad.
I learned that poems don't have to rhyme.
Poems can be in another language.
Poetry can come together into something else like a song or saying or even an expression.
You can turn poems into songs.

These children went forward into fifth grade with a love of poetry and depth of understanding that we believe will help sustain them through their approaching early adolescent years.

Indeed, we have subsequently learned that the project has had a lasting impact. Julie recently asked several of the students two years after the project when they were sixth graders if they remembered it. All of them remembered and could still recite their favorite poems. The sixth-grade language arts teacher made a point of saying that she was very impressed with the students' love of poetry and their ability to take a risk and write different assignments for her. This was unusual, she said, compared to other groups she had taught.

Suggestions

Appendix 3 contains 12 suggestions for celebrating poetry in the classroom, school, and community. Teachers can follow us through our yearlong favorite poem project

Appendix 3

1) Celebrate poetry on a daily basis, and share poetry of many different kinds from classic to contemporary, from poetry in books and the Internet to lyrics on CDs.

2) Engage in author studies of particular poets. Highlight both a nation's classic poets and those less well known. Be sure to include poets who write for children and young adults.

3) Write poetry on a regular, if not daily, basis. Different kinds of form poetry (for example, cinquain, acrostic, and rhymed couplets) are easy and accessible. *Phoetry*, that is, the complementary combination of photographs or pictures and poetry, is something that we have found to be exciting for writers of all ages.

4) Model with another adult Favorite Poem interviews, that is, questioning, audio taping, taking of photographs, and so on.

5) Prepare triptychs including your favorite poem, quotations, attractive visuals, and a complementary poem you have written; share with and model for the students.

6) Have students in pairs interview each other and prepare triptychs.

7) Celebrate triptychs in class and in the school by posting them on the walls and in prominent places.

8) Have student teams interview adults in the school and follow the same process as in 6); post the triptychs.

9) Have students practice interviewing and videotaping other students and adults in the school; critique the process.

10) Send out letters of invitation to a representative selection of community members.

11) Have students interview the community members and then work on the videotapes, that is editing, adding sound-overs, and so on.

12) Celebrate the videotape in the classroom, school, and with the larger community.

or they can modify elements to fit their own contexts, schedules, resources, and students' needs by implementing only Phase 1 or Phases 1 and 2.

Final thoughts

In his beautiful, hopeful, and yet tragic book *Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope* (2000), Jonathan Kozol describes reading with Benjamin, a boy from a poverty-wracked section of New York City. Benjamin was a "troubled" child, labeled in special education classes, held back a grade because of his poor reading and math abilities, and generally considered a troublemaker when Kozol tried to work with him in a group. One day Kozol sits and reads with Benjamin in a one-on-one setting. He helps the boy read and re-read a short poem by the famous African-American poet Langston Hughes. It's through the mutual exploration and celebration of poetry that Kozol and Benjamin both go deeper into themselves and reach out to each other:

> It is the real respect with which he grapples with the poem, the way he looks down at the page and touches it, the patient, labored way he moves his finger on the page from line to line, and the apparent satisfaction on his face when he arrives at the last line, that leave me thinking of him as a very different person from the boy I thought I'd known before. (Kozol, 2000, p. 213)

Celebrate poetry. Honor favorite poems. You might discover children and adults you didn't know before—yourself included.

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Bill Bridges

Teach Editing—If You Can

Another member of our editorial team, William Bridges, talks to readers. Bridges is a veteran reporter and news editor with service on newspapers in the United States and Taiwan, and with United Press International in Germany. He is the former director of the Pulliam School of Journalism at Franklin College.

Photo from author.

If you are starting to teach editing and aren't sure what to do, it may not be a comfort to know that your author is also bemused at times. But I have to start there, rather than pretend to having a magic formula for getting the subject into the heads of students.

I've been writing, editing, and teaching for 50 years now—for newspapers, news services, magazines, as a college professor, and now as a freelancer. If I could capsulize what I've learned, it would be: "Be right, be clear, be read." But getting that across to students can be a battle.

