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A Community of Learning

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A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING

HONORS SENIOR PROJECT

BY

KEREN REITH

Western Washington University

February 1996

A Community of Learning

The Starting Place

All teachers possess a philosophy of education. The set of ideas under which every teacher operates is the springboard for their choices in the classroom, if only because the complex nature of education requires that we operate from a belief system about what we do and why we do it. Philosophy determines what materials we choose, what methods we use to teach them, and what kinds of rules we have for classroom management. A teacher's philosophy of education impacts his or her students in a thousand ways as it is tested and refined in the classroom. One cannot separate theory from practice, for it shapes and is shaped by the everyday realities of teaching, and is the rationale for all that we do.

The marriage of theory and practice is essential for good teaching, and defines who we are as educators. However, the intimate relationship between theory and practice assumes that our philosophies are never finished - that each new student can impact and change our ideas, and that we are constantly adjusting our practice and theory as we grow and learn. Therefore, this is not by any stretch of the imagination a complete work; in fact, it is merely the beginning. This philosophy contains many of the beliefs and ideas I have gained in my university education, but it is only the place

from where I can begin to grow as a teacher, and learn what it means to become an educator.

The Essential Element

I remember sitting in high school classrooms under the careful scrutiny of my teachers and the reigning "keep your eyes on your desk" ideology, and recall thinking, "why do we bother to come to school to learn, anyway? I might as well learn this stuff at home if I am going to be just as isolated at school." The glorification of silence, this "do your own work" dogma was bewildering, and it wasn't until I experienced the benefits of a true community of learners that I also realized how harmful it is. Learning in isolation can be crippling, both for the process of knowledge acquisition and the ultimate aim of education. Community is the heart of learning, giving it vitality and purpose, and should be the core of our teaching. This assertion is central to my own educational philosophy, not merely because isolated learning is dull, but because the lack of a community focus in teaching hinders the goals of education itself. Helping students understand their relationship to the world, to society, and to others is crucial to the development of true critical thinking, and helping them link their knowledge to the world.

The link between community and education is most critical at the epistemological level of education, because the process of learning and knowing develops not merely the mind, but the soul as well. Parker J. Palmer puts it this way:

> "...epistemology is not a bloodless abstraction; the way we know has powerful implications for the way we live. I argue that every epistemology tends to become an ethic, and that every *way* of knowing tends to become a *way* of living. I argue that the relation established between the knower and the known, between the student and the subject, tends to become the relation of the living person to the world itself."
> (Palmer, 22)

Palmer demonstrates his thesis using the dominant university epistemology, objectivism. He claims that while objectivism allows students to critically examine an issue, it also creates a distant, analytic and experimental ethic which we decry in those who wield it. Objectivism, analysis and experimentalism are not inherently negative, but they allow students to distance themselves from the world in which they live, to divorce themselves from the issues they confront in school and the world.

> "They have always been taught about a world out there somewhere apart from them, divorced from their personal lives; they never have been invited to intersect their autobiographies with the life story of the world. And so they can report on a world that is not the one in which they live...where they can carve out for themselves a niche of private sanity in the midst of public calamity." (Palmer, 22)

This perspective emerges from an educational value removed from community, that neglects to reconnect the student with those from whom and with whom they are learning.

Objectivism is an educational ideal that I also take issue with, and one which is the heart of a discussion on community. Objectivism, analysis and experimentalism are important educational tools, and should not be dismissed. However, they must be balanced with epistemologies which affirm the *relational* nature of reality. The concept of community must be epistemologically embraced before

students will be able to make the connection between knowledge and the world, between learning and themselves.

This ability to both make *observations* and *connections* is essential to critical thinking, and is the cornerstone of education's agenda. Critical thinking requires community in several respects: first, true critical thinking requires both a removal of self and an insertion of self; students need to be able to comprehend an issue clearly and without prejudice, yet they must be able to discern their relation to it and their role in it. Second, critical thinking can only happen in community, because conflict and expression are required to seek honestly for the truth of an issue. Third, students will cease to be interested in an issue that has no connection to themselves; reconnecting knowledge to their world will be a greater motivator than any teacher.

