

THINKING Classroom

An International Journal of Reading, Writing and Critical Reflection

VOLUME 9 NUMBER 4 OCTOBER 2008

ISSN 1392-947X

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.

HISTORY

Founded in 2000 as a publication of the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project funded by the Open Society Institute

Published as a quarterly journal from 2002 through 2005 by the International Reading Association

Published from 2006 by the RWCT (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking) International Consortium (www.rwct.net)



© RWCT International Consortium, 2008

Produced by Noncommercial Partnership
"RWCT Center"
Moscow, Russia

EDITORIAL REVIEW BOARD

Serafima Bakhareva, Russia. **Kathryn Bauserman**, USA. **Sara Beach**, USA. **Penny Beed**, USA. **Patricia Bloem**, USA. **Clarise A. Brooks**, USA. **Boris Bulyubash**, Russia. **Marie Cheak**, USA. **Marilyn Cook**, USA. **Chella Courington**, USA. **Alan Crawford**, USA. **Theresa Cronan**, USA. **Peggy Cuevas**, USA. **Lydia Dachkova**, Bulgaria. **Claudia Dybdahl**, USA. **Penny Freppon**, USA. **Petros Georgiades**, Cyprus. **Anna Gladkova**, Russia. **Elvira Gmyzina**, Russia. **Bette Goldstone**, USA. **Ambika Gopalakrishnan**, USA. **Daniel Hittleman**, USA. **Susan Israel**, USA. **Kestutis Kaminskas**, Lithuania. **Galina Kashkorova**, Russia. **Francis Kazemek**, USA. **Sharon Kletzien**, USA. **David Klooster**, USA. **Hana Kostalova**, Czech Republic. **Sergei Lipin**, Russia. **Sergei Lisenco**, Moldova. **Lali Lomtadze**, Georgia. **Patricia Malinowski**, USA. **Galina Mandrikova**, Russia. **Anthony Manna**, USA. **Valeria Mariko**, Russia. **Samuel Mathews**, USA. **J. Cynthia McDermott**, USA. **Peter McDermott**, USA. **Mary Melvin**, USA. **Sharon Miller**, USA. **Samuel Miller**, USA. **Howard Mould**, Australia. **Julian Nakov**, Bulgaria. **Irina Nizovskaya**, Kyrgyzstan. **Donna Ogle**, USA. **Meeli Pandis**, Estonia. **Paata Papava**, Georgia. **Eleonora Proyaeva**, Kyrgyzstan. **Nagendralingam Ratvavadivel**, Malaysia. **Victoria Gentry Ridgeway**, USA. **Andrea Rosenblatt**, USA. **Olga Sevostyanova**, Russia. **Elizabeth Smith**, USA. **Pat Smith**, Australia. **Jeannie Steele**, USA. **Nora Sztaray**, USA. **Michelle Truman**, USA. **Igor Valdman**, Russia. **Inna Valkova**, Kyrgyzstan. **Kate Vishnyakova**, Russia. **Tony Wall**, USA. **Angela Ward**, Canada. **Geoff Ward**, Australia. **Igor Zagashv**, Russia. **Sergei Zair-Bek**, Russia. **Courtney Zmach**, USA.

EDITORIAL ASSOCIATES

Tatiana Baidina (Belarus)	Marcela Maslova (Slovakia)
Simona Bernat (Romania)	Marine Mkrtchyan (Armenia)
Zoran Bizjak (Slovenia)	Melinda Mula (Kosovo)
Irena Freimane (Latvia)	Irina Mushtavinskaya (Russia)
Elvira Gmyzina (Russia)	Makhmadnazar Radjabov (Tajikistan)
Sergei Lisenco (Moldova)	Olga Sevostyanova (Russia)
Lali Lomtadze (Georgia)	Yekaterina Vishnyakova (Russia)
Vera Malneva (Kyrgyzstan)	Tatjana Vonta (Slovenia)
Galina Mandrikova (Russia)	Natalia Zadorozhnaya (Kyrgyzstan)
Valeria Mariko (Russia)	Igor Zagashv (Russia)

ABOUT THE RWCT INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM

The RWCT International Consortium is an institutional membership organization comprising not-for-profit nongovernmental organizations. The RWCT International Consortium provides professional development opportunities for educators who bring up highly motivated and well-educated citizens capable of critical thinking, setting and achieving their own and community goals, and bearing social responsibility.

*Democracy must be born anew in each generation,
and education is its midwife.*

John Dewey

Departments

- Perspectives** 2
What role has the *Thinking Classroom* journal played
in your professional life?
*Answers from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan,
Lithuania, Romania, Russia, and the United
States*
- Strategic Moves from William G. Brozo** 53
Four Ways to Make Strategic Moves Happen:
The Role of School Leaders
William G. Brozo (United States)
- Index to Volume 9, 2008** 55

Features

- Many Voices in the Classroom:
The Role of Classroom Talk
in Education for Democracy** 6
*Patricia Bloem, David J. Klooster (United
States), and Alison Preece (Canada)*
- Farewell to Arms!** 19
Rustam Kurbatov (Russia)
- Reaching for the Middle:
Observations of Two American Students
from Generational Poverty** 26
Nora Booth (United States)
- Playing and Growing Taller Than Themselves:
The Use of Puppets in Developing Language
in a First-grade Library Reading Program** 32
Vida Zuljevic (United States)
- Successful Organization of a School or Classroom
Poetry Club** 40
Greta Freeman (United States)
- Assessing Group Work** 46
*Kalina Peneva and Rumjana Belcheva
(Bulgaria)*

THINKING Classroom

A Journal
of the RWCT International Consortium

CHAIR OF
PUBLICATIONS COMMITTEE
Olga Varshaver

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Alison Preece
Natalia Kaloshina

ADVISORY BOARD
Alan Crawford (Chair) is Emeritus Professor
of Education at California State University,
Los Angeles, USA.

Cecilia Amaluiza is Education Director
of Centro de Educación y Promoción Popular,
Quito, Ecuador.

Lydia Dachkova is President of the Bulgarian
Reading Association and Editor of *Kritichesko
mislene* journal, Sofia, Bulgaria.

Donna Ogle is Professor of Reading and Language
at National-Louis University, Chicago, USA.
She was president of the International Reading
Association in 2001-2002.

Meeli Pandis is a lecturer in the Department
of Educational Sciences at Tallinn University
and President of the Estonian Reading
Association, Tallinn, Estonia.

E. Wendy Saul is Professor of Education and
International Studies at the University of
Missouri-St. Louis, USA. She was a founding
editor of *Thinking Classroom/Peremena*.

Ann-Sofie Selin is Reading and Special Education
Specialist at Cygnaeus Elementary School in Turku/
Åbo, Finland, and Chair of IRA's International
Development in Europe Committee.

Aija Tuna is Program Director in the International
Step by Step Association.

Scott Walter is the Executive Director of Canada's
international education organization, CODE, Ottawa,
Canada. He was a founder and co-director of the
RWCT project.

ART DIRECTOR
Olga Pechkovskaya

TRANSLATORS
Olga Moskalenko
Nelly Nersesyan

COPY EDITOR
Beverly Michaels

COVER PHOTO
Sergei Zair-Bek



Jeannie L. Steele,
Cofounder of
Orava Project and
RWCT program,
USA.

I am honored to be asked to share my thoughts here. Of course, I am saddened that this will be the last issue of *Thinking Classroom/Peremena*; it is a great loss. However, I wish to focus not on loss, but on benefit.

The cooperative work of so many in the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) project was the foundation for the journal. Our rich conversations in monthly meetings across the RWCT countries led us to understand the power of sharing our own experiences. Our conversations were about successes and failures; they included our own evocations, realizations of meanings, and reflections on our work. Together, through our shared vision and like-mindedness, we built thinking classrooms, schools, and programs. The work we did together was then, and remains to this day, one of the most powerful and joyful experiences of my life. I know this to be true for many program participants as well.

The journal arose out of the RWCT program, and was created to provide a venue for participants sharing experiences. It became a forum for broadening our conversations about the practice of teaching beyond individual countries, and beyond RWCT friends and colleagues, to all educators everywhere. From the first, less formal, issues, published in Slovakia as the project was beginning, to the current issue, the efforts and dedication of so many have shone forth beautifully in each issue. The covers, I think, are

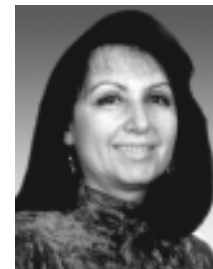
the best I have ever seen on any journal. I cherish the journal, and looked forward to each issue.

Space here does not permit proper recognition of all who had a hand in making *TC/P* the great journal it is. Credit certainly goes to its editors, reviewers, and authors—indeed, to all whose efforts make the journal possible. So I say a collective *thank you* to all of you.

It is disappointing that funding no longer permits publication of the journal. However, I know that many RWCT country groups publish individual Thinking Classroom journals. I am pleased to receive copies and, though I cannot read the words, I enjoy seeing the journal in beautiful Burmese print, and it pleases me greatly to see the ERR framework throughout lesson plans in Czech, Slovak, or Russian. It seems to me that we might consider seeking funding to share and translate each others' journals; it would keep the conversation going. Another idea for continuing our conversations might be to establish a virtual community.

A few years ago I gave a talk entitled "We are not alone—A global adventure in search of what matters most in the classroom" (2003). In it I spoke about the lessons learned through my work in the Orava Project and RWCT program. Those lessons led me to the understanding that we are indeed one community. We are connected by our search for how best to teach our children, and how best to learn our craft. We are connected by our understanding of the linkage between literacy and democracy, and our knowledge of how to teach in ways that foster critical thinking and open minds. We are connected by our understanding of change processes. We know we learn from our conversations with fellow teachers and educators, and are nurtured by the realization that we truly are not alone. I will

miss the journal, and the sense of connection and community it brings. We must now find new ways for us to stay connected.



Inna Valkova,
director of
ACCELS in
Kyrgyzstan,
national
coordinator of
PISA research,
Bishkek,
Kyrgyzstan.

What has *Thinking Classroom/Peremena* been for me? It is hard to respond in just a few words. First of all, it has been a tool for self-discovery, a way of accessing my inner resources and abilities. The journal has broadened my outlook, and taught me to perceive life in a more optimistic way. Working as a *TC/P* editor and later, remaining its faithful reader, I have been learning to understand other people with diverse perspectives, and to be open to considering viewpoints that might at first appear to be unexpected and even unacceptable. This journal gave me a chance to get to know colleagues living on different continents, speaking different languages, yet caring about the same things. It embraced children and people from all over the globe, and spoke of their uniqueness and the need for understanding.

This journal gave me a special gift—my co-editors with whom I shared many "poods of salt," as we say here, and spent countless sleepless nights by the computer. When it was already night here in Kyrgyzstan, it was evening for Olga Varshaver in Russia and Daiva Penkauskienė in Lithuania, while Wendy Saul in the U.S. was just getting up. However, this did not prevent us from working as a united team; we unhesitatingly backed each other up as needed. It was hard, but it was fun, too. There

were lots of worries, and the work was quite demanding of our time and efforts, but all this was outweighed by the feeling of the importance of what we did.

The journal has been and will remain most important in my life. Its impact won't be over with the last issue of *TC/P*: Its values will remain part of my credo and my way of life.



Olga Gromova,
editor-in-chief of
the Library at
School newspaper
of September 1
Publishers,
Moscow, Russia.

When a small but bright star called *Thinking Classroom (Peremena)* appeared in the "sky" of educational publications, it brought us nontraditional perspectives on instruction and the development of students, and on modern (or thoroughly-forgotten) pedagogy. Many of us, teachers in search of new approaches, no longer felt alone in the world.

Thinking Classroom or Peremena (in Russian it means *change*) is a journal seeking to promote change. Not only external changes, as in the organization of school life and work, but also internal changes in how teachers think of themselves and their profession. Interestingly, if a quite traditional or even authoritarian teacher picks up this journal out of curiosity and doesn't put it aside at once, he or she sooner or later starts changing. In fact, it seems teachers belong to one of two types: Some access the professional literature seeking clear-cut directions and ready-made instructional plans and procedures; others look for ideas and strategies that cause them to reflect on their work and support them in

introducing innovations. This journal is for the second type of teacher.

Unexpectedly for me, it turned out that the classroom-related problems and strategies discussed and explained on the journal pages have relevance for everyone who is in one way or another connected with teaching, whether the students are children or adults. This explains the interest taken in its materials by my newspaper's audience: librarians in school and public libraries. If this journal is destined to have some kind of future, either in its current form or in some other format, I would be happy to continue the friendship and fruitful collaboration between our publications. Lots of thanks to all those involved in the production of *TC/P*. Without them many educators would have lacked the necessary encouragement and skills for promoting critical thinking and critical literacy around the world.



Daiva Penkauskienė,
President of the
RWCT
International
Consortium,
Director of
Modern Didactics
Center, Vilnius,
Lithuania

The question looked very simple, but I found it quite difficult to answer, for several reasons. First of all, it is complicated to define the impact of the journal, as on the one hand, it is only part of a whole endeavor—the RWCT (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking) program and the international community drawn together in the RWCT Consortium—and on the other hand, it is a publication that has developed a life of its own, beyond the programs, organizations, and countries of RWCT. Second, I

myself have played a very active role in its life, being one of the initiators and co-editors of the journal. Being "inside" the process makes it difficult to measure its impact, as one can feel multiple influences, coming from many sides. For these reasons, as I look back now, my observations reflect both personal and professional reactions.

- *Thinking Classroom* gave me a unique opportunity to experience the process of developing and publishing an international bilingual (and sometimes multilingual) publication from the inside. I was a witness to how "thought becomes reality."
- *Thinking Classroom* gave me professional training in creating, publishing, and managing an international journal.
- *Thinking Classroom* made it possible for me to meet people (directly and indirectly) who think globally, but act locally; and who are doing incredible things in their daily professional lives.
- *Thinking Classroom* proved that professional cooperation, professional sharing, and professional development really exist, have no boundaries, and make an impact on personal and professional growth.
- *Thinking Classroom* made me work hard, and let me feel both disappointment and joy, sorrow and happiness, despair and hope.
- *Thinking Classroom* brought together an international team of educators who, although not all were professionals in publishing, nevertheless worked together sincerely, enthusiastically, and professionally.

Those six points are not a complete list, but are perhaps enough to portray the nature of the impact *Thinking Classroom* has had for me personally. It's a very positive picture.



Victoria Ridgeway Gillis,
Clemson
University,
Clemson, SC,
USA,
RWCT program
volunteer in
Latvia.

Seldom have I experienced professional development as profound and life-changing as Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT). Everything and everyone associated with RWCT has amazed me with their thoughtful approach to teaching and learning—they still do. *Thinking Classroom/Peremena* grew out of the RWCT experience and community, and like its parent organization, the publication has always been thought-provoking and informative. In a world where one seldom hears voices of reason that present clearly articulated, research-based ideas grounded in experience, *Thinking Classroom* has been on the cutting edge of educational journals. Articles focused on new literacies, the impact of technology on in- and out-of-school experience, communities of practice, and questions about critical literacy and critical thinking have kept me better informed and up to date, and have consistently challenged my thinking. *Thinking Classroom* took the unusual stance of presenting multiple viewpoints on important issues: Competition at school? What content matters? How should we teach? To what ends? While reasoned thinking may not be unusual in other parts of the world, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find in my country.

As I look back on the RWCT experience and *Thinking Classroom*, I feel as though I'm losing a friend and colleague. Where will I

go to find out what other parts of the education world think about the burning questions we all face? None of us knows what is to come, and so I hope that in the near future we will find a way to pick up the reins of *Thinking Classroom* and continue the journal's mission. As Isak Dinesen said about her life in Africa, "The world is round so we don't see too far down the road."

For all of the editors, contributors, and subscribers a simple *thank you* seems inadequate, but those two small words are all I have. We are indebted to you for your hard work, imagination, and perseverance. I have loved being part of this community.



Simona E. Bernat,
Learn & Vision
NGO, Independent
Consultant
Cluj-Napoka,
Romania.

One of the first articles I read in *Thinking Classroom* was the one by David Klooster on what critical thinking is (Issue 4, 2001). At that time I was trying to define critical thinking for myself, to figure out its various meanings, and to play with the concept, and that article helped me in my search. We used the article in 2002 in a two-week workshop for university teachers and students in Cluj, Romania. After that, I used that article in the training sessions on Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking I gave for teachers in Romania, as well as in my courses for pre-service teachers.

There were many other good articles over time in the journal, including some from Romania. I think the journal was a good way to learn about the various developments

and activities of the RWCT organization in different countries, as well as a way to communicate about new ideas and ongoing work in our country. It served as a resource for our pre-service and in-service training sessions as well. Knowing that this is going to be the last issue, I feel thankful for the things I have learned through the journal and through the work of enthusiastic international volunteers and local supporters.



Francis E. Kazemek,
Department of
Teacher
Development,
St. Cloud State
University,
Minnesota, USA.

Thinking Classroom has helped me, various colleagues, classroom teachers, and, especially, my university students expand our understanding of the connections and concerns that link educators around the world. It is the one journal in which we hear both teachers' and scholars' voices from classrooms and universities in eastern Europe, Russia, parts of Africa, Canada, and the United States. For me as a literacy educator, it has fostered a global as well as a multicultural focus in my teaching. Most important, I believe, is the impact it has had on my undergraduate students who are preparing to become educators. When they read and discussed various articles they realized that pedagogical strategies and theoretical orientations often have vitality across nations; and, of course, the differences they encountered challenged them to examine their own developing philosophies of education as a democratic process. *Thinking Classroom* has helped to broaden

their understanding of literacy education as a critical, sociocultural endeavor. It saddens me that this is the last issue of the journal. I only hope that the energy, ideas, and relationships it has nourished continue to increase. *Thinking Classroom* has done much spadework; now it is time for us to tend the garden and help our international community of educators flourish.



Lydia Dachkova,
Chair of the
Board, Bulgarian
Reading
Association, Sofia,
Bulgaria.

I feel very much connected with *Thinking Classroom*. Why was the journal important for me and my colleagues?

I was one of the people involved in its launch. I feel as though I grew professionally by participating in the first training for publication organized by the International Reading Association's publishing department. Later on, it was very motivating and stimulating to work and exchange ideas with colleagues from different countries—some with experience, and others, like me, with no experience in the field of journal publishing. I was also very honored to be part of the Advisory Board of the journal, and the editor of the Bulgarian version of the journal (*Kriticheskoto Mislene—Critical Thinking*).

Over time the journal grew up from a project journal to a publication addressing a wider audience. Eventually its publication was supported by large organizations, first by the International Reading Association and then by the RWCT International Consortium.

Initially, it gave visibility to the respective project activities undertaken by the participating countries/organizations and their partners within the countries. The journal was a good resource of information about the activities and experiences of peers from other countries. In addition, it published conceptual papers about the theoretical foundations and frameworks of the RWCT project as well as others on key educational ideas, issues, and needs. School and university teachers used journal issues as resources in their own teaching, implementing ideas and practices from other countries.

My Bulgarian colleagues were happy to be able to read this international journal published in their native language. These journal resources gave them the feeling of belonging to a professional community, a network both national and international. Even though it was a bilingual journal read by individuals having diverse mother tongues, many readers felt they were "speaking the same language"—the language of modern educators who strive to meet the demands of their students, societies, and time. I do hope that the communication network established through the journal will not be discontinued, and that alternative ways of forming partnerships will be identified.



Petros Georgiades,
Science Advisor,
Department of
Primary
Education,
Ministry of
Education and
Culture of Cyprus.

I have been a reader of *Thinking Classroom* for the past six years. One of the first things that I found

interesting about this journal was the fact that, in spite of its small size and the small number of issues per year, it managed to address an enormously diverse range of topics, from literature and science to active learning, peace education, and cultural diversity. This broad perspective has made the journal attractive to a diverse audience with different backgrounds, interests, and specializations, while at the same time maintaining a common unifying axis: the classroom.