It should also be noted that *editing* can mean anything from checking a news story to revising a novel. As a skill, it can range from a narrow competence in spelling and grammar to an intuitive grasp of the writer's deepest intentions. Editing and revision can't be separated from the broader topics of writing and expression. But we can at least talk about certain editing skills and attitudes—and some schools do offer classes that promise to teach *editing*.

You will look first, naturally, at what level of editing you need to teach. Are your students undergraduates, reasonably literate, with a good basic grasp of their native language? This is not a given. Some graduates of U.S. high schools, raised on television and "self-expression," can't punctuate a sentence or spell. An editing class for them has to be mostly a return to basics. And the teacher's first and hardest job is to persuade them that any of this matters. I'll talk a little later about ways of doing this.

With students who like to read and write the job gets a little easier. It all starts with a receptive attitude toward the written word and a respect for what can be done with it. And I am trying here not to limit myself to English, although this is the only language in which I am fluent. A few years ago, I lived in Taipei and asked a bilingual friend for some sense of the underlying expressive differences between English and Chinese. He replied, "Take the English expression *soaked to the skin* for the experience of being caught in a thundershower. A Chinese is likely to say something that translates more as *I entered fully into the rain and became one with it*." Whatever language you teach in, I would expect you to approach it with full awareness of its own character and complexities. But the goal is always communication.

Now let's return briefly to my six-word formula: "Be right, be clear, be read"—accuracy, clarity, style.

An editor's first goal should be to get it right. I recently fact-checked a book for a publisher. My surprise was not that the authors occasionally made mistakes, but that the copyeditors had not caught obvious ones—like a name spelled three different ways on as many pages. Is this book going to be credible to readers? A dogged concern for accuracy is the first universal for editors.

A second is to edit so that the writer's meaning and intentions are clear to the reader. Editing students ought to be exposed to many examples of clear and muddy writing. Why does

one sentence do its job, while another confuses or misleads the reader? In an essay of my own, I found myself writing: "My wife and I have four sons, three of them married to women we like." Editing that, I realized it suggested a fourth daughter-in-law whom we didn't like. A comma after *married* solved the problem.

A third universal is style and an editor's respect for the style of the writer. True, there are bad writers with no discernible style. But when writers are competent, the editor should leave their distinctive voices alone. "It reads better, but I can't tell what she did" is the highest compliment a writer can pay an editor.

So how can one interest students in learning the skills to be good editors? I always approach it from their self-interest—good editors are in demand and the job pays well. But there are other incentives. If your spelling and grammar are poor, literate people will look down on you (and not want to hire you even for non-editing jobs). Editors get to work with good writers and make their writing subtly better. They learn to read and think more critically than most people, and this is life- and career-enhancing. But perhaps the biggest boon is the ability to self-edit. If the student has learned to edit her own work critically, this translates to better grades and a happier working life. It is "empowering." And editing can open some interesting doors; I knew a commander in naval intelligence who kept an editor on staff to clean up the poorly written reports of spies.

Now I have dodged the "how to do it" question as long as I can. Good editors are lifetime learners—the older they are, the more they have stored in their mental attics. But newcomers have to start somewhere. They need to be exposed at once and repeatedly to standard reference sources and begin building their own editing libraries. I've also found it helpful to use the grammar guides prepared for people who didn't graduate from high school and are studying for general-education diplomas. These guides are cheap, written in the simplest terms, and full of good practice exercises. They're more useful, in my view, than the bulky grammar handbooks favored by English departments, which teach everything and nothing.

In English (and I suspect in other languages) a relatively few problems trip up everyone, so concentrate on those. Use dramatic skits; I am not above lying down on the floor to illustrate the tricky differences between *lie* and *lay* in English. Injecting humor helps. There are books of hilarious newspaper headlines that slipped past sleeping editors. I treasure an announcement in a leading U.S. educational journal that summer classes would be offered in "Ceramics, Extraterrestrials and Sex and the Single Person." A comma after "Extraterrestrials" would have cleared up confusion, although it wouldn't have been nearly as eye-catching.

