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Reconciling dichotomies in higher education : theoretical and practical implications of an interactive educational conception.

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RECONCILING DICHOTOMIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

OF AN INTERACTIVE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION

A Dissertation Presented

by

CARL D. BRELL, JR.

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfillment
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School of Education

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ABSTRACT

RECONCILING DICHOTOMIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS
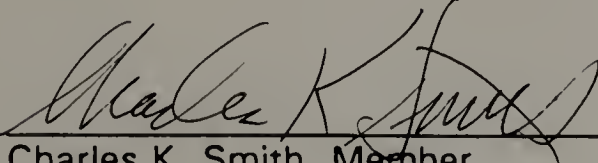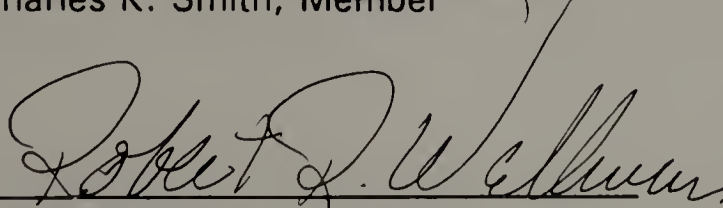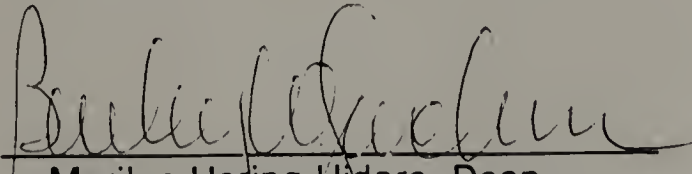OF AN INTERACTIVE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION

FEBRUARY 1991

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Recent decades have witnessed the growing emergence of a

conception of higher learning as entailing the interaction of individual

tendencies with physical and social conditions. The present study

explores the theoretical and practical implications of this conception

across several key areas of the literature, including higher education

reform, critical thinking, moral education, college writing, and college

teaching.

Generally speaking, educational interactionism is the attempt to

explain intellectual and moral growth in terms of the ongoing and

reciprocal interaction of human beings and their physical and social

environments. It accordingly seeks to reconcile the historical antipathy

between inner-directed theories (rationalism, idealism, romanticism)

and outer-directed theories (empiricism, positivism, essentialism) of

human agency, meaning, and growth. In terms of educational

practice, educational interactionism seeks to resolve the persistent

tension between attention to students' individual needs and interests and the transmission of a socially viable body of subject matter. It does so chiefly by asserting that neither has any meaning without the other.

In projecting this interactive conception across what are for the most part discrete literatures, the present study seeks to illustrate how similar principles operate across these areas and to encourage dialogue between them. It should be viewed as a first step in a larger effort to integrate and clarify the general features of an interactive educational conception, eliminate many present inconsistencies, and outline its implications for educational policy and teaching practice.

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CHAPTER 1

BELIEF AS A CONDITION OF KNOWLEDGE:
THE NEED FOR A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE
IN THE REFORM OF HIGHER EDUCATION

In his recent study, <u>College: The Undergraduate Experience in America</u>,[1] Ernest Boyer writes urgently of the need for a guiding vision of liberal education which would give meaning and direction to American undergraduate institutions. Like many educational observers, Boyer is disturbed by the divisions he sees both between colleges and the larger human community and within colleges themselves. Arguing that the undergraduate experience plays a unique and crucial role in preparing people for productive and meaningful lives in an interdependent world, Boyer maintains that above all else colleges need to foster a sense of integrity and responsibility in the minds and hearts of undergraduates. To do this, he maintains, colleges must themselves forge connections between the various aspects of campus life such that all facets of the college experience contribute towards the ideal of the liberally educated person: a person who understands and appreciates the shared concerns of humanity and who uses her knowledge, skills, and habits of lifelong learning both as vehicles of personal growth and fulfillment and in the service of others.

Boyer outlines a broad sketch of concrete recommendations --

from clarifying admission requirements to creating more meaningful

student living arrangements to improving institutional governance --

for revitalizing American colleges. At the heart of his proposals lies an

academic program comprised of three main components: an

"integrated core" of liberal learning, an "enriched major" which

complements rather than supplants general education, and a four-year

"language requirement" wherein the development of reading,

speaking, listening, and, above all, writing skills forms an integral part

of all course work. The idea behind this program is, first, to lead

students towards a greater understanding and appreciation of the

place of their specialized and general knowledge in the larger context

of humanity's shared concerns, and, secondly, to help them learn to

apply that knowledge towards improving the quality of life as a whole,

with the understanding that learning so applied is essential to a

fulfilling life.

Approaching the topic from a somewhat different perspective,

the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher

Education, in a study entitled Involvement in Learning: Realizing the

Potential of American Higher Education,[2] focuses less on a

comprehensive analysis of the undergraduate experience and more

narrowly on certain key conditions of effective higher learning. While

sharing many of Boyer's basic assumptions about the role of college in

producing thoughtful and productive citizens, the Study Group bases

its recommendations instead on a theory of effective learning which

revolves around three principles: student involvement in the learning

process, clear and public standards of student performance that

reflect the complexities of genuine learning, and the need for

appropriate assessment and feedback measures as levers for student

involvement and guides to teaching improvement.

In a series of recommendations that bear some remarkable

similarities to Boyer's, the Study Group emphasizes its conviction that

educational practices and policy decisions should be based on a clear

conception of the desired outcomes of liberal learning, rather than on

the pressures of market demand, as they all too often are. The Study

Group includes among its list of desired outcomes the abilities to think

critically, to communicate effectively, and to synthesize and apply

learning from various disciplines towards the handling of real life

problems -- outcomes very similar to Boyer's, in substance, if not in

tone.

Problem Statement

The present study takes as its starting point the shared

conviction that undergraduate education in the United States is in

need of precisely the sorts of recommendations suggested in these

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two studies, particularly with regard to establishing a clear and unifying vision of the purpose of higher learning. It also recognizes the breadth of such an undertaking and accordingly seeks to limit its attention to an especially central aspect of the problem: the articulation of a philosophically and practically sound conception of higher learning, particularly as that conception is manifesting and being discussed in four crucial areas of the current literature in higher education -- critical thinking, moral education, college writing, and college teaching. The reason for focusing on the articulation of a conception of higher learning is that even the most well-intentioned and seemingly constructive educational recommendations will inevitably go astray if they are not rooted in a model of learning that is sufficiently dynamic to capture the complexities of actual human learning.

The Involvement in Learning study is a good example, for despite a wealth of constructive recommendations, it nevertheless bases too many of its proposals on an incomplete analysis. For instance, the Study Group wisely prescribes that assessment and feedback measures "should reflect the level of subtlety and complexity at which college subjects are taught and learned" and accordingly cautions against reliance on "simplistic multiple-choice examinations as measures of student performance."[3] But their analysis of how assessment and feedback should be used to enhance

"student involvement" is not entirely consistent with this advice. Citing evidence which indicates that "at the elementary and secondary levels, clearly and publicly stated high standards of performance act as spurs to greater achievement, largely because students come to share those standards with their schools," the Study Group assumes that the same will hold true at the college level.[4] Reasoning that since "students respond positively to information on their performance in relation to institutional expectations," the Study Group asserts that "[t]he use of assessment information to redirect effort ... serves as a powerful lever for student involvement."[5]

While clear and public standards are certainly the necessary bases upon which all course design, instruction, and evaluation should be based, the assumption that students will absorb those standards "directly" -- simply by being kept apprised of their progress relative to them -- contradicts what we have come to understand about learning in recent years. While it is certainly true that college teachers need to develop, communicate, and utilize clear standards, there are nevertheless serious psychological, ethical, and epistemological difficulties which suggest that basing an assessment policy on the assumption that students will thereby adopt those standards could actually serve to undermine the kind of learning we want to encourage.