Every issue of *Thinking Classroom* has further maintained a second important characteristic: it presents theory alongside practice, or practice grounded in solid, yet not exhaustive, theory. In other words, *Thinking Classroom* has managed to avoid the pitfall of addressing the teaching community in academic language, which often gives rise to a theory–practice gap, causing disappointment and frustration among teachers. I am sure that hundreds of teachers have tried the innovative, yet realistically applicable, methods and approaches proposed by the contributors of TC/P, and that the outcomes were evident in their classrooms. This successful joining of academic, reflective, or critical thinking with everyday classroom practice is, I believe, one of the features that has made *Thinking Classroom* popular among its readers.

If one adds the truly international dimension of *Thinking Classroom*, which has demonstrated that methods, ideas, problems, and concerns of teachers can be universal, whether in Russia, the USA, Cyprus, or Armenia, the contribution this journal has made to the professional community is substantial and worth noting. In a nutshell, *Thinking Classroom* has managed to bring thinking into many classrooms worldwide. Congratulations and many thanks to all contributors.

Many Voices in the Classroom: The Role of Classroom Talk in Education for Democracy



Patricia Bloem
is Associate
Professor of
English
Education
at Grand Valley
State University
in Allendale,
Michigan, USA.



David Klooster
is Professor
and Chair,
Department of
English, at
Hope College
in Holland,
Michigan, USA.



Alison Preece
is Associate
Professor of
Language &
Literacy, Faculty
of Education,
the University
of Victoria, in
British Columbia,
Canada.

Eudora Welty, in her memoir *One Writer's Beginnings* (1984), tells of her childhood fondness for sitting in the back seat of the family car and listening to a neighbor gossip and chatter to her mother while they went for rides around the Mississippi countryside. "I'm told," states Welty, "that as a small child I would ask to sit in the middle, and say as we started off, 'Now talk.'" Welty's speakers—the murmuring neighbor woman, the sewing woman who loved to tell gossip stories while her mouth was full of pins, her own analytical father—were all using talk to make sense of their lives, just as we in classrooms encourage students to talk to make sense of their learning. The most basic form of school communication—classroom talk—can also be an essential feature of education for democracy. If the classroom is a laboratory for democratic life, and schooling is an essential preparation for participation in democratic culture, then the quantity and the quality of talk in the classroom is an important part of preparing citizens to find and use their voices in the myriad responsibilities of democratic life.

In the following essay, we look carefully at what democracy scholars and theorists teach us about the role of talk in the classroom, and analyze the three most important components of productive

democratic communication: exploratory, reflective, and deliberative talk. We then examine what we believe are the most common obstacles for the classroom teacher in implementing a democratic theory of classroom talk: providing access to all students, encouraging equity during class participation, and managing conflict. We conclude with an extended illustration from an Austrian classroom where a teacher encourages her students to use multiple forms of rich talk to help them understand their own place in democratic culture.*

What communication abilities does democracy require of citizens?

In his brief book *On Democracy* (1998), Robert Dahl, a leading political theorist of democracy, argues that free expression is an essential condition for democracy because it is required in order for citizens to *participate* effectively in political life. How can citizens make their views known, and persuade their fellow citizens and representatives to adopt them, unless they can express themselves freely about matters that have bearing on the conduct of the government? And if they are to take the views of others into account, they must be able to hear what others have to say. Free expression means not just that you have a right to be heard; it also means

that you have a right to hear what others have to say (p. 96).

To acquire what Dahl terms *civic competence*, people need many opportunities to engage in the give-and-take of ideas. This skill or competence does not develop overnight. He says:

To acquire an enlightened understanding of possible government actions and policies also requires freedom of expression. To acquire civic competence, citizens need opportunities to express their own views; learn from one another; engage in discussion and deliberation; read, hear, and question experts, political candidates, and persons whose judgments they trust; and learn in other ways that depend on freedom of expression. (p. 97)

While Dahl stresses the political necessity of free expression, educators see in his words a challenge: How do we equip our students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for them to exercise their right to free expression? Surely a right so fundamental to democratic culture requires certain abilities and attitudes for its exercise. How do citizens acquire the skills they need to express their views, to listen to and learn from others, to question and challenge experts, and to read critically? How do our classrooms help prepare students for the exercise of their right to freedom of expression? (Ayers, 2004).

Education theorists have long supported the idea that students need to speak in order to acquire and display knowledge. Teacher/student dialogue was the defining pedagogical feature of the ancient Greek academy, and student recitation in response to teacher questioning has been central to classrooms at least since the medieval period. But if classroom talk is to serve democratic ends, it must be more than students' recitation of received knowledge imparted by the instructor.

Classrooms where genuine human communication can flourish will need to break from the received traditions of school culture. Each of us can think of places and occasions where good talk happens—a meeting of friends in a café, a conference of peers eager to talk about their shared passions, a family gathered around the meal table. When humans gather on equal footing with shared concerns, their voices are likely to blend into meaningful and purposeful conversation.

John Dewey (1897), the pre-eminent American theorist of the relationship between education and democracy, asserts that schools must be closely related to the lives human beings actually live:

I believe that education... is a process of living and not a preparation for living. I believe that the school must represent present life—life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground. (pp. 230–231)

For Dewey, the quality that allows education to be so closely connected to life is *communication*. Education combines psychological and social dimensions of the human experience, and it is in oral communication—talk—that a student is able to bridge these two dimensions. Dewey advocates those forms of education that emphasize communication, because social life is inherently communicative and educative. In his neo-pragmatist reading of Dewey's work, Tomas Englund (2000) interprets Dewey in light of Richard Rorty and Richard Bernstein in order to emphasize that the private self (what Dewey called the psychological) must be developed in the context of social experiences. Thus, "our private selves cannot be loosened from our ethical responsibility. We always have to be ready to expose our private attitudes to critique and to discuss them publicly with those who have other opinions, not necessarily in order to reach consensus but in order to understand and respect each other" (p. 309).

Thus, if our democratic culture depends on a citizenry educated in the arts of free expression and the open exchange of ideas and information, we can find in the work of Dewey, Englund, and others a dialogic understanding of education and



* The authors thank the following individuals for their contributions to this article: Lois Tyson, Bruce Stinebrickner, Gabrielle Fenkhart, Wauki Hall, and Brian White.

of knowledge itself that encourages us to see the school classroom as a place of conversation, of dialogue and discussion and debate and deliberation. A classroom that sponsors genuine human communication—not the stilted teacher questioning and student recitation of the traditional classroom—will best equip students with the knowledge and the skills they need for citizenship.

What kinds of classroom talk help to prepare students for democratic citizenship?

If education is by its nature conversational and communicative, can we identify those forms of communication that are especially important for citizens of democratic culture? We propose that three forms are of vital importance.

Exploratory talk

Democratic cultures in schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and nations offer participants many opportunities and a wide latitude of choice in terms of lifestyle, religious belief, political affiliation, and the like. Market economies offer workers and consumers many opportunities to choose how they earn and spend their money. These opportunities are both thrilling and dizzying—we feel excited to be able to choose, but often we feel overwhelmed by the number of choices we have.

In the context of the school, we can help students prepare for the world of opportunity they live in by encouraging them regularly to explore possibilities, to generate an abundance of ideas and then sort out the good ones from the bad, and to use their imaginations to create new

possibilities. This exploration is often termed *inquiry*, and involves asking questions and following the leads to possible answers. Classroom talk that begins with the students' own wondering and questions and curiosity is *exploratory talk*.

We can help our students prepare for a world of opportunity by asking them to talk with one another about their own questions and curiosities regarding the world around and within them. Often such talk serves as evocation before new lessons, as we seek to activate students' existing schema of knowledge and understanding, or it serves as brainstorming for writing or research projects. Exploratory talk is generative—it engages students in the creation of new ideas, new observations, new possibilities. Exploratory talk often reveals new knowledge to students, or makes them newly aware of what they already know or think. As the British novelist William Makepeace Thackeray put it, “There are a thousand thoughts lying within a man that he does not know till he takes up a pen to write.” Or, we might add, until she is invited to enter into conversation and speak her mind. In exploratory talk the emphasis should be on creativity, not criticism. Students and teachers should aim for abundance, multiplicity, openness, and should withhold the impulse to judge or critique or eliminate. Exploratory talk seeks the new, the not-yet-understood, the edges of understanding.

For example, students reading and discussing Thoreau's *Walden* (1854/2004) might consider these questions: How does Thoreau help you think differently about how to live simply, with few material goods? How does simple living encourage a different sort of seeing and thinking? The teacher might guide students to think about camping trips they have taken, or their experience of moving into a small residence hall room, and then consider the pleasures and problems of living with few material goods. These questions don't have right or wrong answers, and students need not adopt Thoreau's ideas; indeed, the conversation will be more productive if there are more points of view, more disagreements. Students can explore their own experiences and their own speculations about these issues as they encounter *Walden*.

Thus exploratory talk is not just a goal of learning, but an important means of learning. As students talk through their understanding of ideas and concepts, they are engaged in the process of constructing meaning. Giving voice to ideas in small group conversation helps students to work on their understanding of what they are learning. Douglas Barnes (1993) discusses the important difference between this sort of exploratory talk and more traditional presentational talk in the classroom. In traditional classrooms, teachers present the lesson, and then engage students in a period of questioning, in which concise and direct answers are most highly prized, and the teacher seeks the “right” answer from the students. Exploratory talk, in contrast, is marked by hesitations, interruptions, false starts, and re-phrasings (p. 29). Barnes writes,

It is important not to see such uncertain talk as failed attempts to communicate; the hesitations and changes of direction, as well as the use of words such as “probably” represent the student's struggle to make sense of an emerging idea. In the course of trying to formulate this idea, he or she is sorting out thoughts aloud. It will be convenient to call this kind of hesitant speech “exploratory talk” to make the fact that its function is not simply communication but includes the reconstructive thought that is such an important part of learning. (pp. 29-30)

Barnes (1992) recommends that teachers use small groups as part of their teaching strategies to help create the environment where this kind of exploratory talk can occur.

Reflective talk

Another essential kind of classroom talk is *reflective talk*, as members of the group think back on what they have learned and heard and read, to test, evaluate, and apply ideas and concepts. Reflective talk is considered, critical, and disciplined. Reflective talk allows students to put the results of their learning into their own words, to try it out, to apply it, to weigh it, and to take a personal position in relation to it. It functions in a way that helps students to personalize understanding, to lay claim to what they have learned as their own. Thus reflective talk addresses individual *responsibility* in relation to the countless *opportunities* democratic life offers its citizens.



© MDC, Lithuania, photo

In “Talking About Learning: Making Reflection Meaningful in Elementary Classrooms” (1995) Alison Preece writes:

If we want our students to take reflection seriously we must make reflection a vital part of our program.... [R]eflection can be accomplished through talk—and often the talk is enough. The goal is to foster a thoughtful, reflective orientation to learning and, as part of that, to expose our students to a range of questions and techniques designed to help them think about the work they are doing and the strategies, approaches, successes and stumbling blocks encountered. The point is the thinking, however. (p. 19)

For the class that reads *Walden*, a reflective discussion after students have finished reading might begin with questions such as these: Do you consider Thoreau's experiment a practical one for people living in the 21st century? Would it be possible for you to simplify your life along the lines that Thoreau suggested, or are there other meaningful ways we can redefine our relationship to the material world that would honor Thoreau's experiment? Is his experiment in living ultimately a selfish one, a matter of putting one's own life above and apart from others? Reflective talk draws the attention of students to their own processes of learning and knowing, thus helping them to develop the habits and skills of learning.

Deliberative talk

Deliberation is the kind of classroom talk that is most productive both for learning and for democratic living. The English word *deliberate* is derived from the Latin *libra*, or scale, and thus the sense of the word is *weighing* or *measuring* ideas as a



© William G. Broco, photo



prelude to action. Walter C. Parker (2003) has argued that classrooms and schools can teach students to deliberate about a wide variety of ideas, policies, and issues as they plan projects, events, and organizations.

Deliberative talk ultimately addresses the question: *What should we do?* The class studying *Walden* might begin deliberation by asking, “If this class decides to put Thoreau’s ideas into practice today, what are some practical and meaningful changes we can make in our lives? What are the three most significant changes we could make in our local community?” The students could then collectively create a list and begin to talk with one another about which ideas are most likely to lead to change, which ones are most practical, which ones they agree to put into action. The point of deliberation is to decide—together—what the group will do.

Parker distinguishes deliberation from other kinds of talk. *Voting*, of course, is one way to decide what to do democratically, but voting is devoid of talk—it is a simple, abstracted action, a choice among preset options. Deliberation is also different from *debate*. Debate pits two opposed positions against each other, a positive and a negative, or a left and a right. Debate is organized by teams according to strict turn-taking rules, and the speeches are prepared, formal, and non-spontaneous. Debate is a powerful and valuable form of discourse, but it is not the same as deliberation. Finally, *negotiation* differs from deliberation in that negotiation assumes two opposed parties engaged in a discussion of what they can gain or give up; there is not one group seeking a common good, but two or more groups engaged in bargaining for the best compromise position.

Deliberation, by contrast involves everyone in the group forging together the alternatives and making a decision. It should not be confused with situations in which people who have already formed their opinions gather to advocate and defend them, nor with alternating

monologues.... where there is sequential talking but not listening, let alone perspective taking and empathy. (p. 81)

Parker lists three prerequisites for increasing authentic deliberation in our classrooms. First, we must increase the number of small group interactions. Groups should be temporary, and continually reorganized, to encourage all members of the class and school to work with others; we should avoid relying on the same small groups time after time. Groups should also be organized across age groups whenever possible, to allow older and younger children to work together from time to time. These groups should be task-oriented; they should be charged with accomplishing some worthwhile objective. Parker provides these examples: middle-school science students work in cooperative groups to produce a biography of Galileo; elementary students gather around the teacher to present and explain the project work they’ve completed together; mixed groups of students gather in after-school clubs to pursue special interests; elementary school students gather in mixed-age groups to care for an area of the school grounds; mixed groups of middle and high school students perform community service work after school or on the weekends; and representatives from all classrooms meet in a student government to address problems and potential improvements for the school (p. 79).

Not only is it important to create many opportunities for students to meet together to work on common issues, but we must also find ways to increase the quality of their deliberation. The focus must be on genuine problems—not contrived ones—and students must feel that they begin their work on terms of genuine equality. Groups should work cooperatively, not competitively, and students should perceive that their work is valued and sanctioned by adults they respect—their teachers, administrators, and parents. Parker concludes:

Deliberation, in sum, creates an in-between space—potentially a solidarity across differences; a “we”—among people who are not necessarily friends or relations but who need to accomplish a goal that requires joining together ... Deliberation with diverse others hopes to bring into existence a wise decision to

act, certainly wiser than what results when people do not think together about the problems they face. This is its point. A “we” is deciding an issue, and each member will be bound by it. (pp. 81, 86)

It is not difficult to begin to imagine the many ways in which students who experience rich classroom talk—exploratory, reflective, and deliberative—will be prepared for democratic life. They will develop the habits of mind and the communicative powers to work effectively with diverse others to seek a common good (Nicolte, 2006; Noddings, 2006). But what is more difficult is to imagine, in concrete terms, how teachers can encourage and nurture such talk in their classrooms. We turn now to these practical dilemmas teachers face in implementing exploration, reflection, and deliberative talk.

Practical issues in the classroom

A teacher can be committed to the idea of many voices in the democratic classroom, yet face difficulties in achieving her vision for broad and fruitful participation. Three issues call for further reflection: access, equity, and conflict.

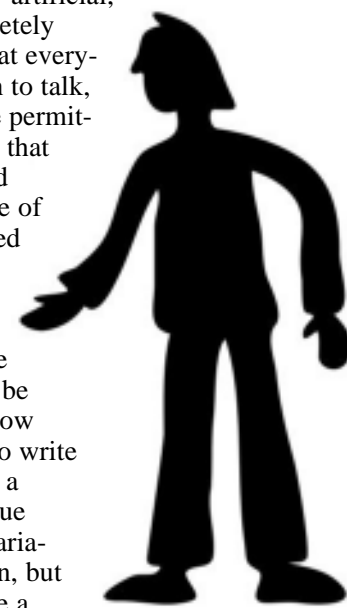
How can we provide access for all students?

If our genuine goal as teachers is to have all voices heard, then it is essential that we take concrete practical steps to make that goal a reality. It is true that the playing field is not a level one. Differences of gender, of culture, of ability, of experience, of peer status, of personality, of “social capital,” are real and have real consequences. Our students have discovered through their experience that not all voices are equally welcomed, equally valued, equally influential, neither in the adult world nor, most of all, among their fellow students (Finders, 1997). As teachers, we need to understand the implications and potential effects of these differences on the interactional dynamics of our classrooms. We must not be naive about the inhibiting effect these differences can have and the challenges they present (Garvin, 1991).

At the same time, we can take active steps to ameliorate their impact in the context of the talk environments we create with our students. We will need to be persistent and even insistent. We need to

make explicit how much it matters that each of us has a right to voice our views, and to have those views considered with respect, to have them count. Since the specter of peer ridicule, of leaving oneself open to criticism, haunts many students, especially as they get older, it is crucial that we openly acknowledge the perils of opening oneself to scorn or dismissal and perhaps make it a topic of talk, of writing, or a part of the trust-building process. Consequently, we need to provide a variety of response options for students that range from the private, to the shared-if-desired, to the open-to-all. Certainly the question of exactly who the audience is, for any written or spoken conversation, should warrant our attention.

Many elementary school teachers use tactics such as tickets-to-talk, or pens-in-the-middle, or talking sticks, in order to make sure that every voice is heard throughout the school day. For example, with tickets-to-talk each person is given the same number of tickets and must surrender one each time they contribute a comment to the discussion; once someone’s tickets are gone, that person cannot speak again until all of the others’ tickets have been used. Pens-in-the-middle is similar, with each person placing a pen or object into the center of the circle and retrieving it once they’ve made a contribution to the discussion. Second turns aren’t permitted until all of the pens have been retrieved and all have had a turn to talk. While admittedly artificial, these techniques concretely convey the message that everyone is entitled to a turn to talk, and that no one will be permitted to dominate. Once that point is understood and reasonably enacted, use of the technique is dropped and only reintroduced as needed. More expansive and certainly more appropriate for older grades might be response forms that allow students, bold or shy, to write reactions to something a classmate says. Dialogue journals allow many variations in implementation, but their point is to provide a





comparatively private, yet supportively structured, opportunity for students to engage with each other and exchange views—to provide a vehicle for written discussion and shared reflection. Exit and entry cards are also simple devices to enable all voice to be heard. Teacher think-alouds help students see how exploratory and reflective talk lead to greater depth of thinking, and serve as important models.

How can we encourage equity and responsibility in classroom talk?

The right to speak needs to be balanced by the responsibility to have something to say, and then to listen, consider and respond thoughtfully to what others say. Most teachers can relate to a frustrated colleague who says:

I don't know what more I can do... I make it quite clear that I want everyone to participate, I stress that we need to hear from everyone, that each person has a valid opinion that I value hearing... and I invite those who haven't yet spoken to do so. Even so: some talk, some don't. I really don't see what more I can do. I can provide the openings, but I can't force people to take advantage of them.

We can also sympathize with the teacher who asked, “Why is it always the same few who speak out? How can I keep one particular student from dominating the talk? I want to encourage him, but he is in effect silencing others.” Issues of equity, fairness, and responsibility are difficult to manage for teachers at every educational level.

Research evidence suggests that many school discussions are superficial and

ritualized exercises, in which competing positions are asserted by a vocal few rather than developed; that points and arguments are merely repeated rather than built upon; and that flaws in a position, or challenges to it, are neither anticipated nor countered (Allington, 1994; Barnes, 1992.; Perkins cited in John Barell, 1991). Ineffective discussions can be compounded or even caused by the failure of the teacher to allow students sufficient time to prepare for a discussion.

While there is certainly a place for spontaneous talk in the classroom, communicating the expectation that

students should prepare for the discussion by advance reading, and by mulling over a question and organizing a response, is useful. Especially for deliberative talk, students need to prepare themselves by engaging in exploration and reflection, some of which can come about through individual effort and some through communal talk, whether in a small group or a large one.

If one person dominates the group, typically teachers ignore the waving hand, or pointedly say, “We need to hear from others as well.” But a teacher could also take the student quietly aside and enlist her assistance in inviting the participation of others; or assign that student the role of the recorder so that it becomes his responsibility to summarize key points made by others; or set a time limit on each student's turn to talk.