And finally a fourth virtue, humility. Even editors need editors. I once wrote a magazine article, from "cold" notes, that I was bored with but hoped would be good enough to get by. "This stinks," my wife said. "Do it over." I did, and the article was much better. You should always listen to your editor—and your wife.

I planned to end here, but my editors tell me they need 200 more words. Hardly anyone ever asks me to write *more*. So I'd like to use those extra words to address any of you who may be planning to send articles to *Thinking Classroom/Peremena.* I'm one of those who will be looking at your manuscript, and I know you would prefer a Happy Editor to a crabby and unsmiling one.

Academic writing has its conventions, and each of you knows vastly more than I do about your subject. What I do know is that academic readers are not all that different from other kinds: They also get tired and distracted, and may not be willing to follow you all the way unless you write with consideration for them. Have a beginning that promises enjoyable reading. High in your article have a summary paragraph that tells the reader your main conclusion and why it's important. And if you feel the pace lagging, drop in an interesting fact or astute observation or even a touch of humor—what one writing guru, Don Fry from Florida, calls a "gold coin"—to reward your reader for hanging with you that far.

And for your references, take the time to look up APA style on the Internet or in the wonderful *Concise Rules of APA Style*, and read a back issue of *Thinking Classroom* before submitting. Then you will have not just Happy Editors but Absolutely Delighted Ones.

And now my space is really up.

Popular Music in the Classroom

William G. Brozo

A recurring theme of this column over the past couple of years has concerned strategies that take advantage of what students bring to any learning context.

One resource nearly all children and youth possess is experience with popular media, such as music, movies, and computer games. Unfortunately, because youth media typically are thought to possess little value to teachers, and may even be regarded as working against adherence to high academic standards, they remain underused in the literacy and disciplinary curriculum (Brozo & Simpson, in press). Nonetheless, exploring links between students' knowledge and interest in popular media, and inviting them to find connections between their life worlds and school-based topics may be the key to keeping them engaged while helping them overcome difficulties with literacy and learning (Alvermann, 2003).

Popular music as context for learning and using new vocabulary

Colin's eighth-grade remedial English class included eight boys and three girls. Using flashcards and workbooks for word study was yielding nothing but complaints and despondency. As he observed his students enter the classroom each day, he became inspired by an obvious way vocabulary and word families could be linked to their real-world interests and desires. Many had hip-hop music pulsing from their headsets, which led Colin to consider how the lyrics from songs and raps his students were listening to could form the basis of fun and meaningful experiences for learning word families.

After getting a few of the most popular titles of tunes from his students, Colin tracked down the lyrics on the Internet and found they possessed a variety of words that could be studied as families. Using these words the students compiled and studied a particular word family, then expanded on the words from the family to generate new words for their individual vocabulary notebooks. They then used the word families as models for decoding other similar words in school texts.

For example, with the American rapper Snoop Dogg's lyrics for "I Love to Give You Light" Colin's class of mostly boys found numerous examples of words with /*ck*/ and /*ch*/ blends. These words were written into a t-chart in their vocabulary notebooks.

ch	ck
such	background
alchemist	jackers
preach	glock
church	block
teaching	locked
watching	black
each	
preaching	
reach	
purchase	
Beach	
child	

Colin then had students work with a partner to think of new words with the /*ch*/ and /*ck*/ sounds and add them to the t-chart. When finished, he asked student pairs to write their own rap lyrics that would contain some or all of the new words they generated for the two word families. Renard read the rap he and Dontrell wrote while Dontrell kept rhythm on his desk top:

> I put my *socks* in my *backpack*
> when I go to school.
>
> I put my backpack in my *locker* or
> I look like a fool.
>
> I get my *socks* from my backpack
> when I go to gym.
>
> Where I *catch* the ball then *stick* it
> in the rim.

Colin's students never had had such fun doing word study work as when they used song lyrics for analyzing related vocabulary. Furthermore, his students' enthusiasm translated into genuine learning as their ability to recognize many of the same and similar words in other texts increased and they obtained higher end-of-year reading test scores in vocabulary and comprehension. By eliminating barriers between his students' competencies with outside-of-school texts and classroom practices (Sturtevant, et al., 2006), Colin was able to increase engagement in learning and expand literacy abilities for his striving readers.