Psychological Difficulties

In the first place, developmental research[6] would seem to indicate fairly conclusively that while external standards issued from persons in authority are major determinants of the values and perspectives of children and even adolescents, the influence of such standards decreases as people mature. The college years in particular seem to be marked by major reconstructions of a person's cognitive structures and values based on a complex network of criteria issuing from cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and environmental factors.

The Study Group acknowledges this widely accepted fact when, in an effort to balance the need for student autonomy with its own objectives, it suggests that "colleges should understand what students expect, and should reciprocate by clearly communicating to students the learning objectives of college-level programs and courses".[7] While this recommendation seems fair enough, it completely bypasses the questions (1) of how to reconcile student and institutional expectations when they conflict, and, more importantly, (2) of how to lead students to see and embrace (or intelligently reconstruct) institutional standards as a function of their own autonomous judgement rather than because of the power of institutions to grant or deny credit. All ethical considerations aside, the developmental evidence indicates that there are good reasons to

doubt the psychological adequacy of standards which students themselves have not adopted through their own autonomous deliberations. While I am no more suggesting that "student expectations should arbitrarily govern curriculum and the content of individual courses"[8] than is the Study Group, I am saying that the interaction between student expectations and institutional standards is more complex psychologically than the Study Group's proposals would indicate.

Ethical Difficulties

In addition to these psychological difficulties, there are closely related ethical considerations which pertain to the Study Group's recommendations concerning the role of institutional standards and assessment measures in securing student involvement. The Study Group acknowledges that "Learning is enhanced when both expectations and standards are clear, and when they are actively shared by faculty and students."[9] But everything would seem to depend on how students come to share such an understanding. If one of the goals of a college education is, as both the Involvement in Learning and Boyer studies maintain, to produce open-minded, thoughtful, and autonomous moral agents, it seems vital that we respect students' right to construct their own standards, guides, and

characters through independently arrived judgments, as opposed to any form of indoctrination, no matter how benevolent.

For one thing, the psychological evidence cited earlier suggests that moral principles arrived at by any means other than autonomous deliberations are relatively unstable psychologically and inadequate for active participation in our democratic way of life. Moreover, it would seem that only the moral agent who arrives at her principles of tolerance, exchange, and personal and social integrity independently can be trusted to uphold those standards under duress and to help others develop in the same direction. Finally, the moral question of how to balance students' rights to their own values and standards with institutional expectations is far from settled. In this regard, the Study Group's recommendation that assessment information be used to secure student involvement comes dangerously close to coercion.

None of this is to suggest that students should arbitrarily set the moral tone or agenda of their schools, but it is to say that clear and public standards and assessment measures, while certainly necessary conditions of effective formal learning, are insufficient to the development of autonomous morality in students. While the goal is obviously not to free students from the responsibility of measuring up to institutional expectations, neither is it to get them to adhere to impersonal standards of performance and "excellence," the bases and implications of which they do not fully grasp, no matter how valid

those standards may be from the viewpoint of the institution. In short, the moral intricacies involved in the balancing of students' reasoning and institutional expectations would suggest the need for a more thorough consideration of the role institutional standards play in students' moral development than that implied by the Study Group's recommendations.

Epistemological Difficulties

A third area of difficulty with the Study Groups' proposal, and one which requires a longer exposition, is epistemological. The Study Group quite correctly stresses the importance of designing educational policies and practices in the light of a clear understanding of desired student outcomes and accordingly cautions against the superficial use of vague and grandiose terms like "critical thinking" and "value education" as substitutes for concrete statements of observable objectives. In their effort to define student outcomes in concrete terms, however, the Study Group chooses behavioral indicators that do not well reflect the epistemological difficulties involved in making attributions of knowledge and commitment.

Consider, for example, this passage on "student involvement":

> Highly involved students demonstrate their commitment in a variety of ways: by devoting considerable energy to studying, by working at on-campus rather than off-campus jobs, by participating actively in student

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organizations, and by interacting frequently with faculty members and student peers.[10]

While these indicators may accurately reflect certain types of involvement, they are neither sufficient nor even necessary conditions of learning. That they are not necessary is evidenced by those highly involved students who do not exhibit these behaviors. (The one exception here is that highly involved students clearly do devote "considerable energy" to studying, but this is the one indicator in the Study Group's list which is not an observable behavior. Devoting "energy" to studying can assume many different forms, most of which are impervious to simplistic behavioral descriptions.) That these indicators are not sufficient conditions of learning is illustrated in the following statement by a typical high school senior in the Boyer study: "Students don't join the French Club to experience French culture but because Yale will be impressed."[11] If colleges were to require evidence of commitment on the basis of such observable behaviors, one can easily imagine students going through the motions of "being involved" without actually learning anything.

While the Study Group assuredly has in mind more substantive indicators of academic achievement, their emphasis on assessment as a lever for securing student involvement is prone to the same basic difficulty: students would be too likely to try to perform in accordance with external standards they did not necessarily embrace or comprehend. How often, for example, have we, as college teachers

striving to get our students to think more deeply, creatively, or critically about something, had students respond to even our explicit requirements and feedback with questions such as these: "So you want me to take a position?" "So you want me to cite my sources?" "So I should try looking at things from other viewpoints?" Any teacher who has experienced the frustration of such responses knows that explicit statements of what we expect from students, even when coupled with careful feedback as to how well students have met those expectations, are still no guarantee that students will really get them, in the sense of **believing** and **adopting** them as active principles of their own reasoning. It is just as probable that students will only adopt our imposed standards for classroom purposes, while resorting in real-life to whatever standards happen actually to guide them.

This is not to suggest, of course, that clear and public statements of objectives are unimportant. On the contrary, they are the very foundation upon which all effective teaching, course design, and evaluation are based, and students certainly benefit from knowing, as precisely as possible, both what it is we expect from them and how well their work measures up to those standards. But securing involvement in learning is not so simple a matter as making explicit our expectations and evaluating students' performance accordingly, though the Study Group is quite right that the adoption

of such measures could make for a substantial improvement in much of the teaching that goes on.

Genuine teaching requires something more. Specifically, it requires engagement of and interaction with students' existing beliefs. To overlook this dimension of teaching would be to take inadequate account of the belief component in knowledge, particularly of the way people at all levels of cognitive development structure and commit themselves to their own knowledge/belief systems.

Three Conditions of Knowledge

The prevailing contemporary view of knowledge is often formulated as follows:

> S knows P
> if and only if:
> (i) S believes P,
> (ii) S has adequate evidence of P,
> and (iii) P is true.[12]

A frequent criticism of school learning[13] is that it often satisfies (i) and (iii) but not (ii). In other words, it is often the case that students will "learn" something and come to believe it without having adequate reasons for doing so. In such cases, they could be said to be in possession of "true opinions" but not "knowledge."