In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), Mandela describes the impact of his early exposure to deliberative talk in tribal meetings, gatherings where members of the community, “chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, shopkeeper and farmer, landowner and laborer,” were free to speak without interruption. “It was democracy in its purest form,” writes Mandela.

As a leader, I have always followed the principles I first saw demonstrated by the regent at the Great Place. I have always endeavored to listen to what each and every person in a discussion had to say before venturing my own opinion. Often-times, my own opinion will simply represent a consensus of what I heard in the discussion. I always remember the regent's axiom; a leader, he said, is like a

shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind. (p. 19)

It may be helpful for a teacher to talk to the whole class about its patterns and habits of conversation and deliberation. Individual students need to become metacognitively aware of their habits of exploration and reflection, and of how they contribute to a group discussion. Clearly skills gained through classroom talk can transfer to other settings in their future when they will be called upon as citizens to speak out.

The quality of discussion can be influenced by the opportunities (or lack thereof) for participants to reflect on, analyze, and critique their experiences of the discussions and interactional events that are part of schooling. Teachers know that if they want students' writing to improve, they must develop shared standards for evaluation and grading and must devote considerable time to responding to student writing. It seems fair to assume that a complex skill like classroom conversation needs similarly well-developed response and evaluation criteria. The fishbowl strategy—in which students divide into two groups, an inner group that discusses and an outer group that observes and evaluates the discussion—is an excellent vehicle for promoting equity and access, and leading students to a metacognitive understanding of how discussions can promote clear reasoning and deliberation.

How can we deal productively with conflict?

A third problem is the need to face conflict and difference in productive ways. How can teachers use conflict in the classroom to fuel solid discussions? How can we support intellectual conflict in our classrooms, rather than avoiding or squashing it? How can we educate our students in ways of disputing differences with appropriate restraint and civility, without exacerbating divisions? In order for class discussions to prepare students for life in a democracy, we need to be explicit in valuing genuinely held and reasoned differences of opinion, of perspective, and of the conclusions reached. We also need to be explicit in

valuing discussions that—through exploration, consideration, marshalling of argument and evidence, deliberation, and judgment—make such differences clear. Teachers can highlight this idea by juxtaposing two versions of the same story, two or more newspaper accounts of the same event, two paintings of the same setting. Likewise, after students have come to a decision on a topic, teachers can ask them to consider the nuances and context, to find evidence *against* their position, and to find other ways to look at an issue. Differences and conflict must be explored and reflected on both individually and in small groups, or students will surely be unprepared to handle conflict well in deliberative talk. As Jones and Nimmo (1994) point out, “Most commonly, conflict is cut short through the exercise of power by the stronger individual or group... [T]his silences the opposing voice and whatever wisdom it may carry” (p. 8).

The Reggio Emilia Model of Pre-school Education from Northern Italy has made an enormous impact on early childhood educators throughout North America. One of the most striking aspects of the model, claimed by many as most distinct from the North American way of doing things (Edwards, 1998), is the explicit value it places on acknowledging and *sustaining* conflicts that inevitably arise among teachers, between teachers and parents, between teachers and administrators, and even among the children, so as to promote or permit a full airing and sharing of the views held with the goal of everyone understanding their basis and implications. Any premature push to



closure and consensus is recognized as short-circuiting the thinking and exchange necessary in order to work things through. Far from being something to be avoided, ignored, or politely hushed up in the supposed interests of harmony, conflict is viewed as an inevitable and essential element in any healthy engagement around ideas that matter. This attitude toward deliberative discussion can serve as a model for what democracies need to support in their citizens.

How might talk—carefully crafted conversation that builds students’ abilities and prepares them for active democratic life—operate in a classroom setting? What follows is an extended example from a year-long conversation in a secondary classroom in Austria, which will be analyzed according to the elements presented above, and which will function as a fugue with themes that echo parts one and two.

Talk in Austria: An extended example

In the academic year 2004-05, Ms. G, a social studies and literature teacher, engaged her thirty 14-year-old Austrian public school students in a year-long study of World War II. Students read fiction, historical nonfiction, and newspaper accounts, interviewed family members, visited museums, watched movies and television documentaries,

reflected in journals, and engaged in small and large group discussions. The culminating event was a field trip to the two encampments of the Loiblpass concentration camp, one on the Austrian side of the border and one on the Slovenian side. Halfway through the school year, an American student (and son of authors Bloem and Klooster) joined the class; his inclusion provided the authors an opportunity to gain a closer perspective on the classroom.

Recognizing the timeliness, Ms. G took advantage of several historical commemorations: the 50th anniversary of the end of Austria’s occupation by the four superpowers; the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II; and the 10th anniversary of Austria’s admission into the European Union. Because of these commemorations, newspapers were full of historical human-interest stories, editorials, opinion pieces, and news of what politicians were and were not doing to commemorate the anniversaries, as well as discussion of the unveiling of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin.

Ms. G asked her students to carry out conversations with their grandparents or other family elders about their lives during the war and after. The students first generated their own questions, thus ensuring that they explored the issues they saw as important, and then were instructed

to manage their own intergenerational conversation. Some of their grandparents had been very young during the Occupation Period; nonetheless, most of the students discovered family stories to share. The American student in the class was able to email his grandmothers and give a non-Austrian perspective. A girl whose family relocated from the Balkans was excused from the interview because the topic of war was too raw for her family. Near the end of the term, each student reflected on his findings and orally presented the results of the grandparents’ conversations to the class, followed by a question and answer period with classmates.

It should be noted that Ms. G was pushing the boundary of her curricula. She was implementing teaching and pedagogical practices approved by her peers and her school community, but was using controversial subject matter to promote talk. While Germany is known for its thorough airing of its role in the Holocaust and in World War II both in the schools and in public life, Austria has not come to terms with its past in the same communal ways. It was not Ms. G’s intent to push her students to condemn their grandparents or the community. But most families in Austria have Nazi pasts; back rooms in local pubs and *gasthofen* display photographs of beloved family members in Nazi uniforms, and in private conversations people wonder how much knowledge their relatives had of the atrocities. While there are some who express great shame, others feel it is paramount that children grow up to respect their elders, and therefore withhold judgment. While there are some who feel that it is the height of hubris for a teenager to critique complex moral issues not experienced firsthand, others feel that a teenager must not be made to feel responsible or guilty for decisions made before he was born.

Exploration–Reflection–Deliberation

This unit incorporated a natural progression of talk. From the first, students offered up comments on the media, talk that began as exploratory. Although some of the students may have written or uttered comments that would be low on Bloom’s taxonomy, Ms. G did not judge or critique their talk at this point, but was open to what they were discovering.



© S. Lisenco, photo

As the students talked, they asked questions, sifted through the experiences of their own families, and reflected on what they themselves believe. Although “pupils do not connect the history of their families so closely with the facts they learn in their history lessons,” the talks children held with their grandparents helped them to see that “the facts they learn in school have something to do with ‘real life’” (Ms. G, personal communication, (June 5, 2005)). A common theme that emerged from the students’ private diaries on their reading was the question, What would I have done? The fact that Ms. G. placed such a high value on the verbal explorations, musings, and “I wonder if...” constructions of student thought clearly marks her as a teacher who is willing to take time for talk, and who works in a manner wholly unlike the transmission model of teaching and learning so prevalent in many North American schools.

In fact, questions about what the community or the individual should have done were continually raised in private, and colored almost every individual’s responses to the films, to the books, and to the family stories. Practically speaking, deliberation is, Parker (2003) says, “discussion with an eye toward decision making” (p. 80). The students here were not asked to create a position statement or a collective decision, and yet private deliberation that mirrored the public community conversations occurred over and over, primarily through the use of questions. Sometimes the questions were answered, at least partially, but often they were open-ended, or almost impossible for the children to respond to at the time. One of the boys, during the Fishbowl discussion of a movie the class had



© RWCT-Kyrgyzstan, photo



Hans Scholl, Sophie Scholl, and Christoph Probst, who were executed for participating in the White Rose resistance movement against the Nazi regime in Germany. Sophie Scholl is the main character of *Sophie Scholl: The Last Days*.

watched, asked his entire circle, “What would you have done?” No one was able to answer it at that moment, in that particularly public context, but it was a question that emerged and reemerged privately and collectively. One boy, in his private diary responses to the books he was reading, asked angrily, “How could my Grandmother say that the people from our area simply did not know what the Nazis were doing?” (Ms. G, private communication, June 26, 2005). That fundamental question was voiced in newspapers, in classrooms, and at the Loiblpass field trip, and in general has been part of the dialogue within the community. It was an honest question, not a mere rant, one that gets at both the communication patterns of 60 years ago, and the psychological ability of people to face reality. It is indicative of the kind of generative thinking, and the weighing of options, that marks deliberation.

Ms. G’s intent was to lead her students to solid exploration and reflection, but to save public deliberation for the issue of concentration camp memorials. Ten kilometers from the school, into the mountains, is a tunnel built by prisoners of war. One set of prisoners dynamited a path and chipped at the rock from the Austrian side, and another did the same from a Slovenian camp until the two groups, which were comprised of resistors and Allied soldiers, met in the middle. Today, the Austrian side of the camp barely acknowledges the historical significance of the spot, except for a stone

tablet one finds on the edge of a dirt path off a parking lot. In contrast, the Slovenian camp, visible from the highway, sets out the structures of the camp’s buildings like Roman ruins, and is marked by an enormous skeletal memorial sculpture.

The students were shocked at the differences and asked, “Why is there no memorial or monument on the Austrian border at the site of the concentration camp?” and, “What should Austria—what should we—do?” Here were questions on which the students could voice opinions and contribute to a community deliberation, discussion that is likely to result “in a decision to take a particular course of action” (Parker, 2003, p. 80). They could channel their pent-up emotion, discuss, argue, and cooperatively plan what should be done about the lack of a memorial on the Austrian border at the site of Loiblpass.

Access–Equity–Conflict

Although not every student had grandparents with moving stories or family experiences of World War II, every student in the class had access to museum exhibitions, to newspaper stories, to television coverage of the anniversaries, and to the films and novels, so all were prepared for the discussions, ready to bring different pieces of knowledge to the class. Each student was able to make her own discoveries, to end up with lessons learned that were specific to her. This kind of teaching “challenges the stereotypical view that the job of the teacher is to pass on unified consistent application to all students,” Mitchell states (2003, p. 121), and it certainly negates the widespread tendency to “teach to the test”. Ms.G’s tailoring of the assignment to fit the Bosnian and the American students also reinforces the idea that assignments must promote individual learning, and that one size does not, should not, and cannot fit all the students.

The students viewed two films: *Sophie Scholl: The Last Days* (2005), directed by Marc Rothmund, and *Napola—Elite für den Führer*, (Gansel, 2004, English title *Before the Fall*), a powerful film about the sadism private school boys experienced as they were being groomed to become Nazi leaders. After each of the movies, Ms. G employed the critical discussion strategy of the Fishbowl, dividing the two discussion groups by gender, a division that particularly fit the

Napola movie discussion. The boys identified powerfully with the character of Friedrich and with the anti-Nazi viewpoint. Ms. G reported, “Although it sometimes seems hard for the boys to cope with their own feelings amongst their colleagues, they all applauded—in the movie theater!—when the weaker of the two protagonists dared to publicly voice his resistance both against the system and his father” (personal communication, May 6, 2005).

The Fishbowl strategy allowed these students to articulate difficult thoughts—difficult because they were close to the bone, but also because they forced the students to take ownership of their reactions in a public setting. The format forced them to think about how well they share ideas and listen to others, thus promoting a metacognitive understanding of their own learning and interactions. Students knew that if they were not inclusive, if they manipulated the discussion or cut each other off, the rest of the group would criticize them. There were rules for engagement; students realized they needed to respect those rules and each other.

Finally, because of the immediacy and relevance of the topic, the curriculum addressed many built-in conflicts. The Austrian media, especially through newspaper editorials and reporting, make it clear that there is diversity of opinion about many of the issues of World War II, with some Austrians claiming that the war was all Germany’s doing and that Austrians were mere pawns, while others claim full national responsibility, pointing to the large number of concentration and work camps operated with support from local Austrians. Because the students’ learning was tied to their greater community, the lessons learned about how to be a citizen in post-World War II and post-occupation Austria were vivid. These young adults have learned firsthand that to be an Austrian in 2005 means to explore ideas that have meaning within one’s immediate family as well as the larger community, and to reflect on them through discussion and talk. Their experience in Ms. G’s class concretely pointed to the need for deliberative, civil conversation

with the older generation as well as with peers. The project showed students how thin the walls are between the outside world and their classroom, how relevant the past is to their present, and how different opinions can be in current day Austria. In many ways, the students’ conversation paralleled the one held by adults all over the country, and certainly it was the sort of talk that prepared them to enter into the larger community. Although there may not be many open forums for citizens that are similar to Ms. G’s fishbowl discussion, these students received productive training for engaging in democratic behavior and understanding how talk can operate.

When one imagines this kind of unit being replicated in other parts of the world, it is clear that most countries have painful periods in their history, political or community experiences fraught with moral dilemmas, guilt, and citizen culpability. In the United States, classes could examine the Vietnam War, or Guantanamo Bay and the invasion of Iraq; in the Eastern Bloc countries, teachers and students can explore silence and collaboration with Communist regimes; in Argentina, classes could explore silence and culpability with regard to “the disappeared”. Every country on the globe has a topic that its young citizens can learn about and discuss, using their talk to help them grasp and experience the potential of democracy. There is a tradition in Western and Central Europe for students to publicly criticize each other’s recitations, so perhaps raising tension levels because of difference of opinion is a more





© iStockphoto.com, photo

acceptable behavior in some European classrooms. By contrast, American classrooms rarely encourage direct conflict (Cazden, 2001), even though disagreement can be hugely beneficial for students' learning and for acculturation into democratic ways (Johnston, 2004).

Nonetheless, the essential elements of talk create a rich fugue of complementary and contrasting voices, and provide an important training ground for the kind of attention to conversation that is necessary for democratic life to flourish. Expert teachers like Ms. G, who have a greater understanding of the role that talk must play in schools, are essential for all of our futures... for all of our voices.

References

Allington, R.L. (1994). The schools we have. The schools we need. *The Reading Teacher*, 48(1), 14–29.

Ayers, W. (2004). *Teaching toward freedom: Moral commitment and ethical action in the classroom*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Barnes, D. (1993). Supporting exploratory talk for learning. In K. Pierce & C. Gilles (Eds.), *Cycles of meaning: Exploring the potential for talk in learning communities*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Barnes, D. (1992). *From communication to curriculum*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Cazden, C. (2001). *Classroom discourse: The language of teaching and learning*. (2nd ed.). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Dahl, R.A. (1998). *On democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dewey, J. (1897). My pedagogical creed. *The School Journal*, 54, 77–80.

Edwards, C. (1998). Partner, nurturer and guide—The role of the teacher. In C. Edwards, L. Gandini, & G. Forman (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach—Advanced reflections*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Englund, T. (2000). Rethinking democracy and education: Towards an education of deliberative citizens. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 32(2), 305–313.

Finders, M. (1997). *Just girls: Hidden literacies and life in junior high*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Garvin, D. A. (1991). Barriers and gateways to learning. In C. R. Christensen, D. Garvin, & A. Sweek (Eds.), *Education for judgment: The artistry of discussion leadership*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Gensel, D. (Director). (2004). *Napola—Elite für den Führer*. [Motion Picture].

Johnston, P. (2004). *Choice words*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Jones, E. & Nimmo, J. (1994). *Emergent curriculum*. Washington: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Mandela, N. (1995). *Long walk to freedom*. Boston: Back Bay Books.

Mitchell, D. (2003). *Children's literature: An invitation to the world*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Nicolte, J. (2006). Conversation: A necessary step in understanding diversity. In J. Landsman & C.W. Lewis (Eds.), *White teachers/diverse classrooms: A guide to building inclusive schools, promoting high expectations, and eliminating racism*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Noddings, N. (2006). *Critical lessons: What our schools should teach*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Parker, W. C. (2003). *Teaching Democracy: Unity and diversity in public life*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Perkins, D. (1991). Cited in John Barrell's *Teaching for thoughtfulness*. (p.192). New York: Longman.

Preece, A. (1995). Talking about learning: Making reflection meaningful in elementary classrooms. *English Quarterly*, 27(4), 18–21.

Rothmund, M. (Director). (2005). *Sophie Scholl: The last days*. [Motion Picture].

Welty, E. (1984). *One writer's beginnings*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Rustam Kurbatov

Farewell to Arms!



Photo from the author's archive

Rustam Kurbatov
is Director of the Ark-21 Lyceum
in Moscow, Russia.

To a strong school!

School is all about coercion. The obvious kind—the yelling, the threats, and the parent summons. The concealed kind—which incidentally is far worse—the persuasion, the admonitions, the attempts to influence.

The problem is not that students are bad or teachers are mean. The problem is in the nature of school itself, in the system. The system that can function only through coercion.

Thus, being called a *strong* teacher is the highest compliment on professionalism a teacher can receive. If you work in a school you need to be strong! Strong enough to suppress the onslaught of children's energy. Strong enough to make a child do something he doesn't want to do. All the while making him think that he is actually doing it of his own free will.

Weak people have no place here. Only strong teachers can maintain discipline in the classroom. Only strong teachers can achieve good results. It is only the strong teachers that children love and remember with gratitude.

To say that “school is all about coercion” is not meant as an insult. It's a simple fact. The system does not work without teachers forcing students. In other words, it's all about coercion.

Teachers have a rich arsenal at their disposal for coercing students.

However, there is one universal and reliable tool that has been proven to work. Educators have yet to think of anything better, and are unlikely to do so any time soon.

It's foolproof and produces immediate results. Moreover it's virtually painless. Many kids even enjoy it. To say nothing of their parents!

In case you were wondering, I am talking about *grades*.

Freedom at last...?

Should we give our students grades? That's a silly question. It's like asking if we should brush our teeth in the morning. Grades have always been with us and always will be; there's no avoiding them. School is inconceivable without them.

The fact that some humanitarian teachers like Shalva Amonashvili and Célestin Freinet have managed to do without grades doesn't mean a thing. It's a purely marginal phenomenon, if not outright heresy.

Article 15.3 of the Russian legislation “On Education” states that “an educational institution is entitled to choose its own evaluation system, the forms, procedures and recurrence of intermediate student



Photo from the author's archive



Photo from the author's archive

performance reviews.” The fact that in the 16 years of this law’s existence only a small number of schools have made use of it and switched to ungraded education is beside the point. This law undermines the sancta sanctorum of the Russian school—the five-grade scale. Or any grade scale, for that matter... At any rate, renouncing grades need no longer be seen as an act of heresy, or as an act of complacency worthy of Gogol’s famous character Manilov. No, it is now a legislated choice. We have been granted freedom, and it is up to us to decide what to do with it.

The question “Should we grade our students?” is a legitimate one. It is a question each and every teacher should ask himself or herself. This is a topic for serious and careful consideration, so both sides of the discussion deserve a chance to have a say here...

Pros and cons

The pro-grade position

The arguments of supporters of the traditional system are very convincing:

1. Without grades students will stop working. Yes, studying is hard work and our goal is to teach children to work. You can’t rely on “interest” alone; sometimes you need to let children know that certain things simply “have to be done.”
2. Without grades parents won’t be able to tell how their children are doing at school. It is much easier to give a label—3, 4 or 5—than to spend thirty minutes trying to explain what a certain student can or cannot do.
3. Grades provide a clear system of values for children. Without them, children will not understand what is acceptable behavior and what is unacceptable.

Without grades, poor students will have the same status as good students.

4. Grades teach children about real life. Without them poor students will think that “it’s all good” and be destined for a harsh wake-up call when, after graduation, they stumble upon the reality of adult life. It could lead to disaster.
5. The five-grade scale is simple and widely understood. In North America they use letter grades—A, B, C, etc.—but the principle is the same. Indeed, everyone in the countries of the former Soviet Union knows what it means to get a grade of *three*, and can tell the difference between a *four minus* and a *three plus*. The five-grade scale is in our blood.
6. Students themselves ask to be graded. It’s true.
7. Lastly, the idea of “renouncing” grades has a very romantic ring to it. But everyone knows that it’s utopian. Just as everyone knows where such utopias and other social experiments lead.