Community is fundamental to creating a meaningful educational experience, not just in what we learn, but in *how*. The way we learn affects the way we live, and consequently, the community of learning is central to the impact we have on the world around us. Community also determines the effect that knowledge has on the individual, for we must realize our relationship with the world if we are to care for learning about it. Education must be linked to others if it is to have meaning and purpose, and not be reduced to mechanistic data input. The themes within my educational philosophy emerge from the belief that community is essential to critical thinking.
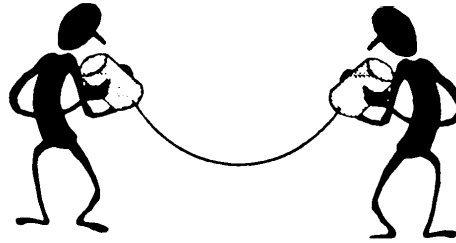
Making Connections

One cannot properly approach a discussion of community in education without exploring the various definitions of that word. The term "community" can be understood in several respects, depending on the focus of discussion. The first is the *Community Of The Classroom* - the students and teachers who make up the learning body. These individuals, through interaction with one another, have the opportunity to explore learning in ways as unique and diverse as themselves. The second aspect of this theme focuses on the *Community At Large*. This is the understanding that we are all part of a greater community of people, and as such, have a responsibility to it even while we reap the blessings of it. It is this aspect of community from which students so easily separate themselves, thereby stripping learning of its purpose, vitality and applicability. The third element of community is the *Community Of Ideas*. A love of learning can only happen if facts are made the gateway to ideas, and if students understand that they are not passive recipients but interactive players in the world of ideas. The joy of learning is produced by active participation, not rote memorization, and this exchange requires both an investment of self and a community in which to do it.

We have been taught that critical thinking requires an objective perspective; the ability to remove ourselves from personal prejudices or ideas which may cloud our judgment. Certainly this is a necessary step towards perceiving the world accurately, and is one which high school students often lack. However, by diverting their passion

to a "rational", unbiased perspective, we remove their involvement in an issue and often strip them of the desire to learn at all. I believe that we must teach students how to re-invest themselves in learning. This means that after we require them to examine an issue objectively, we must ask them to explore their association to that issue. Questions such as, "what do you think about that?", "why do you think that way?", "how did you respond to that?", "what would you do if this was you?", and "have you ever felt that way?" will force students to connect their subjects to themselves and to each other. The concept of metacognition, or "why do I think the way I do?" is certainly not new to education, yet it is one which is indispensable to a meaningful learning process.

The "real world" requires us to understand our relationship to the ideas of school. History, English, Philosophy, Math, Science... these eventually become the basis for a million decisions we make as adults, and that we need to be learning to make as students. However, metacognition is not important simply for voting or economic decisions - it is essential to creating an honest world view, to understanding our relationship to people, and to perceiving the process of learning as significant at all. The ability to make connections between ourselves and others requires a delicate balance between objective, rational understanding and personal involvement.

This process of re-investment is often identified in the educational world as "values clarification" or delving into the "affective domain". David Krathwohl developed a taxonomy of the affective domain which teachers can use to heighten students motivation and identification with their learning. The levels of his taxonomy

are: Receiving, Responding, Valuing, Organizing, and Characterizing. (Tonjes, 32)

These levels denote kinds of activities within the affective domain, and exemplify types

of thinking which many educational psychologists feel ought to occur in the classroom.

I would like to extend their argument further, and assert that these activities must

happen in order for students to want to learn at all. David Ausubel states: "Even

though particular instances of learning may be largely unmotivated, it is undoubtedly

true that the subject matter in question must be related to felt needs if significant, *long-

term* meaningful learning is to occur...". (Tonjes, 34)   This idea is corroborated by

many educational theories of motivation, learning and development. Whether the

theories themselves are in unanimity or not, they recognize that personal involvement

is essential to the learning process.
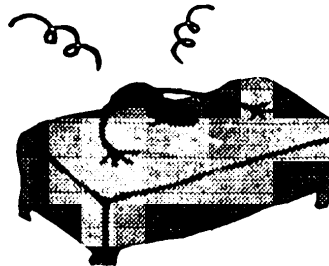
The Motivation Factor