In a similar manner, it is equally possible for school learning to satisfy (ii) and (iii) but not (i). In this case, students are given, and can

reproduce on demand, "adequate" reasons for something generally taken to be true, while not actually subscribing to it themselves. As a writing teacher, for example, I have often received solid papers arguing particular viewpoints, only later to discover in informal discussions or tutorials that the students themselves held entirely different opinions but felt they couldn't defend them in accordance with the standards they believed both I and other teachers required. In contrast, the students who take such conflicts as opportunities to examine more critically the grounds for their own beliefs are precisely the ones who are also willing to challenge external standards -- the irony, of course, being that in so doing they engage in precisely the kind of thinking and learning we are trying to teach. To state the point directly: it is those students who are driven to construct and justify their own standards, by both challenging and entering into dialogue with what are otherwise imposed standards, who engage in genuine college level learning.

Of course, for students merely to challenge external standards is not enough. It is for this reason that I include "entering into dialogue with existing standards" as a condition of genuine college level learning. Much could be (and will be) said about this condition, but the crucial point for now is that genuine college level learning, like all genuine learning, involves the engagement and reworking of students' beliefs and belief systems. And merely providing explicit

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standards and feedback does not ensure such involvement. To be genuinely involved, students must be motivated by something other than grades or their need for approval or the desire to measure up; they must be motivated by challenges, both indirect and direct, to their existing beliefs and belief systems. Only when they are brought to the point where they question the grounds of their own "knowledge," beliefs, and convictions will they become genuinely engaged in learning.

Scheffler's Analysis

Israel Scheffler's analysis of the belief condition of knowledge[14] both supports and enlightens this thesis. Scheffler begins by rejecting the theory, put forth, among others, by B.F. Skinner[15], that belief manifests itself as the tendency to produce certain verbal responses in answer to questioning -- largely on the grounds that many other factors than belief can account for even ingrained tendencies towards given verbal responses (e.g., desire for approval, fear of punishment, ulterior motive, extenuating circumstances, etcetera).[16] It is, moreover, often the case that a person believes he subscribes to a belief while acting in a way that is completely at odds with it. For example, Oliver North and his admirers quite obviously believed themselves champions of democracy yet

sanctioned the most undemocratic behaviors. Or again, a man may sincerely "believe" in the equality of men and women yet in his relations with women treat them as inferiors.

Such instances would seem to suggest that attributions of belief must be based more broadly on a person's actual physical behaviors over time than on merely verbal responses in specific situations. Charles S. Peirce[17] suggested such a view with his pragmatic notion that belief ultimately manifests itself "operationally" as a general disposition to act in certain ways. Scheffler, however, rejects this notion as still too narrow, on the grounds that the actual factors affecting all behaviors are too numerous, complex, and intertwined to permit attributions of any single belief.[18] For example, to suppose that a man who believed it was slushy outside would wear his galoshes would be to assume a variety of things which were logically independent of that belief: "that he wants to go out, wants to keep his feet dry, believes that his galoshes will serve the purpose, does not feel in too much of a hurry to put them on, et cetera..."[19]

As Scheffler sees it, beliefs themselves are so inescapably interlocked, not only with other beliefs but with attitudes, aims, and circumstances, that the only way to describe any one belief is to look at the whole system of attitudes, aims, contextual factors, and related beliefs that support it.[20] Scheffler ends up settling on the view that "belief is ... a 'theoretical' state characterizing, in subtle ways, the

orientation of the person in the world" and cannot be reduced to descriptions which rely solely on discrete observable phenomena.[21]

Implications for Higher Learning

This view has important educational implications, particularly for higher learning, as this is the educational level at which the process of belief formation becomes deliberate and self-critical. To begin with, if by "knowledge" we mean something that students will take with them and use in their lives outside of school, then we must insist that "belief" is a condition of "knowledge," in any significant sense of the latter term. Scheffler's view thus suggests that attributions of student knowledge must include evidence that they have constructed that knowledge in such a way as to function harmoniously within their active belief systems. It further implies that the process of belief/knowledge formation itself entails the complex reconstruction of an entire network of cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and behavioral factors, and cannot be reduced to the sort of simplistic approbational model implied by the Study Group's recommendation that assessment information serve as the means for securing student involvement.

Above all, this analysis suggests that if we want students to use their school knowledge as an active part of their lives, we must

teach them in such a way that they work out the connections and relevance of that knowledge in their own lives for themselves. The way to do this is not through the coercive, though well-meaning, use of assessment information as a lever for student involvement (for coercion is what it amounts to if students do not see the intrinsic advantages of adopting those standards for themselves) but rather by creating those conditions which lead students to discover for themselves the pertinence of those standards in helping them realize and modify their own evolving aims and interests. The Study Group's recommendation that assessment information be used as a lever for student involvement thus misconceives the bases upon which students actually become involved in learning and is in general too simplistic to serve as an intelligent guide of educational policy and practice.

Hypothesis

The purpose of the foregoing discussion has been to suggest the psychological, ethical, and epistemological complexity of higher learning, and to argue the need for a philosophically sound and practically useful conception of higher learning which takes that complexity into account. In the process, the thesis that higher learning necessarily entails the engagement of students' existing beliefs and

belief systems has also been advanced. Taken by itself, this thesis would suggest an incomplete conception of learning which puts more weight on students' existing beliefs and interests than on subject matter. In truth, subject matter figures predominantly in all education, though it does not determine the aim of education so much as its means. This notion is not self-evident, however, and requires some historical and philosophical background.

First forwarded by John Dewey[22] in the early part of this century, and developed most notably since by Lawrence Kohlberg,[23] one of the dominant models in educational philosophy today posits three basic schools of educational thought and practice: (1) that which views education as a shaping from without, (2) that which sees it as an unfolding from within, and (3) that which conceives of it as the "interaction" of external conditions with internal tendencies. While each of these three perspectives prescribes that education should move in the direction of growth, the sources, conceptions, and hypothetical 'end points' of their respective agendas differ in some important ways. For the first school, which Dewey labelled the "traditional" approach, but which Kohlberg more accurately named the "cultural transmission" school, the aims of education have traditionally been defined by the dominant values and knowledge of the culture. Education, from this perspective, consists first and foremost of the passing on of a common body of accepted knowledge and moral

standards from the past, to which the accomplished learner can eventually contribute, once initiated into the ranks of 'knowledge makers.' Some noteworthy spokespersons of this approach in recent years have been William Bennett,[24] Allan Bloom,[25] and E.D. Hirsch, Jr.[26]

The second school, referred to by Kohlberg as "romantic," has its roots in Rousseau, and has twice achieved popular acceptance in the history of American education: first, during the progressive education movement of the early part of this century, and, more recently, during the open education, free school, and alternative school experiments of the 1960's and 1970's. As educational historians Lawrence Cremin[27] and Diane Ravitch[28] have both noted, the romantic perspective seems periodically to gain force largely as a response to perceived shortcomings in the cultural transmission approach (which in its turn resurfaces in reaction to the romantic -- thus creating the "pendulum" effect so often referred to in educational discussions). For our present purposes it is enough to summarize the chief criticism romantic educators have advanced against the cultural transmission school: that, in setting up as the end of education a fixed body of pre-established knowledge and morals, the cultural transmission approach tends to overlook students' own interests and concerns, resulting in a general failure to secure student involvement in the "learning" process. (It is in response to this difficulty,

incidentally, that the Involvement in Learning study developed its recommendation that publically stated standards be used as levers of student involvement -- hardly the sort of reform romantic educators support.)

As many educational scholars[29] have argued, however, despite the legitimacy of the romantic critique, romantic educators have tended in practice to go to the opposite extreme of the cultural transmission school and have typically devalued content in education, elevating in its place the natural tendencies and interests of students themselves. In the 1920's and 1970's in particular, education in this country witnessed a general abandoning of teacher authority and standard subject matter in favor of students' own inclinations and initiatives, which were generally assumed to have an innate, educative power of their own. As at least one prominent cultural transmissionist (Hirsch, 1987) has argued, the result has been a general decline in the amount and quality of shared cultural knowledge.