It’s not a good idea to tempt children. Perhaps grades are evil, but rejecting them altogether would be an even greater evil. Without honest and objective evaluation people would lose touch with reality.

The anti-grade position

And now for the arguments against grades:

1. The five-grade scale is a lie. What does a 4 or a 5 actually mean? Let’s refer to the text titled *Manual of the five-grade scale evaluation of academic achievement and behavior...*, ratified by the USSR People’s Commissar of Education back in 1944. This is the document we are supposed to use as a guide for grading students. It informs us that

The grade 4 is given when a student knows all of the required program material, understands it well and has thoroughly processed it. He gives the correct answers to questions (within the curriculum). He is confident and aware... He uses the standard Russian language in his written and oral work, and does not make any mistakes.

So what, in your opinion, is the difference between a 4 (good) and a 5 (excellent)?

2. In reality, the five-grade scale is actually a three-grade scale. A grade of 1 is an admission of outright failure on

the part of the teacher; a grade of 2 represents zero knowledge, a failure on the part of the student; so that leaves only 3, 4, and 5. That being said, the gap between a “weak” 3 and a “solid” 3 is enormous.

3. The five-grade scale is biased. Whereas in math and the Russian language there are at least some objective criteria (the number of mistakes on a test), with other subjects it’s all in the hands of the teacher. A *four* in one school may be a completely different grade from a *four* in the neighboring school—not to mention all the other schools in the entire country.
4. Grades divide up the student body. Poor, good, and excellent students are partitioned into separate groups, and the barriers between these groups are virtually insurmountable. It’s not unlike the system of castes in ancient India, with Brahmins and Untouchables.
5. Grades do not provide an incentive for learning. Fear of punishment, a stroke for the ego?—Yes. Incentive?—No. People are motivated only when they are interested, or when they can see the practical value of the knowledge offered. Grades interfere with both incentive and interest.
6. Grades destroy trust between a teacher and a student. Trust and sincerity are inherent in children. They expect the same from adults. And what do they get for all their heartfelt efforts? “Good boy, you get a 4 today.”
7. Finally, it’s not just the children’s minds that are damaged by grades. There are irreversible processes going on in the minds of adults, too. Think of the psychological damage they suffer when they are forced to evaluate everyone’s behavior on a five-grade scale basis. This is more than an educational problem—it’s a medical one!

It may seem that the arguments in support of grades are the more persuasive. However, there is one more argument against grading...

Giving grades is very unpleasant.

It’s awful to see the fear in the eyes of children who are facing possible failure. It’s awful to hear them beg “let me try just one more time” and “please don’t give me a 3.” It’s even worse to see a teacher’s firm hand writing low grades in

the grade-books of students who treat him with nothing but trust and even love...

Thus it makes sense to consider not only the children but ourselves, too. If we don’t want to lose the ability to feel, sympathize, and love when working in a school, we should surrender this right—the right to evaluate another human being.

Try going without grades for a week or two. Announce a short-term moratorium if you will. Everything will fall into place. If the students are interested in what you are telling them, they will listen without the grades. If not, there is no force in nature that will make them do so.

And at this point we’ll have to think about the quality of education, rather than about grades. And *that* is the whole point of the moratorium.

A different school

However, a moratorium can’t go on forever. You can’t reject the grading system without changing the school itself. It’ll only make things worse. For instance, how will a teacher make a student rewrite a quiz now? Will he try to persuade him, talk about diligence, and appeal to his conscience? Useless! It’s better to just grade them. Even distributing 2s is better than giving morality lectures.

This is only the declaration of a truce. We shall lay down our weapons. We are ready to talk.

The talks should be honest and consistent. Both the child’s and the grown-up’s interests should be respected.

A child’s interests?

1. A child wants to experience **strong sensations**.



Photo from the author's archive



Photo from the author's archive

Children are interested in everything: They like looking out of the window, studying pictures, listening to scary stories and funny anecdotes. So what do schools give them? Instead of interesting stories they get paragraphs and summaries; instead of experiments they get graphs and formulas; instead of free expression in their native language they get grammatical analyses of complex sentences; instead of observing nature they have to study Mendeleyev's table. Watching and feeling are replaced by abstractions!

If we want genuine cooperation from students we must speak their language, a language of feelings and sensations. In order really to understand something, an adult has to see it and feel it. All the more so with children. True understanding of concepts is constructed by synthesizing direct experience, observation, and description.

2. A child wants his work to produce **results**.

Children are naturally active. When they are young they need to climb on things, run, jump, assemble and disassemble toys. They need to play. As they become older it's important that their activities involve substance and produce results: the kind of results they can hold in their hands, show their friends, and boast about to their parents. It makes perfect sense: You did something and here's the result...

There can be no work without material results. The only exceptions to this rule are the socialist economy and the schools.

How can children see the results of their work? By solving an open-ended math problem; writing their own texts for literature class; conducting hands-on research in physics, chemistry, or biology; creating imaginary dialogues with people of different eras for history class... All the children's masterpieces—and I use the term without a hint of irony—can be published in a school journal or video-taped.

3. A child wants to **think for himself**.

Children like to ask questions. "How? Why? What for?" are all signs of natural curiosity. Unfortunately, this curiosity seems to evaporate after the first few grades. Everything is pre-digested at school—questions, answers, everything. All you need to do is listen, remember, and repeat.

True cooperation, a truly child-centered school, is a school where the teacher does not give ready answers. Moreover, he doesn't pose "ready questions" either. All he does is lead students to inquiry, investigation, and surprise. It's the student who must ask the question. If there's no question, there's nothing to answer... Without the unexpected there is no true thinking.

4. A child wants to **communicate**.

Teenagers go to school to hang out. Learning is secondary. And what happens? Communication is reduced to ten-minute breaks and the occasional note passed in class.

If we want to build a child-centered school we must give students plenty of time—as much as half the school day—to talk with one another and work in groups.

5. Children like to be **successful**.

Success, the feeling that "I can do it" and "I am doing well," is beneficial to our nervous system. No child or adult will work without it. Why then are there so many "unsuccessful" students in our schools? Do they not want to learn? No, that's not it. Every child wants to find out about new things, and every child appreciates praise. Every child *wants* to learn until he is told time and time again that he *can't*. He can't solve problems, or spell, or write stories...

To avoid undermining a child's self-confidence, and to maintain an atmosphere of success in the classroom, a school must reject the system that imposes universal requirements on all

students. Every child should get an assignment he is capable of completing, and a good grade when he completes it.

This, then, is the children's agenda. They want their work to be well organized and enjoyable; their thinking to be independent. Is this so different from what we grown-ups want?

A school built on this foundation is more than just a child-centered school. It's a school with a common, shared language, a dialogue between grown-up and child. It is a space with two connecting streams: the children's *interests* and *thinking* as the main value of adult culture. Admittedly, this doesn't bear much resemblance to school in the traditional sense. Taking a leaf from John Dewey and Célestin Freinet, let's call it a *workshop*, for in this school children are not only learning, they are working to construct knowledge on their own. They are crafting their own understanding.

Such schools don't need grades. There is simply no time for either teachers or students to think about such matters as grades. Sound improbable? Take a look at the material from the work of the Ark Lyceum. (pp. 24–25)

But what about progress reports? and final results?

For ongoing evaluation we use a List of Individual Achievements (or in our case the *Route Chart*). It's a list of the main steps and stages of work on a topic with "passes" marking the completion of said work.

The final result is a collection of a student's creative works (in our case it's *Almanacs* and the journal called *Lyceum Gardens*). This portfolio contains a student's most interesting works, the masterpieces carefully completed and collected throughout a semester or school year.

Farewell to arms!

Yes, school as we know it is all about coercion. And grades are the main source of that coercion. How can you talk about cooperation with a gun to your head? First we have to disarm and then we can work together.

However, the decision to stop using coercion raises another problem: the need to change the nature of schools, to rethink educational methods and content. Only then can we step back completely from



Photo from the author's archive

the five-grade scale and other scare tactics, leaving ourselves only a single tool for influencing our students.

Our Words: genuine talk, dialogue, conversation, communication.

And then we can breathe a sigh of relief and say, "Farewell to arms!"

References

- Amonashvili, S.A. (1989). Non-directive teaching and the humanization of the educational process. *Prospects: Quarterly review of education*, XIX(4), 581–590. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000859/085955eo.pdf#85984_on July 26, 2008.
- Freinet, C. (1993). *Education through work: A model for child centered learning*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press.



Photo from the author's archive

APPENDIX. Illustrative Curriculum from the Ark Lyceum

Science, elementary school

We ask the children to tell us in written form what they would like to learn about and are really interested in... Here are just a few of their questions:

- 1. Why do monkeys no longer evolve into people?
- 2. Where is the end of the Universe?
- 3. What is wind?
- 4. Why do people speak different languages? Why couldn't they decide on just one?
- 5. How do ducks survive in difficult environments?
- 6. Where did reflexes come from?
- 7. Why are some people geniuses and others not so smart?
- 8. Why do people like to eat different things?
- 9. Why do children look like their parents?
- 10. Why does the mixture of gases on the Sun cause warmth?
- 11. If humans are the most developed beings on the planet, why can't they breathe underwater?

What do we do with these whys?

Together with the children we search for the answers. Now this represents a true Science program.

Foreign language: French

“Let’s make a film and send it to France. You’ll talk about yourselves, talk about the school... In French of course.” Made the film, mailed it to France. They watched the film at the Marie Curie School in the Paris suburb of Bobigny. “Super! You’ve made a great film! We made one, too, and we’ll send it to you...” A month later we receive a film from Bobigny. Children of all colors send us a warm African/Asian hello: “Hello, Russians! My name is Adjani, my parents are from Mali. Dance is my passion. I love African cuisine... In other words, everything my Mom makes...”

We are near the end of the second quarter. Outside the window it’s always rain or snow, it gets dark at 4:00 in the afternoon, and we have a math test next week. And here suddenly we have passion and dancing, a dazzling smile on a wide black face, and African cuisine...

“We are going to make a video tour of our school and send it to them”, the fifth-graders say.

Made it, mailed it.

And no one asked about the grades...

If teachers who read *Thinking Classroom* want to write to Russian kids from the Ark lyceum, we’ll send you a film about our life, too!

Primeval History

We don’t just study history.

We travel with the children in a Time Machine. For real. One of our first trips is to a primitive society.

What do you think is the first thing fifth-graders want to know about hunter-gatherer societies?

How they raised their children: what was OK, and what warranted punishment...

(Thanks to the classic work by the American anthropologist Margaret Mead on the islands of Eastern Samoa we know a lot about child rearing in a primitive society).

Like true travelers, the children write a travelogue...

Here on the island the children start helping the adults at a young age. They do many different things: For example, girls as young as two help by sweeping and placing fruit cut up by their mothers into clay pots, while two-year-old boys gather firewood. By the age of five boys are climbing trees as tall as 30 meters. ... Older children keep an eye on their younger brothers and sisters. (Den Nem)

And then the students put themselves into the place of “those people” for a while and write letters to us, the people of the 21st century. Here is an example:

Dear people on the mainland!

I hope you get my letter, which I am sending in a bottle by sea. I am writing to you from one of the islands of Eastern Samoa. I am ten years old. I have many brothers and sisters and of course a mother and father. Older kids raise the younger kids here. I am always taking care of the young kids, teaching them about things, feeding them and fetching water. Sometimes I climb up a palm tree for coconuts...(Lyusya Zubova)

Do these fifth-graders have time to think about grades when they are gathering firewood or climbing 30-meter palm trees?

Modern History

Russian History in the 9th Grade. Let’s set aside our textbooks. After all, we are living among people who took part in, even created, this history. Let’s ask them about “the old days”: life in the times of Stalin and Khrushchev, the period of “stagnation”. What were our parents and grandparents like when they were fifteen like we are now? What were their lives like? What did they think about? What did they believe in? Such was the beginning of a two-month project in our History class, which we called “Through the Eyes of a Teenager”...

The majority of our research was devoted to the years of World War II. Clearly we were not talking about the war as portrayed in history textbooks—statistics, battle charts, and the heroic deeds of the people—nor even the war depicted in stories told by veterans (for the simple, sad reason that these people now are over ninety years old...) We were talking about a different, unexpected war. A war survived by ten- to fifteen-year-olds. There were no battle stories here, only “ordinary life” on the home front and under occupation.

During the war my grandmother and her parents lived in the center of Moscow, on Molchanovka Street. Her parents worked in a factory and when there was a lot to do they spent the night at work. At the time my grandmother was five years old, yet she stayed home alone. When an air-raid warning sounded she would take her little backpack, which held all the items she needed, and go to the bomb shelter in the Arbatskaya metro station (Dasha Odintsova)

During the war my grandmother lived near the city of Chelyabinsk, in the village of Nizhnyaya Petropavlovka. Her mother, my great-grandmother, had died a month before the war. Her father was conscripted into a forced labor brigade. Five children were left alone. My grandmother, who was the oldest, was fifteen at the time...

They had nothing to eat, especially in the spring. But they wouldn't touch the seed potatoes. They knew that if there was nothing to plant it would only make things worse. They were starving, but like all families—even a family consisting of five children— they were obligated to pay regular property taxes: 450 liters of milk per cow a year. The cows, however, didn't always produce milk...

There were no matches or soap in the village. They would leave a stick burning for the night so as to have something to light the stove in the morning... (Sasha Kurbatova)

My grandmother lived in the town of Bogoroditsk in near the city of Tula. The Germans invaded the town in November of 1941... People were scared, as they'd heard a lot about the viciousness of the fascists. They hardly ever left their homes. When a woman went outside she took her children with her, just so if something happened they would all be together...

“Once,” said my grandmother, “I met a German soldier in the street and he gave me a piece of candy. I took it but I wouldn't eat it. Then, using gestures, the soldier explained to me that he'd left a child back in Germany, and that he didn't want to fight or kill people...” (Vitya Kovalev)

My grandmother told me this story: “In 1941 I was twelve years old. We lived in the village of Buzlanovo, near Krasnogorsk... The Germans were approaching. They started bombing. The other children and I ran to the trenches. Grandmother Masha left her pig behind and left the doors wide open. All she took was the samovar. We would sit in the trenches and wait for word that the battle was over. Sometimes we had to spend the night there. The old women would pray to God, and we would laugh because almost nobody believed in God then...” (Dasha Lysenko)

The five-year-old (Dasha Odintsova’s grandmother) taking her little backpack to the bomb shelter; the burning sticks hidden for the night by Sasha Kurbatova’s grandmother; the candy that Vitya Kovalev’s grandmother refused to eat and, finally, Dasha Lysenko’s great-great-grandmother Masha with her pig and her samovar: that’s the war for us now.

This isn’t just a history lesson. This is an attempt to revive something that died in 20th century Russia: the memory of our ancestors, the genetic memory of our people. There were ripple effects from our project: One girl went to another city for her vacation with the specific purpose of talking to her grandmother. A boy made an international phone call to his grandmother. Another girl brought in a letter from the front written by her great granduncle, and the death notice his family had received a mere month later... One grandmother decided to write a detailed and comprehensive memoir. Grandparents told their grandkids things they had never told their own children. As a result, the parents of our ninth-graders learned something for themselves, too. So what is this? Is it history, or is it something more?



Photo from the author's archive

Reaching for the Middle: Observations of Two American Students from Generational Poverty



Norah Booth teaches Language Arts in a middle school in Sunnyside Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona. She taught English and Journalism at the alternative high school in the same district for five years.

Children in poverty are most often taught by teachers with middle class backgrounds and expectations, who have little comprehension of poverty class values and experiences.

These realities can leave teachers unable to communicate with their students in basic ways. I do not always, or even often, know how to communicate the “hidden” information of middle class values (Payne, 2001) to my students in ways that translate into meaning for them. And yet current research indicates that teaching this information is precisely what my students need (Payne, 2001).

“Ana, please return this book to the library shelf in the back of the room.” The twelve-year-old girl gives me a baffled look. My students are laughing loudly at the notion that our few bookshelves comprise a library. For my students, libraries are dedicated buildings housing row after row of books. Most of these children do not have even small shelves of books at home. Since there is no

In saying that education is abstract for many students from poverty, we mean that it is not part of the concrete sensory world that is found in generational poverty. Living in poverty requires a mindset of survival, and because education provides long-term benefits, not immediate ones, it does not have concrete value in the present if you are struggling to survive. Also, the vocabulary and practices in education are abstract. Education is about words and documents. If you are surviving from day to day, there is little room for these abstractions.

Claire Pentacost
Manager, Training Support
aha! Process, Inc.

reference in their experience for an individual collection of books being called a library, just one example of many language roadblocks—and we are all speaking English—I make a note to myself: Figure out how to convey this concept to the children without insulting them.

A report (*Five Key Points for the 2005 Summit*) prepared by the Chronic Poverty Research Center estimates that, worldwide, between 300 and 420 million people are trapped in poverty for much of their lives. Thirteen million American children live in poverty today, if the federal baseline for measuring poverty is accepted. Some consider that a more realistic accounting of impoverishment would more than double this figure to 28 million (Fass & Cauthen, 2007). About 40 percent of Americans will experience poverty at some point in their lives. Of these, only a small percentage come from generational poverty, defined as being in poverty for two generations or longer (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2007). The majority of children in these low-income families have parents without a college or university education (Douglas-Hall & Chau, 2007).

Long-term goals, such as college graduation, do not create short-term benefits in generational poverty. If poverty values are based on survival, college graduation is an intangible because it has no immediate benefit to survival (Payne, 2001). When students are constantly taking care of immediate needs, such as a sick sibling, working relatives who need a babysitter, all-important family gatherings, or caring for their own children, education is an abstraction that cannot compete.

For five years I worked at an alternative education program known as STAR (Students Taking Alternate Roads) in an urban setting near the Mexican border. With students between the ages of 14 and 22, our demographic was 97 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Native American, and

1 percent other. Better than 80 percent of our students qualified for free or reduced-fee lunches, a federal indicator of low socioeconomic status in the school community.

Our students came to us because they had failed in school for a variety of reasons, including pregnancy, truancy, drug and alcohol abuse, learning disabilities, emotional issues, health problems, and trouble with the law. As a group, they shared a high dropout rate and a habit of skipping school.

In an attempt to learn from the source, I selected two students for observation based on culture and gender. They exhibited the spotty success with school, characterized by poor attendance and a history of dropping out, that suited my criteria for study.

My students had returned, older than is typical for high school, to try to beat the demographic odds.

I asked them to tell me about their lives, what brings them to school, what makes them drop out, what helps them succeed. Each expressed full cooperation and enthusiasm for my project.

My thinking was that if I understood better what gets in my students’ path to graduation, perhaps I would be better able to communicate with them and assist them in that important goal.

Milton

Milton (his self-selected pseudonym), Hispanic, was 19 years old at the time of the study. Hispanic male students in our district have only a 50 percent chance of graduating from high school within four years, (Maddock-Pea & Utter, 2008) which correlates with national statistics for this demographic (The American Community, 2004).

Milton showed up in my English classroom—

occasionally. He became very angry with me when he did not pass his first quarter in my class. I showed him his attendance record that confirmed he had missed 15 of 30 classes.

He complained that he was working, rising at 4 a.m. to join a construction crew. He got off work around 1 p.m., but sometimes his job site was far from the school, making it impossible for him to come to my afternoon class on time. He said—and it was true—that he had completed all his class work. I described the constraints I was required to apply because of state attendance mandates, along with my own belief that my students learn best in my classroom.

The next quarter, Milton arrived on time the first day. And the day after that, and the next. I asked what had changed. His parents, he explained, had decided to allow him to complete his high school education without having to hold a paying job. “My mother wants me to be the first in her family to finish high school,” he said. Over the next few months he would often complain to me, “Miss, what am I doing here? I could be making good money doing construction.”

I thought Milton had little chance to succeed in his goal of completing eight high school credits—the equivalent of a year and a half of regular high school—in just five months, the amount of time his



© Alan Crawford, photo

parents had agreed to support him. It meant that he had to enroll in both day and evening schools and maintain excellent attendance. I feared that economics would dictate his dropping out, as it does for so many Hispanic youth whose families rely on the income from their children's work.