The idea that students should learn in community can be validated by common

sense and observations of the classroom.   However, there is much research in

psychology and education which provides a firm foundation for this claim. All theories

of motivation begin with a discussion of the intrinsic versus extrinsic nature of

motivation. Extrinsic motivations are things which produce immediate gratification,

such as grades, prizes, or pleasing the teacher. This type of motivation is useful and

necessary, and can prompt us to work when our intrinsic motivators fail us. However,

no permanent, meaningful learning will occur without the cooperation of intrinsic

motivation. Intrinsic motivators are things such as natural curiosity, desire for excellence or social reciprocity. While intrinsic motivation is based on need, extrinsic motivation is a form of reinforcement, and is central to behaviorist theories of learning. While extrinsic motivation is useful, the behaviorist tenet that people operate solely according to reinforcement and conditioning assumes that human beings are merely robots, formed by external circumstances. My philosophy centers around the belief that people are more than a product of their environment, and as such, require intrinsic motivators to approach learning.
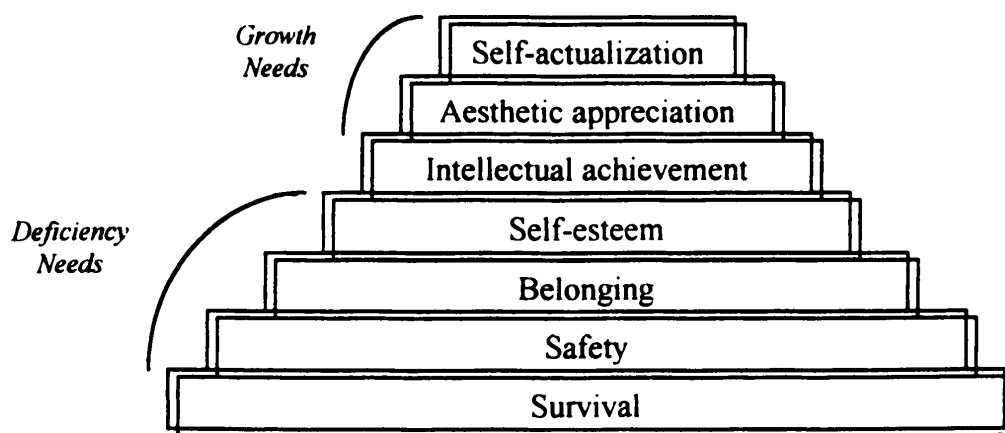
Intrinsic motivation is further developed by Cognitive theories of motivation, which focus on the *need to understand*. Cognitive theories suggest that we have a desire to "understand the world, to have control over our lives, and to be self-directed." (Eggen & Kauchak, 437) These ideas link a person's desire to understand and be self-determined, to their achievement motivation, beliefs about their abilities, and to individual behavior. According to cognitive theorists, a student cannot learn without the incentive of personal involvement and the aspiration to understand the world around them.

A similar theory of intrinsic motivation is the Humanist perspective, which focuses on the need to grow and develop. Humanism, which developed in the 1950's, is a reaction against the behaviorist and psychoanalytic forces which dominated human and educational psychology. It examines how the intellectual, emotional, and interpersonal aspects of a person affect learning and motivation.

"It is a psychology searching to understand what goes on inside us - our needs, wants, desires, feelings, values, and unique ways of perceiving and understanding what causes us to behave the way we do...it is what teachers practice as they help students to see the personal relevancy in what they are learning." (Eggen & Kauchak, 449)

Humanism views motivation as a force which causes all human beings to grow and develop; that stems from each person's internal desire to improve.