Popular music as context for engagement in writing business contracts

Lupe decided to take advantage of her business students' love of Tejano music (a hybrid form of Mexican-American music) by creating a fun and meaningful lesson for writing contracts. She began by inviting students to play their favorite Tejano music CDs

for the class. With her students' interest piqued, Lupe asked them to form pairs so that one could represent a recording artist and another a record company. She then handed each group a set of directions for completing their in-class assignment. First, they had to write out on a formatted sheet a fictitious name for both the company and the artist. Next, pairs were asked to read information Lupe had accessed from helpful Internet sites about the language and format of contracts in the music recording business.

Noelia, representing a recording artist she called "Little Chica," and Hugo, representing a recording company he called "Gonzalez Records," took notes on relevant pages from their handout as they answered two key questions given each pair of students: What are the most important issues addressed in a music recording contract? How can the rights of both the record company and recording artist be protected in a contract?

When students completed their work, Lupe engaged them in a discussion over the answers to the key questions. As comments were made, she wrote important points on the board. She then posed a couple of typical problems in contract disputes: (a) when a recording artist is wrongfully denied payment for services, and (b) when a recording artist is in breach of contract. Lively discussion emerged out of this exercise, particularly between students representing the two parties in such an agreement. Hugo wondered whether his partner's Tejano singer, "Little Chica," could claim "lack of creativity" as a legitimate reason for failing to record a certain number of original songs for an upcoming CD. Lupe explained that such an excuse could be acceptable if provided for in the record contract and that these provisions are not uncommon.

In the last phase of the lesson, Lupe asked her student pairs to reflect on the important points that emerged from their research and class discussion, and, based on these points, to write an actual recording contract using a format she provided. While one pair of students hammered out a contract, other pairs of students were asked to look on; then the roles were switched. At regular intervals, student observers were given the opportunity to share reactions to and ask questions of the pair of negotiators they were observing.

A final word

Linking students' out-of-school familiarity with popular media to academic topics is a practice that honors who they are in all their diversity and demonstrates the value we place on their life worlds beyond the classroom walls (Sturtevant, et al., 2006; Willis, Garcia, Barrera, & Harris, 2003). This may be especially important to striving and disengaged readers and learners. There is a growing realization of the importance of creating spaces in schools for everyday literacies so students with diverse abilities and from diverse cultures can showcase and build on their strengths with the print and digital media they use on their own (Knobel, 1998; Morrell, 2002; O'Brien, 2003).

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Writing for *Thinking Classroom*

Thinking Classroom (also published in Russian as *Peremena*) serves as an international forum of exchange among teachers, teacher educators, and others interested in democratic teaching practices. It seeks to encourage professional development, research, and reflection. Authors are invited to submit articles that focus on active inquiry, student-centered learning, alternative assessment, and other aspects of educational change. Due to the international nature of the journal, articles should address issues that appeal to a wide audience, and terms or examples that are specific to a particular country or region should be explained in the text.

Thinking Classroom strives to maintain a balance of practical and theoretical information. The writing should take the form of a narrative, rather than a formal research report. Examples from classroom experience, quotations from colleagues or students, or examples of students' work can help communicate ideas to journal readers.

In addition to original submissions, *Thinking Classroom* will consider for publication articles that have appeared previously in national journals with limited circulation, to present these works to a wider international audience.

Format for Submissions

- Submissions are accepted in English or Russian.
- Articles should not exceed 3,500 words in length.
- Articles should be submitted electronically as an e-mail attachment at **thinkingclassroom@ct-net.net**.
- The full name(s) of the author(s) should be included on a cover sheet, but this information should not appear in the body of the manuscript, as submissions are reviewed anonymously. The cover sheet should also include complete author contact information (**postal address and e-mail address**).
- References to articles or books cited must be complete. For journal articles include author, date of publication, title of article, title of journal, volume number, and page numbers (where article appeared). For books include author, year of publication, title, location and name of publisher.
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