My questions at the start of the study were: Is Milton's desire to please his mother sufficient to propel him through the intense schedule he has set for himself for the coming months? Will his parents be financially able to keep their promise? Will he be able to make up so many credits in such a short time? As Milton shared his story I began to understand the circumstances of his failure to graduate.

Milton and his two younger siblings are first generation Americans. His parents married in Jalisco, Mexico, and entered the U.S. illegally in the mid-80s, but gained citizenship in the 1990s amnesty. His father earned an engineering degree in Mexico, but now works as a construction laborer, which accounted for Milton's job. The money Milton contributed to the family paid for clothing for his younger brother and for household utilities.

The reason he had failed to complete high school was that his parents returned to Guadalajara, Jalisco, to give end-of-life care to their own parents. Milton spent two years in high school in Mexico. When the family returned, none of the credits he earned in Mexico were accepted in the U.S.

Milton demonstrated a strong work ethic. His goal was to start his own framing company.

The fact that he was essentially redoing high school explained his attitude that school was something he didn't really need. Because he had already been performing well in the adult work world, high school was like a step back into adolescence. It remained to be seen whether he would complete his coursework. I appreciated that he wanted to please his mother, but was that enough to keep him connected to a program and schedule that did not interest him?

After a brief flurry of work, Milton started slacking off in my class, and I heard the same from other teachers. He was usually seen hanging around a group of girls on campus, and he wrote in an intention paper for me that his goal was to graduate from high school and marry a particular girl. Milton said he was in school solely because his mother wanted him to get his diploma. "I wouldn't be here," he repeated, without her having this expectation for him.

STAR has an evening school. Milton had given himself a schedule that started with a 7:30 am class, several hours later than he used to start work, and finished after the first evening class at 5:30 pm. He was taking six and seven classes per quarter. He also planned to attend a weekend academy for English credit, but decided against that due to the cost. Instead, he tripled up on English classes

at STAR. His goal was to graduate from STAR in June, 2007. He had 12 credits and needed 20. The 8 credits he was short would have taken about a year and a half to complete in a regular high school.

When I first started my observations, I feared that a likely scenario for Milton was that some setback that would interfere with his plan—either frustration at his demanding schedule, or financial pressure at home. The flaw in his plan was that it needed to work perfectly in order to succeed because of the tight timeline.

"Why am I in school?" he would ask. "I could be making good money, Miss." Milton at times treated school as a joke. He did not always take assignments seriously, sometimes writing silly, if coherent, responses to questions. He completed the letter of the assignments, but not always the spirit. I worried that a key ingredient for his success, self-motivation, was missing.

Lilliana

My second subject was a 21-year-old Native American woman, a member of a local tribe, making her final attempt to complete high school. In Arizona, students are eligible for free high school education until they reach the age of 22. Lilliana lacked the credits she needed to graduate, and, as with Milton, required an intense schedule to fulfill her stated desire of becoming a high school graduate.

Graduation rates for Native American students in Arizona, who are 6.5 percent of the population (1.2 percent nationwide), are about 45 percent (Diplomas Count Arizona, 2006). Lilliana had become somewhat of an expert on the issues that keep students like her from completing their education. As she explained, "There are many reasons why students don't come to school. You have doctors' appointments, or your child's sick, you don't have a sitter." But she acknowledges that not every reason is a good one. "Stupid reasons are that you just stay home and make that choice not to come. I know I have made those choices and that's why I'm still in school now. I know my mistakes and know what my better choices are, and that I should make those choices, but I don't. I choose not to choose those better choices."

Some of her choices involved Lilliana with the authorities. "I started out, and my first year I got suspended. It was for smoking [marijuana] and I was put on probation. I violated my probation, ended up in juvie [the juvenile justice system] for a couple of weeks. When I got out I came here [alternative school]. It was in and out. I got pregnant, stopped coming to school, came back, then dropped out again because I didn't want to leave my daughter because I didn't trust anybody



else watching her. Now it's all on me now because my daughter doesn't need that constant care."

Lilliana seemed aware that her behavior is directly connected to her own upbringing. "My father has many children and my mother, she has another daughter. I did not grow up with any of them. I wasn't really with my mom a lot. I was with my grandmother because my mother was off doing her thing. I'm not saying I'm grown because I'm still a kid, but there are things I had to learn quick because my mother, she wasn't there, and my grandmother couldn't do a lot of things because she was older."

For many students in poverty, taking responsibility for family is a normal part of growing up. "My older cousins had kids and I was the one taking care of them while they ran errands or whatever, so I think I grew up a lot quicker than what I was supposed to because my mom wasn't there for me. She was there, but not as a mother should have been. My grandmother took care of me and I lived from family member to family member. I don't want that for my daughter. I want her to have a stable home, and not have to be moving from place to place."

When I asked Lilliana if her grandmother was still alive, she began to cry. "I lost her a couple of years ago now, but I still get really sad over it. She was like my mom. [My mother] helps me somewhat, but my mom's getting frustrated with me too. We had a talk and she told me she wishes that she would have pushed me more to go to school or to do the things that people at that age should do, like after 16, go out and get a job, but I didn't



have to do any of that with my grandmother. “I didn’t get everything I wanted, but I got everything I needed. I didn’t have to worry about anything because I was grandma’s girl. I got it. Now that she’s passed on, it’s still hard for me. When I was with the baby’s father he took care of me and of us. And now we’re not together any more. I was with him for six years. He [sees his daughter] once in a great while, at his convenience, whenever he wants to come around and call. But I don’t bother with him.”

Lilliana lives with a new boyfriend.

“Things are good between me and him. I’m getting [my daughter] situated in school. Once she’s in school, I’ll be starting back in school. It will be easier. I won’t have to worry about somebody taking care of her. I’ll send her off to school and come to school myself.”

I asked Lilliana about her work experience.

“I have worked summer jobs through the Nation [her tribe], but not really a ‘job’ job. That’s what I’m saying about my mom. I rely on her. When I want something I ask, ‘Hey, can you get this for me?’ and she says, ‘Well, you need to get a job.’ I know I need to do this, but it’s hard. I know I need to do these things, but it’s just hard. Being taken care of all this time and not having to worry about having to get a job or anything like that [makes it] hard [to now go out and get work].

“That’s the hardest part for me, money and trying to get a job and not having no experiences that it’s scary for me. And I want to work. I want to support my daughter, I do. It’s just school’s a burden on me too. I have school, I have my daughter. I want a job, I want money, I want to support her and not have to do it through the DES [government help] and all this and that. But I need to finish school first before I can do that. So for now I think, this is just temporary while I finish school then I can go get a job or something.”

The difference in outcomes for these two students was pronounced.

I was not the only teacher who doubted that Milton would graduate. His teachers were all pleasantly surprised in June when he put on his cap and gown and joined our graduation. Milton’s

interest in forming his own business led to a teacher introducing him to CAD, or computer aided design. He immediately recognized this as a skill that would help him in his framing business. This formerly reluctant student decided that he wanted to attend the local college and get an associates’ degree in business. He found his own incentive to complete high school.

I met his very proud parents at the graduation ceremony. Truly, the kind of support they provided was essential to his achievement. His desire to make his mother proud was important, but more critical was his own comprehension, in the luxury of the time afforded by his parents, that education had far-reaching impact, and that, while the reward was not immediate, graduation was a viable goal. Given that support, Milton could grasp for himself the abstract value of education.

Lilliana also attended the graduation, but as a spectator. Her chance to reach her goal for high school graduation slipped away. Lilliana had none of the support Milton had. There was no parent who possessed and valued a college degree to model herself after. There was no parent to be proud of her for being the first in the family to graduate from high school. Necessity, and a pattern of abandoning her long-term goals for survival, won out, at least as far as her stated goal of graduating from high school. She did not live in an environment that directly supported pursuit of long-term educational goals. There was no bridge to educational success created for Lilliana. Education remained an abstraction with no immediate benefit, which did not fit into her pattern of survival.

When I think about my study, the following summarizes what I learned that might help any teacher:

- Statistics are not students. Making assumptions about students based on numbers is not beneficial for anyone.
- Parental support can make the difference in student success or failure. It is often difficult for students with parents who lack a college education to understand the benefits of a college degree. Without the experience of higher education, parents are often unable to model the behaviors necessary for success in college or university, and also may not possess the skills

and knowledge required to assist their children in navigating the intricacies of the paperwork and successive deadlines for college admission.

- Immigrants have high incentive to succeed. As a group, they are highly invested in changing their lives.
- The more understanding that a teacher has about the realities of living in poverty, the better that teacher will understand the necessity of making explicit the hidden assumptions, beliefs and unwritten rules of the middle class where these govern success in school. For example, the ability to use standard language registers in speaking and writing is a middle class skill that can be learned (Payne, 2001). The unseen rule that students in poverty often do not understand is that this skill is required for most better paying jobs. Helping them make that connection provides a practical, relevant rationale for learning standard English.
- Alternative schools must have the flexibility to help non-traditional students.
- Finally, as a nation, expanding affordable higher education opportunities for minorities would help reduce the abstraction of higher education for students in poverty by increasing incentives and creating more pathways to that goal. Many students in poverty are very aware of the cost of college. At an early age, they can automatically conclude there is no hope for advanced education because they know their parents are not saving for their college degrees.

I am grateful to my students for teaching me about their lives and making my study possible. I offer these profiles in the hope that other teachers will seek to know more about the constraints their students in poverty face. Asking difficult questions was easier than I expected. My study and the students’ answers changed our relationship in positive ways. I believe it helped them see their situation more clearly and realistically, and it helped me see the need to invest in each student the listening that leads to understanding. In the future, I believe I



will be in a better position to provide the support that might be critical to my students’ success.

References

- Chronic Poverty Research Center. (2005). *Five key points for the 2005 summit*. Retrieved from [http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/CPRC_briefing-UN_Summit\(LR\).pdf](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/CPRC_briefing-UN_Summit(LR).pdf) on August 6, 2008.
- Douglas-Hall, A. & Chau, M. (2007). “Parents’ low education leads to low income, despite full time employment.” National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_786.html on August 6, 2008.
- The Graduation Project 2006*. Diplomas Count. Arizona, Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/media/ew/dc/2006/az_SGB06.pdf on June 6, 2008.
- Fass, S. & Cauthen, N.K. (2007). *Who are American’s poor children? The official story*. National Center for Children in Poverty. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/publications/pub_787.html on August 6, 2008.
- Maddock-Pea, D. & Utter, N.J. (2008). *Project Graduation: A call to action*. Blueprint for Student Achievement, Sunnyside Unified School District. Retrieved from <http://www.susd12.org/node/1229> on August 6, 2008.
- National Center for Children in Poverty. *Child poverty and economic hardship: Ten important questions*. Retrieved from <http://www.nccp.org/faq.html#question4> on June 1, 2008.
- Payne, R.K. (2005). *A framework for understanding poverty*. Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc.
- U.S. Census Bureau. *The American community—Hispanics 2004*. Retrieved from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2007pubs/acs-03.pdf> on June 6, 2008.

Playing and Growing Taller Than Themselves: The Use of Puppets for Developing Language in a First-grade Library Reading Program



Vida Zuljevic is the Teacher-Librarian at Robert Frost Elementary School in Pasco, WA, USA.

A teacher came up to a first grader, gave her a rolled-up piece of fabric, and asked her to hold her “baby” for a moment. The child cradled it carefully and started moving her hands in the motion we adults use when trying to help a little baby go to sleep. Other children watched.

“May I hold it?” whispered the girl sitting next to the student holding the piece of fabric.

“Yes,” she said. “But be careful, don’t wake up the baby.” She handed the cloth baby to her friend with uttermost care, as if it were a real baby. Then, of course everybody wanted to hold the baby for a moment. One boy, who was usually very quiet, took the baby and started singing a lullaby.

When the teacher returned and wanted to thank the girl who was taking care of her “baby,” the baby had already acquired a daddy and mommy, grandparents, aunts and uncles, had been to the store and to daycare, had had a poopy diaper, had discovered it didn’t like broccoli, and had displayed all sorts of other behaviors that were stored in these children’s background knowledge about real babies. Through play that brought this inanimate object to life, the first-graders communicated with each other, stretched their vocabularies, and enacted and verified the meanings of what they knew about real-life situations involving babies.

The teacher smiled. She held her “baby” up and, moving the rolled-up piece of fabric in a goodbye motion, said

to her, “Wave goodbye to your friends.” Everybody waved goodbye and the teacher continued her lesson about taking care of babies.

Many researchers underline the importance and the essential role of play in children’s development. In Vygotsky’s words, children make sense of the world around them through imaginative play, and the opening vignette illustrates this very well. Puppets have the power of transformation and can capture children’s interest because they offer possibilities limited only by imagination. Teachers who recognize the power of puppets bring into their classroom a tool that can truly help their students build background knowledge or develop understanding of the content taught, enhance their language and reading skills, develop social skills, and more.

In this article I describe a qualitative case study designed to explore the use of puppets in a library reading program with first-grade students. Three reading conditions were examined, including (a) the teacher reading with no puppets, and subsequently students retelling with no puppets; (b) the teacher reading with puppets and subsequently students retelling with no puppets; and (c) the teacher reading with puppets and subsequently students retelling with puppets. After each of the three scenarios, students also responded individually to comprehension questions. The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What differences, if any, can be seen in the attitudes of participating students toward the retelling of the folktales in the three different approaches?
2. What differences, if any, are apparent in students’ answers to the comprehension questions?
3. Do the participating students primarily use vocabulary from the book that was read, or do they attempt to retell the story in their own words?

4. Does students’ understanding of literary elements (characters, plot, setting, etc.) as demonstrated in their discussion following the reading, differ among the three approaches? If so, how?
5. Are there differences in the ways students communicate with each other after each of the three approaches to reading?

Research support for play-like literacy activities

Research on child development has strongly supported the use of play-like activities for early literacy learning in elementary-school settings. According to Piaget (1962), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1973), and Smilansky (1968; 1990) children of early elementary-school age are still actively engaging in symbolic, imaginative, and pretend play. As construed by constructivist theorists, the learning process depends upon several equally important factors, including environment, culture, and background knowledge. Learning is manifested when children connect previous knowledge with new information and subsequently use those connections to construct fitting mental pictures in their minds. In order for such learning to occur, it is important to organize instruction that involves students not only intellectually, but also physically, emotionally, and socially.

Research in neuro-psychology and learning strongly supports play with puppets as an educational strategy (Peyton, Bass, Burke, & Frank, 2005). Wilson (1999) wrote of the role of hands in human development. He asserted that the use of human hands has a direct connection with learning. Wilson recommended puppets as excellent tools for boosting brain development simply by enhancing communication between the hand and brain. Neurologist and senior researcher McLean (1990) affirmed that play has a primary role in the evolution of mammals and may therefore constitute a fundamental aspect of human socialization. Bredikyte’s (2002) longitudinal study on Dialogical Drama with Puppets (DDP) as a method of fostering verbal creativity in young children confirmed her hypothesis that the “method promotes development of the verbal/communicational systems and intensifies the imaginative and cognitive processes,” in young children (p. 38).

Biegler (1998) conducted a four-week study of reading comprehension with kindergarten students in which some children received reading instruction enhanced by role-playing, puppetry, story telling, and pantomiming. The results indicated a significant improvement in student comprehension of texts presented in a manner that involved the active participation of children via one of these listed techniques, as opposed to book reading by the teacher followed by a related art project.

The body of research specifically related to using puppets and drama in teaching English language learners, although moderate, can be summarized in Canepa’s (1994) attempt to explain the success experienced with her ELLs: “Once behind the scenes, they find the courage to speak up and take the risks involved, especially when they’ve created a voice that doesn’t even sound like their own” (p. 12).

Setting and data collection

The research site was an elementary school in the Northwestern part of the United States. It serves 550 students, of which 81% receive free or reduced-fee lunch. Sixty-one percent of the students in the school were in bilingual transitional programs (Spanish and Russian). The school had approximately 15% immigrant students and 15% students with special needs. The sample selected for this study was one specialist group (D group) of first-grade students, consisting of 22 students from four different classes. These groups were formed by the teachers to





Photo from the author's archive

mix the children from different classes for participation in P.E., Art, Music and Library activities, taught by subject specialists.

The researcher used anecdotal observations, audio and video recording, and comprehension probes. Data collection included videotaping three 45-minute sessions in the library consisting of two parts each. During the first 15 to 20 minutes, the librarian (researcher herself) read and discussed a folktale with the students. The second part of the 45-minute session consisted of 25 to 30 minutes of small group work. Groups of five or six students sat at tables in the library and were asked to retell the folktales to/with their peers. The retelling was audiotaped. Also, during this part of the session, research assistants called students one by one to the back tables, and asked them to respond to five comprehension questions. Their answers were entered into the recording sheets (Appendix A).

Following the activities in the library, eleven 30-minute classroom observations were conducted in each of the four first-grade classrooms. The participating students—five or six students from D specialist group in each first-grade class—were observed with the goal of collecting data regarding their (a) engagement with the folktale books displayed, (b) communication with their peers from the study sample and also with other classmates,

and (c) language use during classroom free reading time.

Validity and trustworthiness

In this study, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence—the video and audio transcripts, the observation field notes, the comprehension questions—to enhance construct validity. For the purpose of enhancing the internal validity, a pattern matching technique was implemented—patterns in the behaviors of the first-grade participants in this study, as related to the three reading conditions, were matched with what the literature said about the topic and what the researcher had assumed before the study begun.

According to Maykut and Morehouse (1994), trustworthiness refers to the degree to which others can have confidence in the results of the research.

Trustworthiness in qualitative research can be controlled and maintained by involving “another set of eyes” in observing and analyzing the data collected by the researcher and the research team. Peer debriefing and triangulation by observation (Creswell, 1998; Horsburgh, 2003; Li, 2004; Padgett, 1998) were used to enhance trustworthiness of this study.

Data analysis

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was selected as the main analytical method in the present study for several reasons. First, the analysis of this case was geared toward allowing data to generate ideas that emerged naturally from the activity of the research. Second, the constant comparison method facilitated the development of tentative categories (Merriam, 1998) that were subsequently compared to other categories and events. In looking at the data, the researcher was particularly interested in ascertaining which of the three conditions best motivated students to communicate with their peers when asked to retell the folktale.

Codes for proficiency in demonstrating observed skills were assigned as follows: LP for low proficiency, MP for medium proficiency, and HP for high proficiency. Students' behavior during retelling was coded as IC for initiates retelling, LGR for leads group retelling, PGR for participates in a group retelling, NC for students who were quiet and did not communicate with their group, and

RGR for refuses to participate in a group retelling. Spanish-speaking students were assigned codes S1 and S2 because they came from the two Spanish bilingual first-grade classes. Russian-speaking students were assigned code R and English-speaking students code E.

Findings

The results of the analysis indicate a difference in student demonstration of literacy skills under the three different reading conditions described. Student retelling, comprehension, and communication skills improved with the two strategies involving puppets as a reading and retelling scaffold.

Retelling

Two excerpts from the retelling activity illustrate the difference in students' retelling under the first (with no puppets) and last (with puppets) reading conditions. Students' names are represented by their first initials. The following excerpt from a retelling of *Little Red Hen* did not involve puppets.

W: *One summer day, the little red hen found a grain of wheat. "Wheat," said the little red hen. How....*

N: *No, no, no. You said it wrong.*

W: *Never mind that.*

N: (laughing) *Never mind that. One summer day the Little Red Hen found a grain of wheat. "A grain of wheat," said the little red hen to herself. "I will plant it." What about that?*

W: *Never mind that! Of what do you think?*

N: *Yeah, that she took that.*

W: *No.*

N: *Yes.*

[This retelling was interrupted by one student's walking away from his group. The conversation then shifted in an entirely different direction.]

J: *The Little Red Hen. One summer day.*

N: *I don't box today.*

G: *Wait, Tuesday when you remember?*

N: *I only go boxing on Monday.*

G: *Monday, to be.*

N: *What do you do on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesdays?*

When the reading included acting with the puppets, and the students were given a set of puppets to use when reenacting the story for their peers, the videotape captured a completely different level of



Photo from the author's archive

interest and retelling skills. Following is a brief excerpt from the videotaped retelling of *Little Red Riding Hood* by one of the Spanish groups (S1).