While I struggle with the ego-centrism and unrealistic perspective of human nature within the Humanist philosophy, I cannot help but acknowledge the truth in its tenet that *all people grow and develop*. How they do so is a matter of experience; but the reality that learning is prompted by personal needs is evident within the Humanist theories of motivation. The concept of motivation as needs was developed into a hierarchy by Abraham Maslow, the father of the humanist movement. He suggested that people have a "drive for self-realization, self-fulfillment, or self-actualization." (Eggen & Kauchak, 451) Maslow's hierarchy was divided into two categories: *Deficiency Needs*, the absence of which motivate people to meet them, and *Growth Needs*, which expand as people have experiences with them. Here is an example of his idea:

Growth Needs
- Self-actualization
- Aesthetic appreciation
- Intellectual achievement

Deficiency Needs
- Self-esteem
- Belonging
- Safety
- Survival

In this diagram, the lower four needs must be present before the last three can be achieved. According to Maslow, this desire for self-actualization is what motivates all human beings, and is the necessary foundation to any meaningful learning. His theory is widely accepted as evidence of the kinds of goals we have as people, and of the personal and intimate motivations we have for learning.

Both Cognitive theories and Humanist theories of motivation point to one reality - that we desire to have personal connections to the world of people and ideas. Whether we learn from a desire to understand and know, or to grow and develop, these theorists illuminate the truth that learning must connect us to knowledge and to each other.
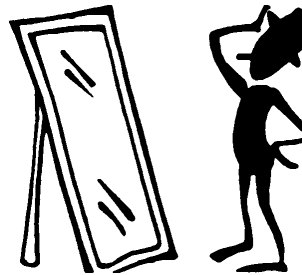
Exploring Perspectives

The idea that learning is motivated by a desire to connect with the world, and that interaction within a community is essential to that end, is supported by studies in developmental psychology as well. The psychologist Erik Erikson created a psychosocial theory that is based on four main principles:

1. People have the same general needs.
2. Development proceeds in stages.
3. Each stage is characterized by a psychosocial issue.
4. Different stages reflect differences in the motivation of the individual.
   (Eggen & Kauchak, 66)

In Erikson's theory, the psychosocial issue that characterizes adolescence is *Identity versus Confusion*. Erikson describes it thus: "From among all possible and imaginable relations, the young person must make a series of ever-narrowing selections of personal, occupational, and ideological commitments." (Steinberg, 267) During this time an adolescent will experiment with different roles and identities, sometimes in permissible sorts of explorations, sometimes not. Trying on different personalities and ways of behaving, says Erikson, is typical demeanor of an adolescent, and requires a *psychosocial moratorium* - a space where they can experience this type of questioning.

Education can play a part in this - in particular, teachers of literature and language arts can promote role experimentation in a safe and healthy manner. A student's search for identity can be a wonderful motivator for learning about other people and characters if teachers can help students make connections between themselves and the literature. Delving into the affective domain forces students to question their assumptions, imagine themselves in different roles, and vicariously "experience" other types of behavior. Exploring perspectives through literature can help students to discover their role in community and more firmly establish their identity.

Erickson's ideas have been highly criticized for the same fault that Freud and other important psychologists possessed, which is a male-centric focus. The research which Erickson contributed to education is invaluable, but it only tells half the story.

> "Gilligan's influential study of moral development showed that women conceptualize and experience the world in a different voice, a voice that is more person centered and empathic, more emotionally

connected and less abstract than the male voice. Men and women, Gilligan concludes, operate with different internal models. Where a dominant image for men is that of hierarchy, competition to be alone at the top, women respond to their lives through the image of the web, or concerns about connectedness. ...Women's epistemological sense is rooted in connecting reality to an ongoing sense of self...to know is to connect rather than to master." (Josselson, 23)

The reality that women's patterns of development differ from men's does not invalidate Erickson's ideas, rather, it prompts a broadening of application. Encouraging community discourse will allow women to partake of identity experimentation within the safe confines of connectedness. Sharing beliefs and ideas within the community provides women the opportunity to try out their thoughts, to explore perspectives through relationships.
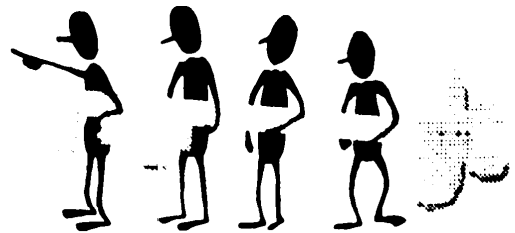
Relevancy - The Key to Connecting