Despite its excesses, however, the romantic perspective contains some valid principles, not the least of which is that in order for learning to take place what goes on in the classroom must be continuous with the learner's experience; (the most common mistake in this regard comes from construing the meaning of "experience" too narrowly as constituting something that is strictly subjective and personal, overlooking its objective and social aspects). Some of the

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more well-known practitioners and/or advocates of this approach today include Peter Elbow,[30] Carol Gilligan,[31] and the authors of what is perhaps the most significant work to come out of the romantic perspective in recent years, Women's Ways of Knowing.[32]

The third and final perspective in this model has historically gone by the label "progressive" education, though it is alternatively known as the "interactive" approach -- by virtue of the dynamic relation it posits between the natural structuring tendencies of individuals with an objective environment that both challenges and is in turn changed by the explanatory frameworks people impose on it.[33] The main proponents of educational interactionism have been John Dewey, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Jean Piaget, though a list of present-day adherents might include such diverse theorist-practitioners as Ann Berthoff, Dwight Boyd, Richard Paul, Richard Rorty, and Israel Scheffler. (This perspective should not be confused with Cartesian mind-body dualism, which also goes by the name "interactionism" but which has no connection to modern educational theory.) For better or worse, the term "progressivism" in education has historically been associated with the aims and methods of romantic educators.[34] Owing to this confusion, and to the fact that "interactive" is more descriptive of the actual principles underlying this perspective, we will henceforth use the more modern term.

Even here, though, the term "interactive" is often used to refer generally to such instructional methods as open discussions, peer collaboration, and student-centered classrooms, which obviously involve a lot of student interaction but which may or may not be "interactive" in the sense used here. "Interactionism," as both Dewey and Piaget use the term, denotes the ongoing and dynamic process by which an individual constructs, tests, and adopts or revises behavioral and explanatory frameworks in response to challenges posed by the environment. The chief function of education from this perspective is to create those conditions which challenge students not only to reassess their existing cognitive, affective, and behavioral structures, but, more importantly, to develop new ones which are not mere extensions of the old but more inclusive and differentiated reconstructions of them. The aim of education, according to this view, is to get students to the point where they initiate and sustain this learning process themselves.

The role of subject matter in this scheme is a source of much educational confusion. Generally speaking, cultural transmissionists (e.g., Hirsch) concede the importance of students being actively engaged in learning, but not at the expense of absorbing the requisite subject matter. Educational romantics (e.g., Elbow), on the other hand, generally acknowledge that transmission of subject matter is important, but not at the cost of securing active student involvement

in the learning process. As Dewey points out, however, the same assumption underlies both positions: that the subject matter which schools have traditionally sought to impart stands in some sort of opposition to the natural inclinations and interests of students, and vice-versa.[35]

From the interactionist perspective, the debate over subject matter stems primarily from its being conceived as the end of education, rather than as a means to increased understanding, appreciation, and control of experience. When subject matter is presented as an educational end, as has traditionally been the case, it holds no intrinsic attraction for students, and artificial means, such as the imposition of external standards (for example, as recommended in the Involvement in Learning study -- though, again, it is not the standards which are artificial but their use as levers for student involvement) must be utilized to coerce students into learning it. The typical result is what Alfred North Whitehead refers to as "inert ideas,"[36] knowledge which students possess but which serves no active function in their lives. The solution, however, is not to diminish, as romantic educators have typically done, the importance of subject matter (or objective standards) in favor of students' natural interests, but rather to make the educational function of subject matter more closely match its actual social and intellectual function: as a means better to understand, appreciate, and control experience.

Central to this idea is the interactionist conception of an "interest" not as an end to be pursued for its own sake (which is how the romantic educator generally conceives it) but as a dynamic tendency in a person's psychological make-up which compels that person to try to secure certain ends-in-view, whether they be physical, affective, or intellectual in nature. Interest so conceived gives us "purpose," especially when some challenge in our environment frustrates our attempts to secure those ends-in-view. And it is this purposefulness in the face of an unaccommodating environment which compels us to organize our knowledge and actions along increasingly more sophisticated lines.

The formal disciplines are both the result of this purposefulness and a means of achieving future purposes. From the standpoint of the disciplinary expert, this dual function is obvious. But from the standpoint of the novice, the formal content and organization of the subject areas is just one more thing to be learned -- **unless** the teacher can do two things: (1) find, or create, within the experience of learners those interests which for their fulfillment would require the superior organization of the subject areas, and (2) find or create those conditions which will frustrate students' attempts to achieve their purposes, thus compelling them not only to seek answers within the appropriate disciplines but also to construct their own conceptual frameworks for achieving, and modifying, those purposes. The role of

the teacher in this educational scheme is thus to create those conditions which will elicit, sustain, and, most difficult of all, regulate the processes by which students construct their understanding of and discourse with the world.

Creating and maintaining such conditions, is, of course, no simple task; in fact, it is probably the most fundamental of all educational problems. The proposed study is accordingly guided by the following general hypothesis: that three of the most basic conditions for engaging students' existing belief systems, and thus for initiating and sustaining higher learning, are (1) doubt, (2) dialogue, and (3) commitment. They are, respectively, the cognitive, social, and moral components of a stimulating college environment.

Method

Rather than explore this hypothesis directly, the present study uses it as a general reference point from which to launch separate but complementary forays into key areas of the literature on higher education. An in-depth study of this specific hypothesis would in any case entail comparative-classroom, cross-disciplinary, and longitudinal studies far beyond the scope of the present project, which seeks primarily to suggest a way of conceptualizing higher learning that is both philosophically sound and practically useful. That conception,

which I am calling "interactive" and the broad features of which were just outlined, is very much in evidence in four key areas, and it is to those which we now turn.

The past two decades have witnessed the birth and expansion of at least four significant trends in higher education: the "critical thinking," "moral education," "writing-as-process," and "college teaching" movements. Entire organizations, journals, series of books, and cross-disciplinary symposia have appeared to accommodate the growing interest in these areas nationwide. While a central concern in all of these areas has been the articulation of a conception of higher learning, especially pertinent to the present study is the fact that in all four literatures the same interactive conception has been emerging for some time.

The present study explores the interactive model in each of these areas by concentrating in each case on an issue which has received attention in recent years -- in the critical thinking literature: the debate over the transfer of thinking skills; in moral education: the gender question in moral development; in college writing: the apparent tension between individual cognition and social context as sources of meaning and invention; and in college teaching: the relation of educational theory to teaching practice as pertains to the growing popularity of collaborative learning techniques. A separate chapter is devoted to each issue, exploring it in the context of the appropriate

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literature. In general, the method consists of selecting dichotomous models from the relevant literature, exploring their strengths and weaknesses, and suggesting how an interactive conception transforms what was previously thought to be an irreconcilable conflict into a more inclusive, integrated, and dynamic educational conception.

There are three basic reasons for conducting the study in this manner: first, to illustrate how the same interactive principles operate across several key areas of the literature, second, to begin exploring the connections between literatures which might otherwise remain discrete, and third, to generate five or six discrete essays suited to diverse audiences (but nonetheless held together by the same basic principles).