D: *And she put the cap down. And she go in the bed. Then the Little Red Hood, she knocked on the door. Then she said,*

P: *"Why do you have big eyes?"*

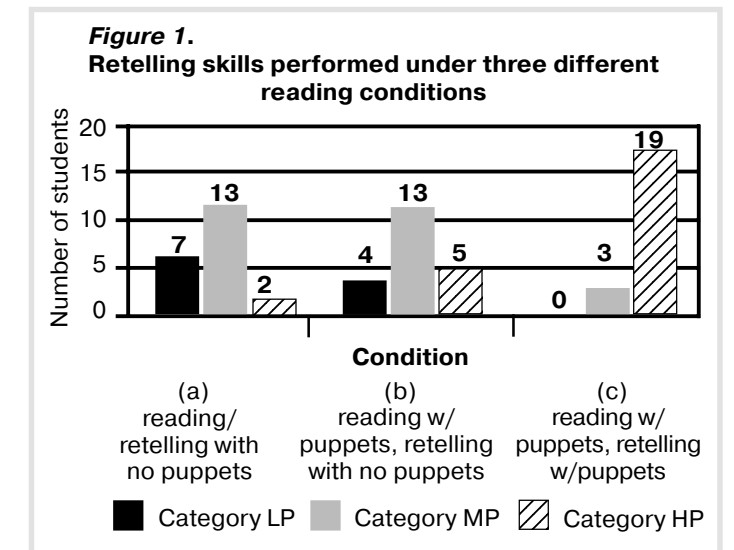
P: *"Why do you have a big mouth?"*

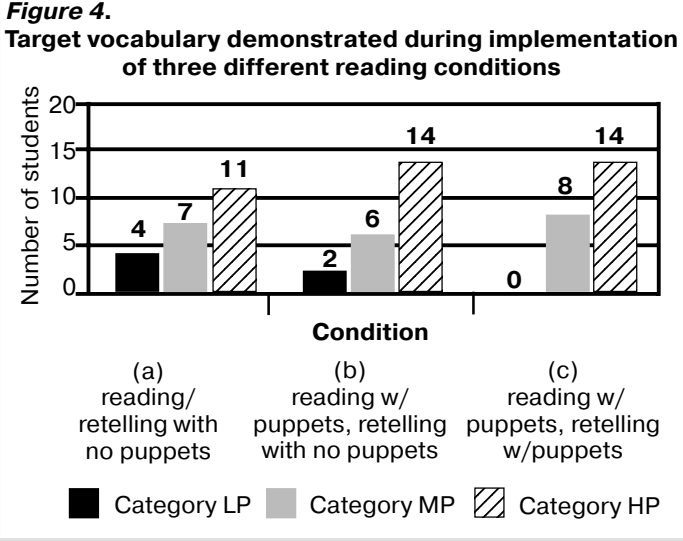
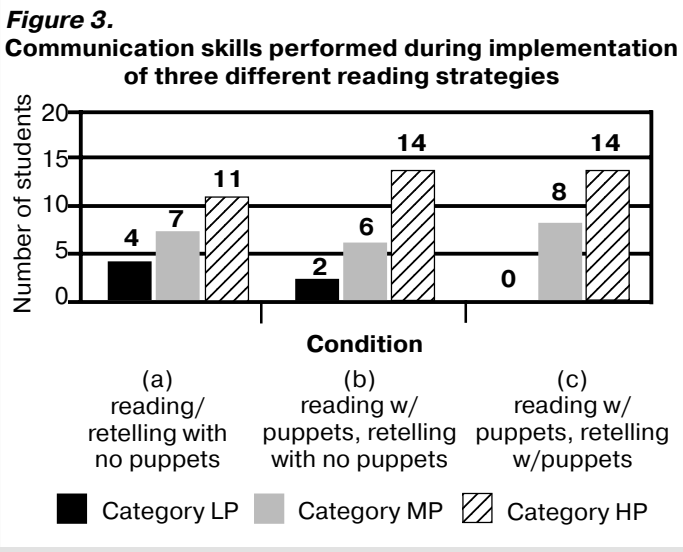
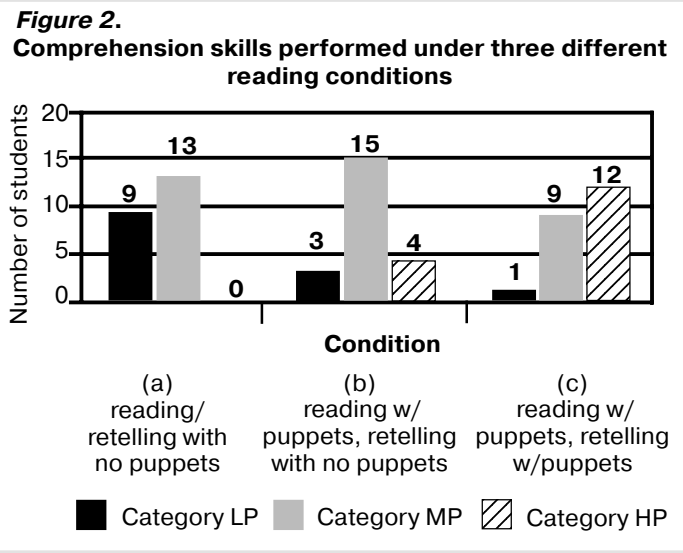
B: *"To eat you more—so good."*

D: *And then one man hears. And then run, run, run to the house and he opens the door...*

The full version of the above retelling was very detailed. The group tried to incorporate as many words from the story as they knew. They helped each other by adding words or moving puppets, and reminded one another about the voice inflections if someone forgot that the wolf, for example, has a deeper voice than Little Red Riding Hood.

Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of students in each category of retelling





proficiency across the three reading conditions implemented.

Comprehension

In this study, reading comprehension was examined through responses to five comprehension questions formulated according to Bloom’s taxonomy (1956) of skills in the cognitive domain. (see Appendix A as an example). Figure 2 illustrates comprehension skills performed under three different reading conditions.

Communication

Various researchers (Rogoff, 1990; Wells, 1999) perceive social interaction among students in their classroom as one of the central factors in literacy learning. Figure 3 illustrates students’ observed proficiency in communicating with their peers across the three reading conditions.

Vocabulary

Kame’enui, Dixon, and Carnine (1987) posited that vocabulary can be defined as either expressive or receptive. Both types were examined in this study. More specifically, expressive language was evaluated through observation, and receptive language (understanding of target words) was noted in comprehension probes. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of students in the three different categories for target vocabulary understanding across reading conditions.

Conclusions

Several conclusions were drawn from the data analysis:

1. Student retellings were much richer in detail, and included references to literary elements of the folktales, when retelling included puppets.
2. Students’ responses to the comprehension questions were slightly improved when the puppets were included in reading and showed additional improvement when the students were given opportunities to use the puppets in retelling.
3. Students worked intensively with groups of their peers when they had puppets to use in the retelling of the folktales. Under the first two conditions, students felt more comfortable



working in pairs and retelling the folktale to their partners.

4. Students’ understanding of the English target vocabulary varied according to their different linguistic capabilities.

Limitations of the study

One potential limitation of this study could be the time of year when the study was conducted. Because it was the end of the school year, with many possible distractions to the regular schedule, we attempted to ensure with the homeroom teachers that the library reading sessions and scheduled observations remained on time and were uninterrupted. The teachers were very cooperative and willing to adapt their schedules to fulfill the needs of the study.

Another limitation could be the number of bilingual students in the sample. The study did not specifically address English language learners but rather all children, regardless of their native language.

The researcher’s participation in the study as the primary individual teaching the lessons offered numerous benefits. However, this same factor could also pose a limitation or biasing factor, considering her knowledge of the students, personal love of puppetry, and her additional work with the students as the puppetry teacher at the study site. To

minimize the impact of this factor on the validity of this study, the researcher had research assistants observe students during the library reading sessions, as well as in the classrooms, to enable triangulation of data, thus protecting the validity of the results.

Recommendations for further research

Studies that examine the repetitive reading and retelling of folktales with puppets would provide an opportunity to better measure the impact on vocabulary learning with elementary-age students. Research on reading, retelling, and puppetry that includes student populations of English language learners is especially needed. Literature focused on the use of puppets in reading instruction is limited. Further research holds the potential for more specific direction in the development of reading programs using such props. The goal of the reading program remains the same: enhancing students’ interest in reading, and strengthening their comprehension, retelling, and communication skills. Research into specific skills, developed with or without puppets as a reading scaffold, would be of great benefit to those interested in innovative approaches to teaching reading and developing related skills. Perhaps studies of this sort

could make the case for adding puppetry and other fine arts to reading programs throughout the K–12 curriculum.

Application in the classroom

The results of this study offer promise to classroom teachers that play, specifically play involving puppets, carries the potential for increasing students’ interest in reading and improving retelling skills. The results of this study also indicate that, by allowing their students to play with puppets, teachers would help the development of communication skills and reading comprehension. Providing a simple puppet stage and some puppets to start with might engage most of the students and motivate them to use language freely, to check on their understanding by engaging in conversation with their peers, and to expand on their previous knowledge, as did the students in this study.

The use of puppets is not limited only to reading instruction. For teaching content area concepts, for example, the teacher might introduce a puppet who needs help in understanding the science, math, or social studies concept, and then invite students to to help the puppet understand the concept through peer discussion, research, critical thinking, and problem solving. Also, English language learners might make simple puppets and write a short dialogue for them to



Photo from the author's archive

perform, using knowledge from a story read to them or a new concept taught. Students can thus practice new words, check on each other’s understanding of new concepts, and practice writing skills, all through engaging in an interesting and motivating activity.

The key to making puppetry a meaningful tool in teaching is the teacher’s willingness and courage to tap into young learners’ own world of imagination and playfulness. When teachers provide an environment in which students can frequently play and engage in literacy activities with puppets, they provide the opportunity for their students to reach beyond their present level of competence, to grow taller than themselves.

References

Biegler, L. (1998). *Implementing dramatization as an effective storytelling method to increase comprehension*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 417377). Retrieved February 20, 2005 from the ERIC database.

Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives, Handbook I: The cognitive domain*. New York: David McKay Co., Inc.

Bruner, J. (1973). *Going beyond the information given*. New York: Norton.

Bredikyte, M. (2002). Dialogic drama with puppets (DDP) as a method of fostering children’s verbal creativity. In E. Majaron & L. Kroflin (Eds.), *The puppet—What a miracle!* (pp. 33–60). Zagreb: The UNIMA, Puppets in education commission.

Canepa, M. (1994). ESL community puppeteers. *The Journal of the Imagination in Language Learning and Teaching*. Volume II. Jersey City, NJ: Jersey City University. Retrieved from: <http://www.njcu.edu/cill/journal-index.html> on August 14, 2006.

Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among the five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Horsburgh, D. (2003) ‘Evaluation of Qualitative Research’, *Journal of Clinical Nursing* 12(2): 307–12.

Kame’enui, E.J., Dixon, D.W., & Carnine, R.C. (1987). Issues in the design of vocabulary instruction. In M.G. McKeown & M.E. Curtis (Eds.), *The nature of vocabulary acquisition* (pp. 129–145). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Li, D. (2004). Trustworthiness of think-aloud protocols in the study of translation process.

International Journal of Applied Linguistics 14(3): 301–13..

Maykut, P. & Morehouse, R. (1994). *Beginning qualitative research: A philosophical and practical guide*. London: Falmer.

McLean, P.D. (1990). *The triune brain in evolution: Role in paleocerebral function*. New York: Plenum.

Merriam, S.B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from case study research in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Padgett, D.K. (1998). *Qualitative methods in social work research: Challenges and rewards*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Peyton, J., Bass, W.T., Burke, B.L., & Frank, M.L. (2005). Novel motor/somatosensory activity is associated with increased cerebral cortical blood volume measured by near-infrared optical topography. *Journal of Child Neurology*, 20(10), 1–5.

Piaget, J. (1962). *Play, dreams, and imitation in childhood*. New York: Rutledge.

Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Smilansky, S. (1968). *The effects of sociodramatic play on disadvantaged preschool children*. New York: John Wiley.

Smilansky, S. (1990). Sociodramatic play: Its relevance to behavior and achievement in school. In E. Klugman & S. Smilanksy (Eds.), *Children’s play and learning: Perspectives and policy implications* (pp. 18–42). New York: Teachers College Press.

Vygotsky, L.S. (1978). *Mind and society: The development of higher mental processes*. (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds. & Trans.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wells, G (1999). *Dialogic inquiry: Toward a sociocultural practice and theory of education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, F. (1999). *The hand: How its use shapes the brain, language, and human culture*. New York: Vintage Books.



Photo from the author's archive

Appendix A

Comprehension Questions

Little Red Riding Hood

Student: _____

Date: _____

Questions	+ / –	On Bloom’s Taxonomy
1. <u>What</u> happens in the folk tale <i>Little Red Riding Hood</i> ?		Knowledge
2. Can you <u>name</u> the main characters?		Comprehension
3. <u>Explain</u> to me why the wolf went to the grandma’s house before Little Red Riding Hood got there?		Comprehension
4. What does the word <i>mean</i> <u>mean</u> ? (<u>Explain</u>)		Comprehension
5. <u>What could have happened</u> if the hunter had been at Grandma’s when the wolf arrived there?		Analysis

Successful Organization of a School or Classroom Poetry Club



Greta Freeman is Assistant Professor at the School of Education in the University of South Carolina Upstate, USA.

Introduction

It seems like a lifetime ago that I began my first teaching position in a small rural middle school in Western North Carolina. The position began in January, and I just happened to be the fourth teacher in five months that this particular group of seventh graders had had the privilege of “breaking in.” I was 23 years old and shorter than most of my pimple-faced, hormone-ravaged students. The first words one of my new colleagues whispered to me were, “If you can survive this, you can survive anything.” With me being the young, determined, save-the-world teacher that I was, I refused to allow a comment such as this to faze me. I had been warned by professors, and other educational professionals, about those negative teachers, and I fully planned to ignore them and their comments. It was a different story however, five minutes into my first period class. It was during the first week of teaching that I transformed from a carefree college student to a grown-up seventh grade English teacher. It was also during this week that I stumbled upon a class activity that would save me from complete and utter first-year teacher failure. The activity was the creation of a classroom “Poetry Club.”

The first few days teaching English to three different groups of seventh grade students (70% Caucasian, 17% Hispanic, 13% African American, and approximately 94% from a lower-class socioeconomic background) proved challenging, not to

mention downright exhausting. To say that I was naive would be an understatement. I tried rewarding my students with praise, candy, and even a pizza party for my sixth period class at the end of the week. I thought that if I gave them extrinsic rewards, even though they might not always deserve them, that they would somehow change their ways and all would be well. These rewards did not convince them to bring their homework in, to participate in class, nor did it convince them to act like civilized human beings. I was thanked with one stolen candy jar (candy included), and pepperoni pizza plastered over the decorations on my new bulletin boards. I knew I had to think of something fast if I was going to survive the semester. Poetry! It was the first idea to come to my mind. I have always loved poetry, both the reading and writing aspect. Perhaps, I thought, I could convince my students to enjoy it and, subsequently, it would help bring some form of bonding and camaraderie into our classroom environment.

Monday morning my students filed into class, late as usual, popping gum, laughing raucously, and disheveling my classroom as they found their desks. I propped myself on a stool in the front center of the classroom and, without warning, began to read a poem originally published in the mid-1800s by Elizabeth Barrett Browning (2001, p. 55). I read with as much expression and clarity as I could muster:

*How do I love thee?
Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth
and breadth and height
My soul can reach,
when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of every day's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
I love with a passion put to use
In my old griefs,
and with my childhood's faith...*

I briefly glanced up at my students. They were quiet. Their eyes were on me. They were listening. I couldn't decide if they were engrossed by the poem, or just trying to figure out which alien planet I was from, so I continued.

*I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
with my lost saints, —
I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life! —
and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.*

I stopped and waited for a response. A normally quiet little girl in the front row eyed me very seriously and asked, “What... was that?” I explained, to some interested expressions, the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, her deep love for Robert Browning, their courtship (including the 574 letters they exchanged), and the secret wedding due to her father's disapproval of their relationship. The students were hooked. At least some of them were hooked.

This was the beginning of a wonderful experience and relationship with some special young people who, I later realized, were extremely needy; some were totally lost. They were still kids, trying to be adults, who needed love and guidance, and, most of all, a confidence boost. Although *de-tracking* has been a prominent theme in United States schools for years (LeTendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003), there was severe *tracking*, or ability grouping, at this particular middle school during the time I was teaching there. LeTendre, Hofer and Shimizu wrote that “tracking often has a negative effect on student's ultimate educational trajectory” (p. 43). Hallinan (1991) reported that many studies show “negative effects of ability grouping on the attitudes and behaviors of low-ability students” (p. 114). I was witnessing this firsthand. These students knew they were in the “dumb” group. They told me so during that first week. Since they thought they were in the dumb group to stay, they apparently had decided to prove right the teachers who had put them there. They had basically given in and given up. They had given in to the idea that they were slow learners. Worse, after witnessing the treatment teachers gave them, when compared to that received by many of the other students in their grade, they had also given up on their chances of accessing an equitable, let alone a quality education.

After the initial positive experience, we read poetry every day. I even brought in one



© S&S Foundation, Armenia, photo

of my own journals from when I was in seventh grade. It was filled with poems I had written, pictures and favorite quotes. I shared one of my own short poems with them:

*One flower, all alone.
One day it is beautiful.
The next, it is gone.*

I also shared my favorite quote from a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier (2003, p. 150), “For of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these: ‘It might have been.’” I explained how that quote could be referring to each and every one of them and how sad it would be if they were to give up, never to succeed in anything, only to look back at their lives one day and think how sad that they could have accomplished something great if only they had tried harder. They loved that. We soon began copying poems out of books and illustrating them. We copied and illustrated poems on index cards and made fancy boxes to hold them. We had discussions and seminars where we argued about the meanings of poems. We held poet studies. Soon we began to write our own poems, and from this activity came the birth of our very own “Poetry Club.” The remainder of the school year brought poetry writing contests and publications by our group, and soon other English classes asked to be involved. Our little group became famous because of our poetry club. Everyone wanted to read and discuss the personal poems of Room 416. My students had found something that was important to them, and that would take their minds off the petty arguing and other distractions that kept them in trouble. More importantly, they gained self-confidence, and the majority of my students' grades improved drastically in most if not all of their subjects.



One of my most needy students at first rejected the idea of a poetry club. He had a negative attitude, and projected this toward me and all the children in the classroom. He carved curse words into my classroom computers and drew vulgar pictures to flash to the other students when my back was turned. He was actually quite an artist. One day I used this talent to work with him one-on-one. We talked openly and I learned about some of the harsh circumstances he was living under. I simply said, "Write about it and add some illustrations. Sometimes writing about what you are going through is like therapy. It makes you feel better." At the time he wasn't convinced. However, about a week later he laid a piece of paper on my desk with the following beautifully illustrated poem written on it:

Daddy

*Why are you so mean to me?
What did I ever do to you?
You are supposed to love me,
Play ball with me,
Wrestle with me.
But, all you do
is drink, and drink, and drink.
And...drink.*

Tears came to my eyes and I couldn't help myself. I went over to this young man and I hugged him. He hugged me back. From that moment on he did well in my class. It is amazing how the sharing of poetry can be a release for human emotions and life's difficulties.

Developing and managing a poetry club

Today's students aren't much different from those in my first class. Their clothes may be different and they may be more technology savvy, but a poetry club can still be rewarding and inspire many children to get involved. In developing a poetry club the first step is to get the

group you are working with interested in poetry. The club could be one daytime class or an after-school group. Poetry clubs can start with students as young as second grade and continue throughout high school. Once you have laid the groundwork, by reading and discussing both classic and modern poems, the writing can begin. You must model how to write poems with the group. Make use of an overhead projector, bulletin board, or document camera. Read poems to your students as you write them. Write about a variety of topics, especially topics the age level you are working with will be interested in. Often students are asked to write but not given a topic to write about, and many students have difficulty starting to put words to paper without a little help. If you begin with a discussion on a general topic such as anger, grief, loneliness, family issues, or school or world issues, you often will find students come up with their own more specific topics such as: a parent being away from home; the death of a pet; or the emotions felt after a relationship break-up. I have found graphic organizers to be very beneficial for brainstorming more specific topics. After you have spent several days modeling, allow students to help you write poems using the document camera or overhead projector. Once you think the children are comfortable with the idea, invite them to practice writing their own poems. Have them share often in front of their peers. Do activities to keep them reading poems. In one such activity, known as *poetry round-about*, students are divided into groups. There are several stations in the room with selected themed poetry available. Each group reads and discusses the poems at their station, and when the teacher rings a bell they move to the next station and repeat the process. Once students are confident with their writing, you can hold a poetry-reading contest, or organize poetry writing and illustrating contests.