However appealing the benefits of learning (growth, understanding, identity, etc.) may be, the disturbing truth is that education fails to attract students. There are many explanations for this dilemma, and while I won't presume to answer this question in its entirety, I cannot help but believe that much of the problem lies with educational epistemology. If students do have intrinsic motivations to learn, and if they must engage with a community in order to do so, then the link between these two ideas is relevancy. Connecting the greater community of people and ideas to students via their own personal concerns and interests is the key to motivation. Leila Christenbury puts it this way:

"In English class, students want to read something that speaks to them and their experience; they want to write about what they know; they want to talk about issues of importance. This does not mean that they can't or won't read about different cultures and different ages, but it must, somehow, relate to now." (Christenbury, 19)

A favorite professor of mine used to talk of the teacher as a salesperson: "You have to convince them that what they are about to learn *is* important to them; that they are not wasting their time and effort, but that the material does relate to their lives and interests... Reading, 'Riting and 'Rithmetic are fine, but Relevancy is the big 'R' of teaching."

One reason that relevancy is so significant to the learning process is that it answers the "why" of education. In a typical adolescent mindset, utilitarianism reigns: "*Why* do I have to read The Great Gatsby? When will I ever need to know this?". Helping students to see the connection between themselves, knowledge, and the world around them will push them toward a love of learning for learning's sake. Another benefit to relevancy is that it validates student experiences. In order to connect students to learning, one must cease to view students as empty vessels which need to be filled with knowledge. Allowing students to contribute their own thoughts and experiences creates participants in the community of learners, and encourages the critical dialogue necessary for real understanding.

The importance of relevancy can be seen from various learning theories as well as motivational arguments. Cognitive theories about how people learn focus on information processing, rather than behaviorist ideas of conditioning. From a cognitive

perspective, learning is defined as "a change in individuals' mental structures that gives them the capacity to demonstrate changes in behavior." Below is an information processing model:
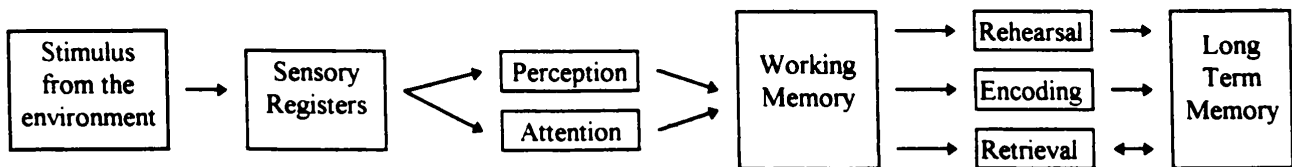
This model illustrates the sequence of events that occur before a person has "comprehended" a piece of information. It is apparent through this model as well as common sense, that a student's perception and attention must be turned onto the teacher and away from other environmental stimulus if any learning is to be achieved. This is where relevancy makes a difference - if the teacher can focus the material on student interests and concerns, then the student's working and long term memory are more likely to become engaged.

One strategy to achieve this end is known as the "hook", and is a wonderful way to engage student interest. Christenbury explains it thus:

> "Many beginning teachers forget how puzzling a piece of literature can be, how it can seem, especially on first reading, to come from absolutely nowhere. Accordingly, in their classroom discussions teachers just start - often seemingly out of thin air - as if the mere act of having heard the poem read aloud or reading the short story as homework was sufficient introduction. Always think about how to lead your students into a piece... give them some sort of context for what they will be dealing with, and try at the onset to help them puzzle out a connection." (Christenbury, 136)

The "hook", "warm up", or "anticipatory set" is designed to attract student attention and establish the relevancy of a particular lesson.