There are three chapters in addition to the four topic essays. The first consists of this prospectus itself. The second is entitled "Hirsch on Dewey: Setting the Record Straight," and aims to describe the interactive educational perspective in the context of the current debate over a national curriculum. It is intended as a more detailed introduction to the interactive model than that offered in the hypothesis section of this proposal. Finally, a brief concluding chapter offers summary remarks that reconsider the six main chapters in their relation to one another. Abstracts of the separate chapters, and a description of how they contribute to the dissertation overall, follows.

Chapter 1 -- Belief as a Condition of Knowledge: The Need for a Philosophical Perspective in the Reform of Higher Education

In an effort to illustrate the need for a philosophical perspective in higher education reform, this chapter begins with a discussion of specific shortcomings in the federally-sponsored study, Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education. It argues primarily that this study takes inadequate account of the belief condition of knowledge and, in so doing, makes recommendations which undermine one of its chief objectives: that students develop habits of learning and commitment which would enable them to apply their school knowledge in non-educational settings. The chapter goes on to discuss a more dynamic conception of human learning which better reflects the intricacies of actual human growth than that which underlies the Involvement in Learning study.

In terms of the dissertation, this chapter illustrates the practical need for a philosophically sound conception of higher learning. It also advances the key interactive notion that genuine learning entails the engagement of students' existing beliefs and belief systems. In the interactive conception, human beings construct their understanding of the world in response to the challenges posed by an unaccommodating environment. Posing such challenges as compel students to reconstruct their prior conceptual frameworks is the only

sure path to securing genuine, wholehearted student involvement, and is the teacher's primary (but by no means only) function.

Chapter Two -- Hirsch on Dewey: Setting the Record Straight

In his book, Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know (1987), E.D. Hirsch, Jr. advances the thesis that American schools should all teach the same fundamental body of culturally shared information. In the process, he perplexingly traces the rise in this country of the "content-neutral" curriculum to John Dewey, somehow missing the fact that Dewey staunchly opposed all educational schemes which separate attention to students' individual needs and interests from the transmission of a socially viable body of subject matter. This chapter attempts, first, to set straight Hirsch's mischaracterization of Dewey and, second, to explain how Dewey sought actually to preserve the formal content of education while also making it play a more dynamic role in the formation of students' habits of constructive communication and inquiry. Dewey's educational philosophy is presented as providing a more encompassing framework within which Hirsch's otherwise beneficial recommendations take on new meaning.

In the context of the dissertation, this chapter gives a more complete exegesis of the interactive conception than that offered in

the hypothesis. It does this by reframing Dewey's formulation of the interactive conception (without a doubt the most complete and penetrating of its kind) in the context of the current debate over curricular reform. The essay distinguishes Dewey's interactionism from both Hirsch's cultural transmissionism and Rousseauan romanticism. It seeks to reconcile the apparent dichotomy between attention to students' personal development and the transmission of subject matter (by discussing how neither has any meaning except insofar as it interacts with and regulates the other).

Chapter Three -- Critical Thinking as Transfer: The Reconstructive Integration of Otherwise Discrete Interpretations of Experience

Recent work in the delineation and teaching of critical thinking skills has led some theorists to question the extent to which skills learned in one context can be transferred to others. Although there exists a range of positions on the subject, the lines of the debate have nevertheless been relatively clear-cut, with one side arguing that thinking skills are specific to discrete subject areas, and the other that they are transferable. The present chapter begins by attempting to capture and clarify the major themes of the transfer debate. The chief purpose of this discussion is to reveal that underlying the arguments of both sides is a fundamentally shared conception of "thinking" as something that is not so much comprised of skills (whether they be

subject-specific or general) to be transferred as it is itself a process of transfer through which otherwise discrete interpretations of experience become integrated. The chapter concludes by arguing that while the teaching of both subject-specific and general thinking skills is important, our chief concern should be with fostering in students those habits of reflective inquiry and ongoing transfer by which they seek to construct ever more inclusive and integrated knowledge systems, or what is generally referred to as "the critical spirit."

This chapter poses an interactive solution to the apparent dichotomy between teaching for skill and teaching for content. Thinking is presented as the process by which people reconstruct and integrate what would otherwise remain discrete interpretations of experience. Such a conception makes the promotion of students' habits of reflective inquiry the primary educational concern. For more important than skill or knowledge themselves is the development of a disposition which inclines a person actively to seek moral and intellectual integrity. Genuine and wholehearted involvement, in other words, is the necessary basis upon which the learning of content and skills must take place if they are to play an active role in students' larger lives. This thesis is but a restatement of the idea that engaging students' existing belief systems is a necessary condition of genuine learning.

Chapter Four -- Justice and Caring and the Problem of Moral Relativism: Reframing the Gender Question in Ethics

The relatively recent addition of women's voices to the study of moral development has led to the postulation of two separate moral contexts defined by gender, each with its own dominating concerns, guiding principles, forms of reasoning and hypothetical end point. While many developmental theorists agree that mature moral reasoning entails some sort of integration of these two perspectives, the exact nature of that reconciliation is a matter of considerable speculation and debate. This chapter begins with the premise that the mark of a moral developmental model's philosophical adequacy is its handling of the problem of moral relativism. It examines the strengths and weaknesses of the justice and caring approaches in regulating the contextual relativism inherent in genderized moralities. And it concludes by proposing that only by reframing the gender question in broader, more teleological terms than present theories have attempted can the problem be resolved.

This chapter again poses an interactive resolution to a topic which has received much attention in recent years. Kohlberg's justice model and Gilligan's caring model alike share the interactive assumption that moral development proceeds through the ongoing revision of previous structures in the context of challenges posed by an objective environment. The main point of this chapter, however, is

that neither model takes the implications of its underlying interactionism far enough. Whereas the justice and caring conceptions both assume that the problem of moral relativism is an inevitable outcome of the irreconcilability of conflicting conceptions of the Good, a fully interactional model posits that the problem is ultimately one of how to go about reconstructing a more encompassing and integrated teleological conception. The interactionist conception, in other words, offers the possibility of a reflective transformation of moralities previously assumed to be irreconcilable. The educational implication is once again that our primary concern should be the development in students of the active propensity to seek moral and intellectual integrity.

Chapter Five -- The Indeterminacy of Knowledge and Discourse Communities: How Cognition and Context Interact in Reflective Thinking and Writing

Despite the growing popularity of the "process approach" to the teaching of writing, many versions of this approach currently vie for dominance. As part of a wider effort either to negotiate the differences between these varying conceptions, or at least to make more informed educational choices regarding them, a model positing three basic process-oriented rhetorics has emerged. While all three rhetorics are seen as having arisen in response to the shortcomings of

the traditional, product-oriented approach, each has evolved according to its own particular sensitivity. The "expressive" school, which surfaced in the 1970's, views writing primarily as a means by which people construct or discover and communicate to others their deepest or most authentic selves. The "cognitive process" school, which achieved widespread popularity and institutional support during the 1980's, focuses chiefly on the thinking and composing strategies by which successful writers make and communicate meaning. And the "social constructionist" school, which by all indications will dominate composition studies in the 1990's, concerns itself mainly with the various discourse communities and overarching social and cultural forces which shape our knowledge, language-use, and purposes.

At the present time, the most active debate is between the cognitive process theorists and the social constructionists. Although proponents of the two schools frame what is being debated somewhat differently, the following formulation more or less captures the gist of that debate. Social constructionists basically accuse cognitive theorists of holding a positivistic conception of language as nothing more than a medium of communication which people use to achieve purposes formed independently of their sociolinguistic contexts, contexts which social constructionists believe are actually the major determinants of how we perceive and act in the world. Cognitive theorists, in their turn, charge social constructionists with a

social determinism that too hastily dismisses the role of the self-conscious individual in negotiating among and between socially constrained options, options which cognitive theorists admit may indeed shape a great deal of our thinking but which do not override the capacity of individuals to construct their own meanings and achieve their own purposes. In terms of the actual teaching of writing, the issue is over which to emphasize: the cognitive processes by which people construct meaning, or the social contexts and discourse communities within which people's thinking and writing take place.