Poetry Slamming

One type of competition students tend to enjoy is *poetry slamming*, defined as "the competitive art of performance poetry" (Glazner, 2000). Poetry slamming was developed in 1985 by Marc Smith, nicknamed Slampapi (Smith & Kraynak, 2004). He was a construction worker who approached a club owner in Chicago with

the idea for an open microphone poetry reading series, similar in format to stand-up comedy. The key was to add a performance aspect to the reading. The idea quickly caught on, and today poetry slams are popular in nightclubs and coffee houses throughout North America, as well as on college campuses and in middle- and high-school English classrooms.

The general rules for poetry slamming are: 1) The poem must be an original work by the reader; 2) The poem must be performed without props, costumes, and/or music; and 3) The poem must stay within a three-minute time limit with a 10-second grace period. There are five judges, each judging on a scale of 0–10. The high and low scores are dropped, and the person with the score closest to 30 wins (Glazner, 2000). In the "real world," poetry slammers can go on to the annual U.S. National Poetry Slam. In your school, you could have slams in every English class, and the finalists for each class could go on to a school-wide poetry slam at the end of the academic year. The key to good poetry slamming is the performance. This is a time to encourage students to use their voices, facial expressions, and body language to make a point. However, a word of caution is in order regarding the body language. Set out and post specific rules ahead of time. For example, the touching or displaying of any private part of the body is unacceptable, and vulgar body language such as gyrating and outlining of female physiques should not be tolerated. In my clubs, the first time someone broke a rule, that student was given a warning. The second time, the student was out of the club.

Literature Connection

Brod Bagert's book, *Hormone Jungle: Coming of Age in Middle School* (2006), is an excellent way to introduce a poetry club. *Hormone Jungle* is about two students, a female and a male, who dislike one another and begin writing poetry back and forth to show disrespect for each other. They eventually involve their friends and it turns into a school-wide poetry competition. There are many examples of poems that middle school children can easily relate to in the book. At the end of one school year my students gave me a portfolio filled with pictures, drawings and poetry they had written. Here are some samples:.

Horses and Boys

*My name is Emma Mackey
I'm twelve years old,
And, I like horses—
They're stubborn,
They're stupid,
And, they stink,
But I like horses.
I also like boys—
Ditto.*

Friends Forever

*Never has there been—
Another friend—
Like you.
Someone to share dreams,
Someone to plan schemes,
And share experiences, too.
We walk the halls together,
Cruise Patton Avenue
no matter what the weather,
Go guy watching at the mall,
Tall, dark with huge muscles
(never small!)
Have we ever gotten into a brawl?
Oh, no! Never! Not at all!
Pass notes in class,
Share grades (failed and passed).
How long will our friendship last?
Forever... 'til the end of time.*

Activities

Poetry can be especially enjoyable if you involve the students in related activities to foster writing. You want students to learn poetic forms and devices in addition to being creative and original in their writing, yet some students resist instruction in the rules of poetry. Sharing examples based on your own writing and that of the students will make the instruction more palatable. Templates for poetry make it easier for



those suffering from “writer’s block.” The Internet provides numerous sources for poetry templates and sample activities. The following are three activities that I use often with children and adults that get positive results. The first is a cinquain poem, a five-line poem with specific rules for completion:

One word (noun)
Two words (adjectives)
Three words (verbs)
Four words (phrase)
One word (noun, synonym of first line)

An example of a Cinquain poem from a former fifth grade student of mine is:

Club
Private, Secretive
Scheming, Planning, Sneaking
Absolutely No girls Allowed
Alliance

The Important Book by Margaret Wise Brown (1949) is a poem in the form of a children’s picture book. Integrating literature and writing is easy when you read the book to your class and then have them write their own “important” poem. The following is a sample from one of my students, whose mother is a cancer survivor:

The important thing about my mom is
that she is brave.
She is beautiful.
She is strong.
She never complains.
Even when my mom is tired,
she has time for me and my sister.
My mom makes the best lasagna
and brownies in the whole world.
But, the important thing about my mom is
that she is brave.

Momma, Where Are You From (Bradby, 2000) is a wonderful multicultural children’s picture book that is easily read and that provides a model for writing personal “Where I am from...” poems. The following is an excerpt from a piece written by Michelle:

Michelle, where are you from?
Where are you from, Michelle?
I am from mountains, lush and green,
with cool water trickling over waterfalls.
I am from farmlands with wild deer
and turkey gobblers and catching catfish from
the banks of the French Broad River.

I am from a strict, single mother,
and five strict uncles.
I am from hardworking, kind and loving people.
I am from a place close to Heaven.

Older children especially seem to enjoy writing from the “When I was a child...” template. Thomas wrote:

When I Was a Child
When I was a child,
I wanted to be... the green Power Ranger.
I believed... I could defeat evil in any form.
I hoped... to grow tall and strong like my Poppy.
I loved... soccer and Nana.
I learned...
that little sisters don’t like to dress up
in Power Ranger costumes.
I was certain... there was treasure
hidden in the back yard.

When I began to grow,
I wanted to be... a famous soccer player.
I believed... dress-up was for babies.
I hoped... to win the state championship.
I loved... soccer and my Nana’s cooking.
I learned... to trust my instincts.
I was certain... there was treasure
hidden in the walls of my house.

Now that I am almost grown,
I want to be... a famous soccer player.
I believe... dreams come true.
I hope... no one reads that last line.
I love... myself.
I have learned... if you tear a wall out of your
room looking for treasure
you will get grounded for a week.
I am certain... of very little.
When I was a child... life was much easier.

Challenges

I have found in my experience with poetry clubs that, as with most anything involving young people, there are challenges. When I first suggested the club to my English classes, I was met with a mixture of excitement and resistance. It seemed that the girls were more interested than the boys, so I made sure to include poems the boys could relate to. There were times when students wanted to use their poetry to hurt others. For example, when a student named Lizzie “stole” her friend Jasmine’s boyfriend, Jasmine wrote a nasty poem telling secrets they had shared as friends, and pointing out Lizzie’s hidden flaws. I also experienced situations where students wanted to write about situations that were too personal.

I explained to students that I didn’t mind that Jennifer wrote a poem describing her objection to how “certain boys snap the strap!”; it gave us a good topic for a seminar discussion. However, giving intimate details about particular relationships was not appropriate in our club context.

As with most new endeavors, I had to learn through trial and error, but after my first year I felt as though I had dealt with most of the problems associated with developing a club of this sort. Still, new issues came up in future clubs, and were managed on a case-by-case basis. After the initial poetry club, I developed some rules that I used with subsequent groups:

1. Read and write with expression.
2. Be mindful of the feelings of others.
3. The use of curse words and vulgarity are prohibited.
4. Respect others’ writing even if you dislike it.
5. Keep personal and intimate details for your private diaries.

If you are consistent with consequences, enthusiastic, and open-minded, your poetry club should run smoothly. It also helps to have special treats for students, so they feel that being a part of the club is a privilege. Keep it interesting. Have fancy snacks with special glasses or napkins. Have them dress in character when reading poems out loud. Take them on a field trip to a local poetry reading or to visit the home of a noted poet. Have a poetry reading night and invite family and friends.

Conclusion

A class- or school-wide poetry club can build confidence, bolster community and team building, and even offer a bit of competition. It is a healthy way for students to share their feelings, beliefs, and concerns, and learn the joy of writing in the process. It is important to share what the students are doing with the rest of the school community and the general public. Inviting other classes to poetry slams, inviting parents to evenings of poetry competition, and creating a club website to post student poems so they can share with other students around the world can all be important to the success of your poetry club. The poetry club can become an important part of the lives of students. The goal is for it to be so



© SbS Foundation, Armenia, photo

important that perhaps one day your students will sift through old papers and keepsake items, find copies of old poems they’ve written, and reminiscence about the wonderful experiences they had.

References

Bagert, B. (2006). *Hormone jungle: Coming of age in middle school*. Gainesville, FL.: Maupin House Publishing, Inc.

Barrett-Browning, E. (1850). *How Do I Love Thee? Sonnets from the Portuguese and Other Love Poems*. New York: Gramercy Books.

Bradby, M. (2000). *Momma, where are you from?* London: Orchard Books.

Brown, M.W. (1949). *The important book*. New York: Harper Collins.

Glazner, G.M. (2000). *Poetry slam: The competitive art of performance poetry*. San Francisco: Manic D Press.

Hallinan, M.T. (1992). The organization of students for instruction in the middle school. *Sociology of Education*, 65(2), 114–127.

LeTendre, G.L., Hofer, B.K., & Shimizu, H. (2003). What is tracking? Cultural expectations in the United States, Germany, and Japan. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(1), 43–89.

Smith, M.K. & Kraynak, J. (2004). *The complete idiot’s guide to slam poetry*. New York: Alpha Books.

Whittier, J.G. (1880). Maud Miller. *Complete poetical works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (2003), p. 150. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger.

Assessing Group Work



Kalina Peneva and Rumjana Belcheva are teachers of Bulgarian Language and Literature in the Elias Canetti Professional School for Economy and Management in Ruse, Bulgaria.

In Bulgaria in recent years, preconceptions about the nature of education have been breaking down: People have realized that the major task of schools today is to raise a generation of young citizens who will be able to clearly formulate and defend their opinions, positions, and ideals. In addition, teachers are trying to re-ignite students' interest in reading. In our classroom we have found that we can often achieve these goals through small group work.

In such groups students combine their skills and talents, and help one another develop their individual strengths as they work on their assignments. Through work in small groups, students

- become aware of their responsibilities to their group mates
- develop skills in communication and cooperation
- learn to make joint decisions.

As a result, students in our Bulgarian Language and Literature courses remain engaged in their work throughout the class period. Working collaboratively, they perfect their reading skills, develop independent thinking, and learn to reach consensus. They approach the text in two ways, by reading and by hearing it read, which allows for better comprehension. And for the most part, joint analysis of the text appears to lead to a deeper analysis, since in a group students have the opportunity to ask more questions, and can draw on more resources to organize the information.

Since 2003, we have participated in the RWCT program (Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking). In our lessons we

employ diverse activities designed to stimulate thinking and help students process information more effectively. These strategies include brainstorming, dual-entry diary, the K-W-L Chart (I Know-I Want to know-I Learned) (Ogle, 1986), clustering, Venn diagrams, gallery walks, cinquain poems, and many others, all well-known to teachers who employ active learning methods in their classrooms. The creative character of these activities helps students feel like explorers, discovering new territories of knowledge.

There are always students who are reluctant to speak in class, but in a group setting even the quiet ones overcome their shyness and start to express themselves. Moreover, there is often dialogue between groups, which sometimes develops into debates. Such exchanges help students focus their attention on the problems they are discussing. Experience shows that knowledge acquired in this way is comprehensive and long-lasting. Working together, students have more opportunities to show their talents, and many learn to be more tolerant of each other and of differing viewpoints. Thus, we see new behavior patterns evolving through group work.

However, with all the advantages of group learning, at a certain point the teacher will inevitably face a serious question: How should students' work in groups be assessed?

This question includes a whole set of sub-questions:

- How can group work in general be assessed?
- How should the group be graded if they

worked well and completed the assignment, but some students did not contribute?

- What criteria should be used to assess the individual contributions of each student?
- How can assessment be made to serve as a stimulus for further improvement?
- How can the assessment process be made fair and objective?

This article describes our search for answers to all of these questions, in the context of our work with 8th–12th graders (aged 14–18) in Bulgarian Language and Literature courses. When we started to work on the assessment system three years ago, we realized that it had to include three major elements:

1. assessment of the work of the entire group
2. assessment of the work of individuals within the group, and
3. self-assessment.

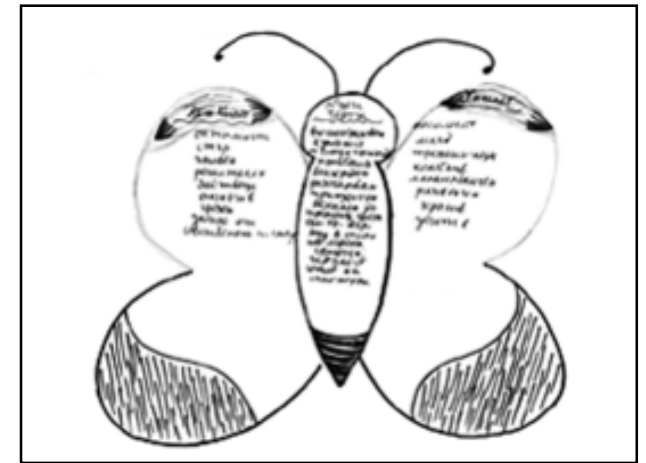
Assessing the work of the whole group

We began by asking our students to complete a questionnaire regarding possible criteria for assessing group work. Their responses can be summarized as follows:

- *The teacher should question each group member individually.*
- *Each group should have an observer who monitors the work process.*
- *The group members' individual contributions must be taken into consideration.*
- *The grading should be individual, and should reflect each participant's individual contribution.*
- *Every group member should have an opportunity to assess the group's work, based on previously established criteria.*

These assessment criteria, according to our students, should include:

- *the ability to present information on the topic clearly, concisely, and completely*
- *the breadth of coverage of the topic, and the quality of the analysis*
- *a serious and conscientious approach to the issues*
- *the quality of the arguments supporting the position*
- *the clarity and attractiveness of the presentation*
- *coordination and planning of the group work*
- *the participation of all group members.*



Of course, initially these suggestions were not so clearly expressed, and we lacked a systematic approach for implementing them. As always, we found it helpful to hold a general discussion, in the course of which students' ideas were clarified and became more concrete. In the end we managed to develop a workable system for assessing both individual and group work, and also a system for self-assessment.

We usually divide a class into groups of 4–6 participants for group work: Our experience has shown such groups to be the most effective. The criteria for formation of the groups are important too. Initially groups may be formed randomly. If a group is successful, the teacher may give them an opportunity to work together for several lessons. Later, however, it is advisable to reconfigure the groups so that students from successful groups are inconspicuously placed in other groups, which can then benefit from their modeling. Thus the membership of the groups constantly changes.

The tasks assigned to the groups may be different: to define the characteristics of a





Photo from the authors' archive

hero; to compare heroes from two different books; to identify the symbols used by the author; to examine the image of a city or the role of nature in the artistic design of the novel. The nature of the task depends on the subject matter and on the educational focus of the lesson.

To make the assessment process relevant and accessible, even before we distribute assignments we appoint an *observer* for each group, whose task is to describe and evaluate the group's experience. Each group member takes a turn in the role of observer. When the assignments have been completed, the groups present the results of their work to the class, and then the observers report their findings, guided by the following list of questions:

- Is there an obvious leader in the group?
- Does the group have a thorough knowledge of the text?
- Do the group members work together in a coordinated fashion, or is everyone talking and offering suggestions at the same time?
- Do the group members listen to one another?



- How are group decisions reached? Jointly, by consensus? By compromise? Or does one person impose his or her opinion on the others?
- Does everyone participate in the discussion?
- Are individual opinions taken into account?
- Was the assignment finished on time?
- Would you say that this group worked effectively?
- Did the group work as a unified team?

We soon saw that, when assessing their team's work, observers generally tried to be objective and specific in their comments. A few excerpts from the observers' notes illustrate this point:

- ... *the group lacks leadership...*
- ... *they have difficulty making a decision...*
- ... *there is not much going on...*
- ... *the participants give appropriate consideration to presenting the results of their work...*
- ... *it is hard to say whether or not they work together as a team...*
- ... *they have completed the assignment on time...*
- ... *I think that the group has been working effectively...*
- ... *there seems to be a lot of activity, but they are not accomplishing much...*
- ... *the group's suggestions are too general; they need to be more specific...*
- ... *while discussing the problem, the participants try to get to the basic issues...*
- ... *they work together toward an agreement...*
- ... *many examples from real life were cited...*
- ... *their discussion led to a thoughtful decision...*

It was interesting to watch how the observers themselves worked. Summarizing their reports and comparing them

Т	ВОРЕБАТА
Р	ЕААИЗЦРА СТРЕМЕНИ НА
А	ЗА
Д	А ПРОСВЕТИ ХОРАТА В
И	СТУДИЯТА ЗА
Ц	ЯЛОТО БОЖЕСТВЕНА ЦЕЛОВА ДА
И	ДЕАИЗИРА
Я	СНО ОБРАЗА БОЖИ

with our own records, we concluded that most of the student observers

- were able to follow the activities of the group
- objectively assessed the contributions of the participants

Table 1 Assessment criteria: individual performance within groups

Criterion	Points
1. The student has studied and analyzed the text or problem	2
2. The student takes the assignment seriously	2
3. The student comes up with interesting ideas	1
4. The student suggests considered arguments	2
5. The student states his or her viewpoint clearly and convincingly	2
6. The student works cooperatively	2
7. The student encourages others in their work	1
8. The student respects the other members of the group	1
9. The student is tolerant of others	1
10. The student listens to others' opinions	1
11. The student is able to appreciate the opinions of others	2
12. The student recognizes his/her personal responsibility for the group's results	1
13. The student does not help others with their work	-2
14. The student is not sufficiently conscientious in doing the assignment	-1
15. The student prevents others from doing their work	-2
16. The student does not cooperate with group mates	-2
17. The student manipulates others	-2
18. The student imposes his or her opinion upon the group	-1
19. The student insults or ridicules others	-2
20. The student ignores feedback or criticism from group mates	-1

Table 2 Individual assessment chart

Criterion	C1	C2	C3	C4	...	C18	C 19	C 20	Total points
Name									

- did a reasonably good job of judging the effectiveness of the group
- had no difficulty identifying the group leader
- were precise about monitoring time
- were able to overcome their own subjective preferences

However, they were not always able to evaluate the depth and completeness of the group's response to the assignment (here the assessment largely depends on the content knowledge of the observer).

Assessing individual performance within groups

Once we were satisfied with our approach to assessing group work, we shifted our focus to individual assessment. We tried to encourage students to think about how they could objectively evaluate the work of others. With the active participation of the students, we created a list of assessment criteria (see Table 1) and assessment charts for students to use in evaluating the work of their group mates (see Table 2). The assessment technique is very simple: the student enters the names of the other group members into the chart, and whenever a group mate's work corresponds to this or that criterion, writes the relevant number of points (negative or positive) next to the name. Usually we ask students to complete their individual assessment charts 10 minutes before the end of the lesson. Then the teacher collects the charts and calculates the total points "earned" by each participant. The only thing left is to convert the



Photo from the authors' archive

Table 3 Converting individual assessment results into traditional grades ²		
Group of 2 participants Maximum total points – 18 18-17 points – 6 16-14 points – 5 13-10 points – 4 9-8 points – 3	Group of 3 participants Maximum total points – 36 36-34 – 6 33-29 – 5 28-22 – 4 21-18 – 3	Group of 4 participants Maximum total points – 54 54-50 – 6 49-42 – 5 41-32 – 4 31-27 – 3
Group of 5 participants Maximum total points – 72 72-67 – 6 66-55 – 5 54-45 – 4 44-36 – 3	Group of 6 participants: Maximum total points – 90 90-84 – 6 83-70 – 5 69-55 – 4 54-45 – 3	

result into whatever grading system is in place in the school, for the sake of convenience ¹ (see Table 3). This part of the assessment is very important for the students: On the one hand, they realize their own responsibility to their group; on the other, they begin to see that their grades are fairly objective, since they are based not only on a teacher’s opinion, but on the opinions and observations of many classmates, using criteria that they have discussed and agreed upon.

After each individual assessment session, we ask students to respond to a single question: Was the grade you received today a fair and objective reflection of your work in the group?