This teaching strategy also corresponds to the theories of educational psychologist Jean Piaget. He maintains that all people are motivated by the *Drive For Equilibrium*, or the instinctive need to find order, structure and balance in our existence. "When the structures or patterns fit, the world makes sense, and we have equilibrium. When our ideas about the world fail to fit or make sense, disequilibrium occurs, and the search for new and better patterns begins." (Eggen & Kauchak, 36) It is this search, this uncomfortable disequilibrium, where real understanding occurs. Our drive for order pushes us to create order, and in so doing, we learn! Piaget asserts that we organize the this learning by a series of coherent patterns, called schemata. Schemata are the "knowledge, procedures and relationships that we use to understand and function in the world." (Eggen & Kauchak, 37)

Within Piaget's model, acquiring knowledge becomes a process of attaching new information to schemata which is already present. The importance of this procedure is seen in the case of a teacher building on previous learning; random bits of information have no meaning unless they can be firmly anchored to existing knowledge. However, Piaget's theories of schemata are also significant to the question of relevancy. If schema is the framework we use to make sense of the world, then our own experiences are crucial to this process. Linking texts to student experiences allows them to expand their schema - whether through an exciting "hook", questions which force personal investment in issues, or sharing within a community of peers - the context of learning is

central to the learning process itself. If they are to care about learning at all, literature and writing must stem from and connect to a student's own experiences and the world in which they live.

Discovery through Interaction

The importance of helping students interact with learning on a personal level, and the significance of connecting them to a greater community of ideas has been emphasized throughout my discussion. However, these are not achievable without a pedagogical transformation in the classroom. The classroom community is an abundant resource for collaborative learning and discovery.

> "Whether you are conscious of it or not, your classroom is a fertile social context for literacy learning. And if the linguists are right that the social context is the driving force behind literacy acquisition, then the social context of your English/Language Arts classroom is the most powerful and important variable you can experiment with." (Zemelman & Daniels, 50-51)

The value of collaborative learning has been substantiated by numerous educational theorists. Piaget's concept of knowledge acquisition asserts that students construct their schema, or understanding of the world, through the interaction they have with it. *Constructivism* focuses on the importance of direct experience, rather than a lecture or "telling" mode of instruction. Constructivists believe that knowledge is "the result of individual constructions of reality." (Eggen & Kauchak, 57) Students must create hypotheses, then test and rebuild them in order to grow in understanding the world. In an English classroom, hypothesis building takes the form of discussion and interaction

around a text - either literature or writing of their own. The classroom can provide direct experience, and in encountering new ideas it can promote the critical discourse that is the heart of learning.

Educational theorist Jerome Bruner proposed an instructional approach that provides students with information, and then requires them to process this data into meaningful abstractions. His concept of *Discovery Learning* reignited a topic that was extremely controversial, because it removed educators from the central role of information giver. Bruner's ideas forced educators to concede one thing, however - that learning is not a passive activity, and that it requires personal and collaborative effort to achieve. This hypothesis is corroborated by the work of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky.

Vygotsky's theories of the social origins of learning emphasize his idea of the *Zone of Proximal Development*. This zone is the phase where most learning takes place, and is where a student will benefit the most from group work. Vygotsky stressed the importance of social support during this phase of the learning process, because of the significance of language in developmental growth. People must verbalize their thoughts and ideas in order to learn and grow, and this can only occur in a vibrant community.

Zone of Proximal Development
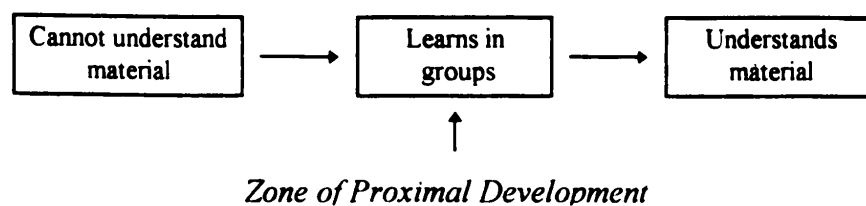
These theories substantiate what is only common sense - that students learn more effectively if they are not isolated, but are a part of an interactive community of learners. Learning is not passive; it requires hypothesis building, direct experience, personal discovery, and community discourse. This is particularly true of English/Language arts classrooms, because literacy is socially constructed, and because reading and writing are forms of communication.

One domain of the English classroom which is especially hard to merge with the idea of community is writing. Traditionally, writing has been perceived as a means of evaluation, rather than a instrument of discovery and communication. The punitive and merciless red pen of the English teacher does more to create frustrated, unconfident writers than it promotes original and creative discourse. To view writing as an evaluatory end rather than a method of learning strips writing of its purpose - to convey ideas to a community of learners. The classroom community ought to be a student's audience, for it will benefit from and give to the writer.