Theorists from both schools have called for a reconciliation whereby the principles of one approach would enlarge our understanding of the other. One such attempt has even been labelled "interactive."[37] The present essay supports these efforts but seeks to take the interactive conception further than either of them. It argues that neither general cognitive strategies nor particular social arrangements are intrinsically thought-provoking or thought-generating; hence neither can induce students to think and write in meaningful ways. Taking its inspiration from the conception of "reflective thinking" outlined by Dewey,[38] the essay argues instead that the construction of meaning entails the interaction of objective social and physical conditions with a structuring self and arises where a perplexing situation leads one to a state of doubt about what to believe or do. The key educational condition for eliciting reflective

thinking and writing from this perspective is neither the social

groupings or apprehension of discrete academic discourse conventions

advanced by social constructionists nor the process strategies or

cognitive-developmental capabilities advanced by cognitive theorists.

It is rather the teacher's structuring of a perplexing situation (from the

students as well as the academic community's viewpoint) into a task

requiring reflective inquiry and reconstructive dialogue for a creative

and satisfying resolution.

In terms of the dissertation, this chapter explores more directly

the practical implications of an interactive theoretical conception, a

relationship which is addressed explicitly in the sixth chapter.

Chapter Six -- Personal and Philosophical Reservations About Collaborative Learning

An increasing number of university faculty from a wide range of

disciplines are turning to "collaborative learning" as an alternative to

more traditional modes of instruction. The term itself denotes a

general pedagogical style which emphasizes cooperation -- either

among students or between students and faculty -- as the basic mode

of learning. Founded on the premise that learning is fundamentally a

social process, collaborative learning seeks to replicate that process in

the classroom. In practice, it can take the form of small-group

exercises, collaborative research projects, peer-review methods,

cooperative course development, or reconfigured lecture formats -- to name some of the more widely used techniques.

This chapter begins with a personal account of my experience in a variety of collaborative learning situations -- first as a high school and college student, then as a college teacher. The chapter then considers three learning outcomes which proponents of collaborative learning claim it is supposed to achieve: (1) increased responsibility for learning, (2) the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, and (3) the development of higher order reasoning skills. The purposes of this inquiry are, first, to caution against the dangers of ascribing to collaborative learning educative powers which it does not necessarily possess, second, to give a more cautious account of what collaborative learning actually achieves and under what conditions, and third, to suggest avenues for further inquiry and research.

In general, this chapter argues that collaborative techniques are excellent motivators and extremely helpful in promoting tolerance, critical thinking, and the understanding of the social nature of knowledge. However, learning and motivation depend finally on the learning task, how it interacts with students' interests, abilities, and existing belief systems, and how it is structured to sustain and regulate the interplay of skepticism and belief in students' reasoning. This thesis is but a restatement, in a particular context, of the interactive conception being put forth in the dissertation overall.

Summary Remarks

Almost everywhere one turns in the literature on higher education, the same basic conception of learning as the interaction of internal tendencies with external conditions is emerging as an antidote to the enduring educational dichotomies: process versus product, skill versus content, student versus curriculum, method versus subject matter, and so on. A single study which would consider the various conversations in their relation both to one another and to the interactive conception as a whole could produce valuable new insights and encourage dialogue between otherwise discrete discourse communities.

The proposed study takes a first step in that direction. It aims to formulate an interactive conception of higher learning across several key areas of the literature -- including critical thinking, moral education, college writing, college teaching, and higher education reform. The study integrates concerns from epistemology, ethics, rhetoric, learning theory, and policy analysis, and, in so doing, seeks to outline a more unified philosophical conception which draws on recent advances in each of these areas.

Generally speaking, educational interactionism is the attempt to explain intellectual and moral growth in terms of the ongoing and reciprocal interaction of human beings and their environments, both

physical and social. It accordingly seeks to reconcile the historical

antipathy between rationalism and empiricism (and, more recently,

social constructionism) -- that is, between the assumption that

meaning resides in the mind and the assumption that it resides in

objective reality (whether that be defined empirically or socially). In

terms of educational practice, educational interactionism seeks to

resolve the persistent tension between attention to students'

individual needs and interests and the transmission of a socially viable

body of subject matter (by asserting that neither has any meaning

without the other).

This study is but a first step in a much larger effort which

would aim to integrate and clarify the general features of the

interactive conception, eliminate many present inconsistencies, and

outline its implications for educational policy and teaching practice.

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4. Involvement in Learning, p. 20.

5. Involvement in Learning, pp. 21-22.

6. E.g., Lawrence Kohlberg, The Philosophy of Moral Development (New York: Harper & Row, 1981); William G. Perry, Jr., Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1968); Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Moral Development (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

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8. Involvement in Learning, p. 21.

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34. Cremin, The Transformation, ch. 6; Dewey, Experience and Education.

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36. Alfred North Whitehead, The Aims of Education and Other Essays (1929) (New York: Mentor Books, 1960), p. 13.

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CHAPTER 2

HIRSCH ON DEWEY:
SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Lawrence Cremin once wrote of John Dewey's educational

writings that "the grossest caricatures of his work have come from

otherwise intelligent commentators in the United States and

abroad."[1] Cremin's observation is unfortunately as true today as it

was thirty years ago, and manifests itself in the form of E. D. Hirsch,

Jr.'s conspicuous misrepresentation of Dewey's thoughts on the role

of subject matter in education.[2] Hirsch, in advancing his thesis that

American schools should all teach the same fundamental body of

culturally shared information, perplexingly traces the rise in this

country of the "content-neutral" curriculum to Dewey, somehow

missing the facts that Dewey not only staunchly opposed all

educational schemes which divorce method from content, and the

teaching of skills from subject matter, but openly criticized (though

probably not forcefully enough) the separation of students' individual

needs and interests from the transmission of an organized body of

shared cultural knowledge.

Indeed, it is arguable that if Dewey were alive today he would

support the idea of teaching a common national culture, and for many

of the same reasons as Hirsch. This is not to say, however, that there

are not important differences between Hirsch's and Dewey's educational visions. But those differences are not, in general, the ones Hirsch identifies. The truly unfortunate thing about Hirsch's mischaracterization is that in maligning Dewey, Hirsch not only neglects the counsel of a powerful opponent of educational formalism, but steers countless others away from examining this advice also.

The present essay attempts, in some small way, to rectify this situation. It begins with a brief overview of Hirsch's thesis that the most important function of education is the transmission of a society's shared cultural knowledge -- a thesis which Hirsch presents as standing in opposition to Dewey's educational agenda. The essay next addresses the specific distortions which Hirsch commits against Dewey -- including his characterization of Dewey as a disciple of Rousseau, an opponent of formal subject matter, and an advocate of content-neutral skills and social utility as educational aims -- and offers numerous and striking counterexamples to these charges from Dewey's own writings. (The unusual number of quotations cited in this and the following section is warranted by the need to demonstrate that Dewey actually said the things which I attribute to him. It is also hoped that they might motivate readers to examine the works cited herein for themselves.) This discussion reveals the many important ways in which Dewey in fact anticipated and agrees with

Hirsch about the role of subject matter in education, particularly with regard to its socializing function.