Photo from the authors' archive

- Here are some of their responses:
- *I am pleased with the results. I think my group mates assessed me objectively. They were right not to give me the maximum number of points: I was not too good at presenting the group’s work to the class.*
 - *I was graded objectively. I know I earned a high grade, as did my whole group. Good work, good results.*
 - *If my group gave me this low grade, then my work must not have been good enough.*
 - *I think my grade today is realistic.*
 - *I didn’t get a fair grade, even though I worked hard and had a lot of ideas. During the break I even managed to re-read the text, searching for something that might be useful for the assignment. However, this is what the group decided, so this is my grade.*
 - *In general I am pleased with my results, but I’m sure I could have done better.*
 - *I see no problem with my grade. I’m glad you give us a chance to judge our own work and our classmates’ work.*
 - *The grade is correct, I think, but I am not pleased with myself.*
 - *Assessment in our group was objective today; the grades reflect reality. Everyone worked marvelously, so most of the grades are very high.*
 - *It’s great that we have a chance to grade each other, but of course we are not always objective. In fact, if you do not like someone in your group (even if she worked harder than the others) you never give her the highest possible*

¹ In Bulgarian schools, a six-point grading system is used (editor’s note).
² In a group of two, each participant has to grade one partner, in a group of three—two partners, etc.

number of points. But I agree that this way of assessing group work is the best we’ve had so far.

After analyzing the results of the individual assessments and the students’ reponses to our question about the fairness of the process, we came to the following conclusions:

- Initially, about 25% of the students were dissatisfied with the results of their individual assessments.
- Their discontent gave these students motivation to improve, and in subsequent group tasks they worked harder to achieve the set goals.
- In groups where the participants initially all gave each other very high grades, students gradually came to realize that the contributions of individual members were not equal, and that individual assessments should reflect what each participant actually contributed to the task.

The students were quick to accept this method of mutual individual assessment. However, we understood that there was still one important element missing from our system: self-assessment.

Self-assessment of individual contribution to group work

To help students objectively assess their own results, we again asked for student input, and discussed criteria by which group members could evaluate their own contributions to the work of the group.

Table 4 shows the evaluation chart that we created with the students. (Please note that this is a work in progress, subject to ongoing revision.)

Using this table, participants can independently convert the results of their own assessment into a traditional school grade (27–30 points correspond to a 6, 22–26 to a 5, 16–21 to a 4, and 10–15 points, to a 3).



Photo from the authors' archive

Just three years after we began work on this new assessment system, we are already seeing positive results. This system has delivered clear benefits to both the students and the learning process. These include the following:

- Students learn to work together as a team.
- Students develop their communication skills, powers of observation, sense of responsibility, self-control, and self-discipline.
- Students learn to establish assessment criteria, and to assess themselves and each other objectively.
- Students acquire analytical skills, and learn to be both critical and self-critical.



Table 4

Criteria for self-assessment

Meeting the criterion Criterion	Always (3 points)	Sometimes (1 point)	Never (0 points)	Points
1. Before starting to work, I think through the assignment and how I will approach it.				
2. I have read the text carefully and can analyze it				
3. I state my ideas clearly				
4. I find convincing supporting arguments				
5. I am attentive to details that can help me analyze the text and formulate conclusions				
6. I listen to my group mates and respect their opinions				
7. I motivate other group members to work				
8. I cooperate with others				
9. I try to prevent group conflicts				
10. I do my best to complete the group assignment				

- Students share experiences and exchange opinions (which is important because knowledge acquired through dialogue with peers is more enduring).
- Students learn to make well-grounded decisions as a group.
- Even reticent or struggling students participate more.
- Peer assessment provides a stimulus for self-improvement.

We are confident that these skills acquired through group work will serve our students well in the future.

Our assessment methods have aroused the interest of our colleagues, and now other teachers in our school and other local schools have adopted these methods for courses in philosophy, geography, history, and other subjects.

Of course the technique described here is far from a perfect assessment system, and we continue to work to improve it.

Nevertheless, it is already helping us address many educational tasks more effectively.

References

- Ogle, D.M. (1986).
K-W-L: A teaching model that develops active reading of expository text.
Reading Teacher, 39, 564–570.



Photo from the authors' archive

Strategic Moves

from William G. Brozo



Photo from the author's archive

Four Ways to Make Strategic Moves Happen: The Role of School Leaders

William G. Brozo is Professor of Literacy in the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, USA.

My goal for this column has been to describe and advocate for strategies and practices that most teachers, especially those with limited resources, can take up. This approach of speaking directly to teachers about strategic teaching comes from my belief

Combining the lessons learned from these programs with the experiences I have had in school-based projects, I present four principles reform-minded school leaders can use to guide their work with teachers to make strategic moves happen.

teaching reforms. Focusing on a specific set of strategies around which expertise can be developed benefits both teachers and students.

Principle 2:

Move from workshop to classroom.

Whole school workshops are the most common form of professional development for school faculty implementing new teaching initiatives. They provide teachers with initial exposure (Cooter, 2004) to particular approaches but not the capacity to apply them in actual instructional contexts. Consequently, one or two workshops alone rarely bring about lasting change, unless coupled with provisions for supporting teachers' sustained efforts to implement teaching innovations. Not as common are in-class teaching demonstrations conducted by a school leader. School leaders who provide workshops at the start of the new academic year should follow up by going into teacher's classrooms throughout the year to conduct lessons using the strategies demonstrated in the

Principle 1:

Offer teachers a manageable and realistic number of new strategies.

Teachers need scaffolding for change just as do their students. If overwhelmed by a large

number of new strategies, teachers may find it easier to stick with the status quo than try to decide which strategies to apply. To have the widest possible impact, school leaders might initially get teachers to embrace a small number of new instructional practices, so as to provide consistency for students and a common set of school-wide teaching experiences (Brozo & Simpson, 2007). A commitment to a smaller but more manageable set of strategies will help teachers feel as though everyone is putting a common shoulder to the wheel in advancing the

that even though governments can dictate educational policy and directors can exhort teachers to enact new methods, it is ultimately the choice of each individual teacher to change her/his practices. In this installment, however, I widen the lens on teacher change to bring into view the supportive efforts that are needed from school leaders to increase the likelihood that new strategies are adopted by teachers.

It is clear from studies of virtually all successful school reform programs with demonstrated effectiveness that comprehensive staff development is essential to success (National Staff Development Council, 2006; Sturtevant, et al., 2006).



© MDC, Lithuania, photo



© George Hunt, photo



Principle 4: *Work with those who are most eager to be innovative, while creating opportunities for all to learn and grow together.* It pays to concentrate staff development efforts on those teachers and staff members who show the greatest interest in the reform agenda. Teachers who are

workshops. Teachers should also be given opportunities to team-teach the strategies or to try them on their own with opportunities for feedback. With in-class modeling and subsequent support of teachers' efforts to apply instructional innovations with their own students, strategic moves are more likely to occur.

Principle 3: *Establish forums for teachers to reflect on, evaluate, and refine strategic teaching practices.* Many teachers not only need to acquire knowledge of new strategies, but also need to change beliefs about their role as teachers. Transforming strategies and beliefs requires that forums be established where teachers can have a genuine voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating reforms (Ancess, 2003). Teachers should be encouraged to gather in groups to discuss and propose instructional priorities for their students. Important strategic initiatives that can have a positive impact on student achievement are likely to emerge from these conversations.

eager to learn new strategies and attempt new practices in their classrooms deserve the full support of any school leader. We know from experience that as individual teachers become increasingly expert in employing innovative strategies, their enthusiasm grows, which positively affects the colleagues with whom they interact. At the same time, school leaders need to retain an attitude of openness to all teachers, including those who may be more resistant to change, by creating worthwhile and interesting opportunities for them to receive technical assistance and support.

School leaders should be ever watchful for those teachers who are ready to adopt and adapt new instructional strategies and can subsequently facilitate their peers' use of these practices. They should also promote a system of incentives and rewards for teachers who contribute positively to the reform effort. These may come in the form of grants, additional resources, elevated professional status, or recognition at events such as trainings or staff meetings.

A Final Word about the Role of School Leaders in Supporting Strategic Moves
Virtually all successful schools are distinguished by school leaders who invest in quality teacher professional development (Fullan, 2001). In turn, this investment leads to dividends in the form of greater student engagement and higher student achievement. By making various professional development opportunities available, school leaders can transform teachers into highly qualified professionals with expertise in both subject matter and strategic teaching. And students are the beneficiaries.

References

Ancess, J. (2003). *Beating the odds: High schools as communities of practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.
Brozo, W.G., & Simpson, M.L. (2007). *Content literacy for today's adolescents: Honoring diversity and building competence* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Erlbaum.
Cooter, R.B. (2004). Deep training + coaching: A capacity-building model for teacher development. In R.B. Cooter (Ed.): *Perspectives on rescuing urban literacy education: Spies, saboteurs, and saints*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
National Staff Development Council. (2006). *Standards for staff development*. Retrieved from <http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm> on June 15, 2008.
Sturtevant, E., Boyd, F., Brozo, W., Hinchman, K., Alvermann, D., & Moore, D. (2006). *Principled practices for adolescent literacy: A framework for instruction and policy*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.



Index
Thinking Classroom
Volume 9, 2008

DEPARTMENTS

Letter from the Editor

Talking With: The Heart of Teaching
Preece, Alison

Letter to the Editors
Okwumuo, Korlu M.

Perspectives

How do you ensure that evaluation is a positive experience for your students?

*Anic, Kim; Bakhareva, Serafima;
Kuo, Jun-min; Madoyan, Rafael;
Arushanyan, Lyudmila*

Should There be a Place for Competition at School?
*Fontanova, Alla; Samaryan, Artashes;
Zhiotovskiy, Ilya*

What role does the computer play in your or your children's life and learning?

*Roninson, Michael; Sarkisyan, Margarita;
Bogomolova, Maria; Michaels, Beverly*

What role has the Thinking Classroom journal played in your professional life?
Dachkova, Lydia; Georgiades, Petros, Valkova, Inna, Penkauskiene, Daiva; Bernat, Simona E.; Steele, Jeannie; Gromova, Olga; Ridgeway Gillis, Victoria; Kazemek, Francis E.

Pros and Cons

Elitism and Competition in School Sports: Losing Children to Win Games
Neal, Gerald W.

Mastery-Oriented Competitive Climates: Better Practice for Schools?
Temple, Vivienne A.

The Effects of Computer Use on Children's Physical Development
Patrikeyev, Artyom

Strategic Moves from William G. Brozo

Developing Academic Vocabulary
Four Ways to Make Strategic Moves Happen: The Role of School Leaders
Teaching Students to Read and Communicate in Science and Mathematics
Brozo, William G.

Teachers, Classrooms, and Change

High Expectations in the Learner-Centered Classroom

Reading the Hard Stuff
Klooster, David; Bloem, Patricia

FEATURES

Asking Questions
Cook, Marilyn

Assessing Group Work
Peneva, Kalina; Belcheva, Rumjana

A Transformative Journey: Theoretical Foundations for an Integrative Approach to Teaching
Evans, Katherine; Glenn, Kathy; Lester, Jessica

Critical Thinking Tools and Techniques for Illuminating Literary Texts
Stepanov, Nikolai

Engaging Children and Teenagers in Peace Culture Education and Peacebuilding
Markosyan, Goharik; Chaloyan, Julieta

Enhancing Thinking Through Self Assessment
McDonald, Betty

Farewell to Arms!
Kurbatov, Rustam

High Stakes Testing and Fourth Grade Readers: Documenting the Impact on Teachers, Children, and Learning
Lesley, Mellinee

Interactive Teaching Strategies Reduce Inappropriate Student Behavior in Kosovo
Zabeli, Naser; Saqipi, Blerim

Many Voices in the Classroom: The Role of Classroom Talk in Education for Democracy
Bloem, Patricia; Klooster, David; Preece, Alison

Mathematical Modeling Experiences for Mathematical Development in Children
Chan, Chun Ming Eric

"Media Education is an Integral Part of the Development of Critical Thinking"
Fedorov, Alexander (Interview)

Playing and Growing Taller Than Themselves: The Use of Puppets in Developing Language in a First-grade Library Reading Program
Zuljevic, Vida

Reaching for the Middle: Observations of Two American Students from Generational Poverty
Nora Booth (United States)

Successful Organization of a School or Classroom Poetry Club <i>Freeman, Greta</i>	Oct 40	Madoyan, Rafael (Armenia)	Apr 16
Teacher Trainers' Secrets: How to Evaluate a Workshop and Prepare a Trainer's Report <i>Vasiliev, Yury; Rakayeva, Eugenia</i>	Apr 29	Markosyan, Goharik (Armenia); Chaloyan, Julieta	July 21
Teaching Spelling Through Word Study in the Elementary Classroom <i>Bomphray, Alexandra</i>	July 29	McDonald, Betty (Trinidad and Tobago)	July 38
The Long Road to Literacy: Students Decode Ancient Writings <i>Datsik, Vera</i>	Jan 33	Michaels, Beverly (United States)	July 6
The Role of the Humanities in Post-Conflict Societies, or Do They Need Poems Here? <i>Bloem, Patricia; Klooster, David; Wollor, Asone; Harris, James; Noah, John-Paul</i>	Apr 4	Neal, Gerald W. (United States)	Jan 42
WE-CARE Library <i>Roberts, M. Woryonwon</i>	Apr 12	Noah John-Paul (Liberia) <i>see Bloem, Patricia</i>	Apr 6
Where do Ideas Come From?		Okwumuo, Korlu M. (Liberia)	July 45
Scaffolding Creative Thinking in the Classroom <i>Lamberg, Teruni</i>	Jan 27	Patrikeyev, Artyom (Russia)	July 8
AUTHORS		Peneva, Kalina (Bulgaria); Belcheva, Rumjana	Oct 46
Anic, Kim (Croatia)	Apr 16	Penkauskiene, Daiva (Lithuania)	Oct 2
Arushanyan, Lyudmila (Armenia)	Apr 16	Preece, Alison (Canada)	Apr 2
Bakhareva, Serafima (Russia)	Apr 16	Preece, Alison (Canada) <i>see Bloem, Patricia</i>	Oct 6
Belcheva, Rumjana (Bulgaria) <i>see Peneva, Kalina</i>		Rakayeva, Eugenia (Kyrgyzstan) <i>see Vasiliev, Yury</i>	Oct 2
Bernat, Simona E. (Romania)	Oct 2	Ridgeway Gillis, Victoria (United States)	Oct 2
Bloem, Patricia (United States) <i>see Klooster, David</i>	Jan 2, July 2	Roberts, M. Woryonwon (Liberia)	Apr 12
Bloem, Patricia (United States); Klooster, David ; Preece, Alison	Oct 6	Roninson, Michael (United States)	July 6
Bloem, Patricia (United States); Klooster, David ; Wollor, Asone; Harris, James; Noah, John-Paul	Apr 4	Samaryan, Artashes (Ukraine)	Jan 40
Bogomolova, Maria (Russia)	July 6	Sarkisyan, Margarita (Ukraine)	July 6
Bomphray, Alexandra (Canada)	July 29	Saqipi, Blerim (Kosovo) <i>see Zabeli, Naser</i>	Oct 2
Booth, Nora (United States)	Oct 26	Steele, Jeannie (United States)	Oct 2
Brozo, William G. (United States)	Apr 46, July 46, Oct 53	Stepanov, Nikolai (Russia)	Jan 20
Chaloyan, Julieta (Armenia) <i>see Markosyan, Goharik</i>		Temple, Vivienne A. (Canada)	Jan 47
Chan, Chun Ming Eric (Singapore)	Apr 37	Valkova, Inna (Kyrgyzstan)	Oct 2
Cook, Marilyn (United States)	July 36	Vasiliev, Yury (Kyrgyzstan); Rakayeva, Eugenia	Apr 29
Dachkova, Lydia (Bulgaria)	Oct 2	Wollor, Asone (Liberia) <i>see Bloem, Patricia</i>	Apr 6
Datsik, Vera (Russia)	Jan 33	Zabeli, Naser (Kosovo); Saqipi, Blerim	Jan 5
Evans, Katherine (United States): Glenn, Kathy; Lester, Jessica	Jan 11	Zhivotovsky, Ilya (Russia)	Jan 40
Fedorov, Alexander (Russia)	July 14	Zuljevic, Vida (United States)	Oct 32
Fontanova, Alla (Russia)	Jan 40	SUBJECTS	
Freeman, Greta (United States)	Oct 40	Classroom strategies	Jan 5, 11, 20, 33 Apr 46 July 14, 46
Georgiades, Petros (Cyprus)	Oct 2	Cognitive processes	Jan 26 July 36, 46 Oct 19
Glenn, Kathy (United States) <i>see Evans, Katherine</i>		Competition at school	Jan 40, 42, 47
Gromova, Olga (Russia)	Oct 2	Critical thinking and critical literacy	July 14
Harris, James (Liberia) <i>see Bloem, Patricia</i>	Apr 6	Democratic culture	July 21, Oct 6, Oct 2, 24
Kazemek, Francis E. (United States)	Oct 2	Educational environment	Jan 5 Apr 2 July 45 Oct 2, 6
Klooster, David (United States); Bloem, Patricia	Jan 2, July 2	Educational goals and objectives	Jan 2 July 14, Oct 26
Klooster, David (United States) <i>see Bloem, Patricia</i>	Apr 6, Oct 6	Educational projects	Oct 6, 19
Kuo, Jun-min (Taiwan)	Apr 16	Educational reforms	Apr 4 July 45 Oct 53
Kurbatov, Rustam (Russia)	Oct 19	Educational theory and practice	Oct 2
Lamberg, Teruni (United States)	Jan 27	Efficiency of learning	Jan 2 July 29, 38, 46
Lesley, Mellinee (United States)	Apr 20	Evaluation and assessment	Apr 16, 20, 29 July 38 Oct 19, 46
Lester, Jessica (United States) <i>see Evans, Katherine</i>		Information technologies	July 6, 8, 14
		Integrated instruction	Jan 11
		Media education and media literacy	July 6, 14
		Motivation	Jan 26 July 2, 29 Oct 32
		Peer tutoring	July 21
		Poetry in learning	Oct 40
		Puppets in education	Oct 32
		Professional development	Apr 29 Oct 2
		Reading	Apr 4, 12, 20, 46 July 2
		Reflection	July 2 July 38
		Research in education	Jan 5 Apr 20, 37 Oct 26
		Self-assessment	July 38
		School management	Apr 29, Oct 53
		Social responsibility	Jan 2 July 21 Oct 6
		Sports at school	Jan 42, 47 July 8
		Teacher education	Apr 4 July 45 Oct 2
		Teaching science and maths	Apr 37, 46
		Vocabulary	July 29, 46
		Writing	Apr 4 July 29

Letter from a Contract Worker

Antonio Jacinto, Angola

transl. by E. Mphahele

I wanted to write you a letter
my love
a letter to tell
of this longing
to see you
and this fear
of losing you
of this thing which is deeper than I want,
I feel a nameless pain which pursues me
a sorrow wrapped about my life.

I wanted to write you a letter
my love
a letter of intimate secrets
a letter of memories
of you
your lips as red as the tacula fruit
your hair black as the dark diloa fish
your eyes gentle as the macongue
your breasts hard as young maboque fruit
your light walk
your caresses
better than any that I can find down here.

I wanted to write you a letter
my love
to bring back our days together
in our secret haunts
night lost in the long grass
to bring back the shadow of your legs
and the moonlight
filtering through the endless palms,
to bring back the madness of our passion
and the bitterness of separation.

I wanted to write you a letter
my love
which you could not read without crying
which you would hide from your father Bombo
and conceal from your mother Kieza
which you would read without the indifference
of forgetfulness,
a letter which would make any other
in all Kilombo worthless.

I wanted to write you a letter
my love
a letter which the passing wind would take
a letter which the cashew and the coffee trees,
the hyenas and the buffalo,
the caymens and the river fish
could hear
the plants and the animals
pitying our sharp sorrow
from song to song
lament to lament
breath to caught breath
would leave to you,
pure and hot,
the burning
the sorrowful words of the letter
I wanted to write to you.

I wanted to write you a letter
But my love,
I don't know why it is,
why, why, why it is, my love,
but you can't read
and I—oh the hopelessness—I can't write.