> "What students learn about writing depends more than anything else on the context in which they write - that is, on the ways in which writing is used in the classroom; the attitudes of the teacher toward the students and toward writing itself; ...why they are writing; how people treat the ideas and beliefs expressed in their writing; ...and the purposes for learning implicitly expressed by that community." (Zemelman & Daniels, 50)

Utilizing the classroom community for writing helps students to focus on the *process* of writing, and debunks the myth that people are "born writers". Students can brainstorm together, revise their papers together in groups, and even evaluate one another. This approach to writing engages students in critical thinking and encourages personal

investment in their writing. Students are spending time 'creating' a real contribution to the classroom, not just producing rote evaluation for the teacher. The process takes longer than a traditional approach to writing, but the benefits are calculably greater. "The fact is, in real life we rely very little on external evaluation and much more on practice - unmonitored, unsupervised, uncriticized practice - as the key way of learning almost everything important." (Zemelman & Daniels, 208) Asking students to prewrite, revise and edit their work more accurately simulates "real world" endeavors - the kind of work that happens outside the classroom. Student-centered writing not only involves students in crafting and shaping their writing with care, it allows them to have personal interest in their writing assignments.

If students are to care about writing, then their assignments must reflect the myriad of purposes for which we write. Student writing should allow room for discovery and reflection, for personal concern, and for subjects of interest to the student. Whether this is accomplished by offering a choice of writing topics or allowing students to choose their own, the benefits of providing unique writing opportunities are immeasurable. One example of interesting writing which I particularly like is the Oral History. This assignment requires students to interview and draft the story of another individual - often an elderly person who has impacted them in some way. Author Linda Rief traditionally involves her students in the oral histories of the elderly, because it forces them to reach beyond themselves.

> "Adolescents are self-centered. Letting them consider the plight of other generations lets them get outside themselves to reflect on others for a change. They are going through so many physical, social, emotional and

psychological changes, that we sometimes think adolescents can't get outside themselves to think about the plight of others. They can, whether its in understanding what motivates characters in a story or in empathy with real people." (Rief, 70)

These kind of assignments lessen the isolation of the classroom, involve students in "real" writing, and provide opportunities to share within the classroom. "Writing has the power to generate thinking and to enable connections, thereby creating new relationships." (Andrasick, 8)   Utilizing the outside world and classroom community gives purpose to students' writing, and helps them become intimately involved with learning.

The Dynamics of Community
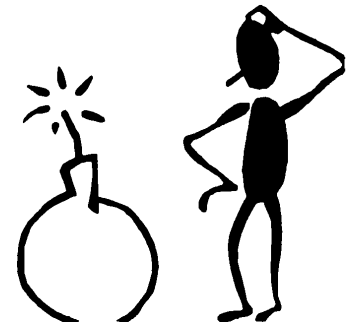
In order for reading and writing to take an active and vibrant role in the classroom, that community must foster an honest, collaborative and nurturing atmosphere. Critical thinking can only emerge from an environment where everyone works together to seek out truth; where the teacher has "built into the classroom context clear and congruent encouragement for putting down honest ideas and questions rather than set formulae for producing acceptable products." (Zemelman & Daniels, 50) Encouraging students to produce hypotheses, no matter how unusual, should push them towards discovering answers.

However, the importance of affirming student responses does not mean that we should pretend that "right" responses do not exist. This is where I diverge from the popular relativism of the university - while literature and ideas are full of relativistic

concepts, the honest search for truth is at the heart of our desire to learn. Allan Bloom refers to this idea when he says, "Openness used to be the virtue that permitted us to seek the good by using reason. It now means accepting everything and denying reason's power." (Bloom, 38) Though respect for different ideas and sensitivity to others is essential to critical discourse, we cannot pretend that learning is merely airing one's opinion. Critical thinking requires that we examine our ideas for flaws, and be willing to change if we are wrong. It implies that truths do exist, and that learning comes from discovering new questions to ask as well as finding answers to them. Additionally, if we are prompted to learn by our desire to find answers, how discouraging it must be to discover that there are none! Unbridled relativism kills the very reason we learn, and reduces us to non-thinking individuals. The classroom community should be a place where students can come to seek truth together; an environment which produces the critical discourse necessary to learn.