The essay then examines that part of Dewey's writings most neglected by Hirsch: his concern about the dangers of over-formalizing both subject matter and basic skills and the means by which he sought actually to preserve the formal content of education while also making it play a more dynamic role in the formation of students' habits of reflective inquiry and discourse. Finally, in what constitutes something of an appendix, the essay attempts to account for Hirsch's misrepresentation of Dewey by elaborating on Lawrence Cremin's three-part explanation for the persistent mischaracterizations of Dewey which he has observed in his work as an educational historian.

In the end the reader should see that Hirsch, in mistaking his own skewed and fragmentary misinterpretation for the whole of Dewey's educational philosophy, not only commits an intellectual injustice and social disservice but fails to avail himself of a philosophical framework of greater scope and integrity than his own, a framework within which his own otherwise beneficial research and recommendations take on new meaning.

Teaching the National Culture

In his book, Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, E. D. Hirsch, Jr. sets forth his "anthropological" thesis that the primary function of schooling should be the transmission of that body of specific cultural information necessary for participation in the social life of a community.[3] His basic argument is that effective communication, particularly in an advanced society, depends upon its people being familiar with a wide range of shared information more or less specific to that society. This body of shared information, he argues, lies below the surface of all communication, and anyone unfamiliar with its contents simply cannot partake in the give and take of ideas and information which characterizes all successful societies.

Recent research in the psychology of reading, Hirsch persuasively argues,[4] supports this idea. Reading, it turns out, involves much more than the mere decoding of the specific information and ideas symbolized in a given text. Readers, in fact, bring to any text a vast background of previously structured information without which the task of decoding would be virtually impossible -- or at least so time-consuming and laborious as to be absurdly impractical. The name given by reading researchers to these previously structured bodies of information is "schemata," and they function basically the same way as Piaget's "structures": as dynamic

networks of meaning with which new information must be integrated, through a process of mutual adjustment of both the schema and the new data, in order to take on meaning.

Effective communication, Hirsch argues, depends upon people having learned the same basic schemata, for without them people would have to expend tremendous amounts of time and energy familiarizing themselves with the structure of each other's background knowledge. In essence, it would be like learning a new language. Hirsch's rationale[5] is again convincing. The history of the ontogenesis of national languages forcefully demonstrates that nations which consciously normalize their languages through national educational systems are much better able to meet the demands of industrialized living than those which fail to do so. As Hirsch points out, what is less obvious is the fact that such nations conceive and transmit their national cultures consciously as well, as educators in this country did for nearly two centuries following the American Revolution. Thus, Hirsch argues, literate Americans could, until recently, assume a shared body of knowledge and corresponding schemata within which their national dialogue could take place.

The problem with our present educational system, according to Hirsch, is that we have relinquished responsibility for the construction and transmission of a national culture in favor of one that is both dangerously fragmented and substantively sparse. The culprits, Hirsch

believes, are primarily school administrators and professors of education fixated on misguided notions of "natural" student development and "content-neutral" learning, the origins of which Hirsch traces to Rousseau and Dewey via the curricular upheavals of the progressive and open education movements. These misguided notions, he argues, have given rise to an era of what he alternatively refers to as "romantic formalism" and "educational formalism," wherein skills assumed to be general and transferable are taught with reference to students' immediate and parochial interests rather than within the context of a coherent body of culturally shared subject matter. "The inevitable effect of this fundamental educational mistake," writes Hirsch, "has been a gradual disintegration of cultural memory, causing a gradual decline in our ability to communicate."[6]

Despite his opposition to many current educational practices, however, Hirsch advocates no simple return to traditional methods of instruction, as some of his critics have charged,[7] acknowledging that certain important educational advances have come about in recent decades. Among these he includes respect for individual and cultural differences, imaginative and flexible presentation of subject matter, an appreciation of the active nature of genuine learning, and the use of intensive study to promote deeper and more comprehensive understanding.

It is not entirely clear, however, whether Hirsch subscribes to the epistemology of traditional Lockean pedagogy -- which generally likens the mind to a blank slate onto which teachers can inscribe subject matter -- or to the modern view that unless students are led somehow to structure that subject matter for themselves they will neither grasp it nor be able to apply it in non-educational settings. His discussion of the way in which readers must organize and adjust existing schemata in order to make sense of new information,[8] along with his assertion that subject matter "should be taught not just as a series of terms, or list of words, but as a vivid system of shared associations,"[9] would seem to suggest an active epistemology. At other times, however, Hirsch seems to advocate a very passive epistemology. In particular, he claims that young children not only can but should absorb adult information before they fully understand it.[10] And although he acknowledges that only through "intensive study and experience" can students "understand how isolated facts fit together in some coherent way,"[11] he nevertheless maintains that, "in the early grades, truly intensive study is in any case difficult to pursue."[12]

In the end, Hirsch winds up advocating a two-part model of education comprised of both an "extensive curriculum" of culturally shared information and an "intensive curriculum" of detailed and active study adapted to the needs and interests of individual

students -- a proposal which reflects his apparent desire for a reconciliation of traditional and so-called "progressive" pedagogies. Arguing, first, that a curriculum can be "pluralistic in its materials and modes of teaching but nonetheless provide ... our children with a common core of cultural information,"[13] and, secondly, that a failure to specify the contents of a national extensive curriculum will leave students at the mercy of a "curriculum of cultural fragmentation and illiteracy,"[14] Hirsch goes on to present his famous list of items, the meaning of which "every American needs to know."

Hirsch's Mischaracterization of Dewey

Throughout his book, Hirsch contrasts his "anthropological theory of education" with the "content-neutral conception of educational development"[15] that he more or less plausibly diagnoses as dominating American pedagogy today. According to this content-neutral model -- which Hirsch tells us was first advanced by Rousseau and later popularized in this country by Dewey -- schooling emphasizes natural human growth and the development of general intellectual skills with little regard for the specific knowledge and traditions which make up a society's culture. Thus, for example, children are taught to read through the use of Dick-and-Jane-type texts which are accommodated to children's particular developmental

needs but devoid of any specific cultural content -- the premise being that what children need is not a lot of adult information but practice in the rudimentary decoding skills which will form the basis of later literacy.

Dewey's Critique of Rousseau's Conception of Natural Development

In fact, while a case can be made for the claim that this content-neutral approach to education has at least some basis in Rousseau, the same cannot be said of Dewey, who criticized Rousseau precisely for the rift the romantic educational philosopher created between natural human development, on the one hand, and induction into a shared culture, on the other. Hirsch, however, entirely misses this crucial distinction, and in so doing not only fails to enlighten us as to the profound differences between Rousseau's and Dewey's educational philosophies but unwittingly perpetuates the very sort of uninformed generalizing to which one might suppose he would object.

To begin with, to emphasize as Hirsch does the content-neutral strain in Rousseau's educational philosophy is misleading, for it diverts attention away from Rousseau's primary concern -- that children should learn to think and choose for themselves. For Rousseau, the problem with education as it was practiced in his day was that it

coerced children into accepting the intellectual frameworks and moral values of society without the exercise of their own native intelligence. According to him, before they are indoctrinated by society, children well know the difference between acting from necessity and acting in order to conform to authority. And since education, as he saw it, relied on the latter, it caused a profound division between children's "genuine" selves and their "social" selves, resulting in a state of chronic artificiality and hypocrisy.