One element of critical thinking that is all to often missing from high school classrooms, is creative conflict. Katherine Andrasick illustrates the powerful benefits of conflict within community: "Collaboration forces confrontation with new points of view and provides students opportunities to evaluate, analyze, and compare a variety of observations. " (Andrasick, 21) Collaborative learning forces us to adjust our old schema, to challenge new ideas, and to hear the voices of our companions.

> "Knowing and learning are communal acts. They require a continual cycle of discussion, disagreement, and consensus over what has been seen and what it all means. This is the essence of the 'community of scholars', and it should be the essence of the classroom as well." (Palmer, 25)

Open and creative conflict breed learning, and dissuade the competitive individualism of the traditional classroom. When lines of communication exist only between student and teacher, a pedagogy develops that places the individual as the primary agent of knowing, and produces the silent ethic of personal reward. "Our ability to confront each other critically and honestly over alleged facts, imputed meanings, or personal biases and prejudices - that is the ability impaired by the absence of community." (Palmer, p.25) Healthy conflict cannot exist without the virtues of community, and without conflict, students cannot reap the benefits of cognitive learning.

The social climate of the classroom, however, influences the degree of communication and collaboration that exists within its walls. Students will only share in an environment that fosters trust, where classmates are known to one another. Thus, task oriented activities need to be balanced by "maintenance" , or "relational" activities. Whether this means allowing a few extra minutes for chitchat in small groups, or creating assignments that require students to work together, actively fostering community will enable critical dialogue better than any other strategy.

This kind of flexibility is an important element of a *Student-Centered* classroom. Allowing students to debate and interact is a messy, unorganized process, and requires teachers to relinquish a certain amount of control. I do not mean to imply that chaos should run rampant, but I do feel that good instruction involves letting go. One way to accomplish this is to allow students to participate in constructing their environment. Ask students to help establish the classroom rules - it allows them to voice what's

important to them, it gives them some autonomy, and it offers the teacher a solid basis for enforcing the rules. Student-centered classrooms also suggest a redefinition of what it means to be an educator - rather than the fount of information, a teacher can be a facilitator of the learning process. Providing opportunities for students to share, debate and question also implies that the teacher is willing to learn just as much as the students. A teacher can convey participation in the classroom community, and still be an authority figure with knowledge to offer. This kind of community, where the members are known to each other and have begun the same journey, is a place where discovery and learning can happen.

The Purpose of Community

Philosophies are created by everything from abstract theories to personal experiences, and mine is no different. Perhaps the greatest influence on my ideas about education has been my involvement in the community of faith. To maintain one's religious beliefs at the secular university requires the kind of critical thinking talked about here - discovery born of analysis, conflict and community. It was in the community of faith that I truly learned critical inquiry; where I began to ask, "What is my relationship to this idea? How does this affect me? Does this impact my beliefs? How will I incorporate this into my life?" During this process, I began to see that my experience was not the norm - that other university students were not forced to

examine their relationship to their knowledge, and as a result, often came away unchanged by their experience. This is where community had its greatest impact - not only was my community of faith a support, but it was involved with the same process as I. The whole community was striving together for understanding, growth, analysis, and truth.

As I reflected on my own education, I began to tie the benefits of community to the goals of learning. Education is about change; about adjusting one's perception of the world to incorporate new ideas. If we are to be truly changed by our educational experience, then we must invest ourselves in it, and that requires a community. Community is the place where we are encouraged, pushed, and challenged. It is the place where we discover our relationship to the world, where we can give and receive from others. If the way we learn affects the way we live, then I want my students to learn within a community - because it is important that they live in and for a community. R. Josselson's ideas are significant for both men and women - we need to begin to perceive the world in terms of "connectedness." We must be able to weave our knowledge into a web of purpose and relationship, if it is to have any meaning at all.

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