Rousseau's solution (if we are to take the Emile as prescriptive of what education ought to be) was to structure the entire educative experience so that children always act from a perceived necessity and never from a restriction placed upon them by authority (an idea of enormous and, for the most part, unrealized educational import). Where Rousseau went wrong was in assuming that this meant education must proceed outside the existing social order -- that is, as it would "in nature," with children acting in pursuit of their own perceived best interests as opposed to any socially-imposed expectations. Only this way, Rousseau believed, could children's will and personal integrity be preserved.[16]

Now Hirsch writes that in Schools of To-Morrow[17] Dewey "acknowledges Rousseau as the chief source of his educational principles" (though he in fact does no such thing), ostensibly on the grounds that "The first chapter ... carries the telling title 'Education as

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Natural Development' and is sprinkled with quotations from

Rousseau."[18] Those who have read Dewey's other educational

writings, especially <u>Democracy and Education</u>, will find this statement

particularly remarkable, as Dewey spends more time telling us what

Rousseau got wrong than what he got right.[19] That situation is,

however, conspicuously reversed in <u>Schools of To-Morrow</u>, the first

chapter of which does indeed read like a paean to Rousseau, of whom

Dewey writes:

> [H]is insistence that education be based upon the native
> capacities of those to be taught and upon the need of
> studying children in order to discover what these native
> powers are, sounded the keynote of all modern efforts
> for educational progress.[20]

Even here, though -- in the sentence immediately preceding that

just cited, in fact -- Dewey remarks that "Rousseau said, as well as

did, many foolish things,"[21] a comment which evidently piqued

neither Hirsch's curiosity nor his scholarly instincts enough for him to

pursue. Had he done so, he would have found that according to

Dewey there is an enormous difference between the notion that

growth should proceed "naturally," that is, by stimulating the native

interests and abilities of children, and the rather absurd notion that it

can only do so in isolation from the social milieu in which children live.

And this difference goes to the heart of Dewey's critique of Rousseau:

> The recognition ... that great historic institutions are
> active factors in the intellectual nurture of mind was a
> great contribution to educational philosophy. It indicated
> a genuine advance beyond Rousseau, who had marred

his assertion that education must be a natural development and not something forced or grafted upon individuals from without, by the notion that social conditions are not natural.[22]

Actually, Dewey greatly admired Rousseau's contention that the child's present abilities and interests form the starting point of education (an educational principle which I later argue Hirsch himself must be constrained to admit -- even if he will not follow it through to its logical conclusion). But Hirsch goes too far when he maintains that Dewey shared Rousseau's conception of natural development "on analogy with the development of an acorn into an oak." Writes Hirsch:

> [T]he theory ... has its drawbacks, one of which is that a child is not in fact like an acorn. Left to itself, a child will not grow into a thriving creature; Tarzan is pure fantasy. To thrive, a child needs to learn the traditions of the particular human society and culture it is born into.[23]

In fact, Dewey criticized Rousseau on precisely the same grounds:

> Rousseau and his followers ... made much use of the analogy of the development of a seed into the full-grown plant. They used this analogy to draw the conclusion that in human beings there are latent capacities which, if they are only left to themselves, will ultimately flower and bear fruit. So they framed the notion of **natural** development as opposed to a directed growth which they regarded as artificial.
>   But ... [e]ven the seed of a plant does not grow simply of itself. It must have light, air and moisture in order to grow. Its development is after all controlled by conditions and forces that are outside of it... A stunted oak, a stalk of maize that bears few ears with only a few scattered grains, exhibit so-called natural development as truly as does the noble tree with expanding branches or the ear of maize that wins the prize at an exhibition.[24]

According to Dewey, Rousseau's error lay in mistaking an educational means -- the child's native curiosity, impulses, and interests -- for an educational end.

> Rousseau was right, introducing a much-needed reform into education, in holding that the structure and activities of the organs furnish the **conditions** of all teaching of the use of the organs; but profoundly wrong in intimating that they supply not only the conditions but also the ends of their development. ..[T]he notion of a spontaneous normal development of these activities is pure mythology. The natural, or native, powers furnish the initiating and limiting forces in all education; they do not furnish it ends or aims.[25]

A child's native capacities, in other words, can never fix the goal of education, any more than her experience can be construed as something that exists apart from social conditions. At the same time that education must take the child's present interests and abilities into account, the direction of education, according to Dewey, comes from a source outside the child.

Dewey's Advocacy of an Organized Body of Shared Cultural Subject Matter

Contrary, then, to Hirsch's characterization of Dewey as opposing the transmission of an organized body of shared cultural knowledge, Dewey maintained that it is precisely such knowledge as this that determines the direction of education. Far from advocating that the actual content of education is a matter of indifference,

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Dewey believed that the transmission of the shared knowledge and traditions of a society constitutes one of education's primary functions. Like Hirsch, Dewey justified this notion on anthropological grounds:

> The primary facts of the birth and death of each one of the constituent members in a social group determine the necessity of education. On one hand, there is the contrast between the immaturity of the new-born members of the group -- its future sole representatives -- and the maturity of the adult members who possess the knowledge and customs of the group. On the other hand, there is the necessity that these immature members be not merely physically preserved in adequate numbers, but that they be initiated into the interest, purposes, information, skill, and practices of the mature members: otherwise the group will cease its characteristic life... Education, and education alone, spans the gap...[26]

Much like Hirsch, Dewey also argued the need for a common subject matter, particularly in a pluralistic culture where the interests of smaller groups, communities, and sub-cultures can easily cause cultural divisiveness.

> [W]ith the development of commerce, transportation, intercommunication, and emigration, countries like the United States are composed of a combination of different groups with different traditional customs. It is this situation which has, perhaps more than any other one cause, forced the demand for an educational institution which shall provide something like a homogeneous and balanced environment for the young... The intermingling in the school[s] ... of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment. Common subject matter accustoms all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated. The assimilative force of the American public school is eloquent testimony to the efficacy of the common and balanced appeal.[27]

Hirsch, however, incorrectly lumps Dewey together with Rousseau and his followers, and accuses them all of failing to show "an adequate appreciation of the need for transmission of specific cultural information."[28] In reality, Dewey not only maintained that children need to learn the shared information of the culture, but he criticized so-called progressive educators in his own time precisely on the grounds that they had overreacted against the tendency of traditional schools to impose factual knowledge without securing student involvement.

> [I]t is often held that since traditional education rested upon a conception of organization of knowledge that was almost completely contemptuous of living present experience, therefore education based upon living experience should be contemptuous of the organization of facts and ideas.[29]

Dewey warned against this tendency as early as 1902, in The Child and the Curriculum. He later criticized it, among other places, in a 1928 speech to the Progressive Education Association entitled "Progressive Education and the Science of Education,"[30] in a 1930 essay entitled "How Much Freedom in the New Schools?,"[31] in a 1934 essay entitled "The Need for a Philosophy of Education,"[32] and, most notably, in his 1938 critique of the progressive education movement, Experience and Education.

In fact, so pervasive is this theme in Dewey's educational writings that it is difficult to understand why Hirsch neglects to mention it. Indeed, two of Hirsch's chief historical sources, Patricia

Graham[33] and Lawrence Cremin,[34] document at length and in the plainest terms Dewey's struggles with the opponents of organized subject matter. Graham, for instance, cites Dewey's 1928 speech to the Progressive Education Association, where Dewey said that he wondered "whether this earlier and more negative phase of progressive education has not upon the whole run its course, and whether the time has not arrived in which these schools are undertaking a more constructive organized function."[35] Graham writes that in this speech "Dewey then urged that the schools attempt to organize subject matter along intellectual lines and to study conditions favorable to learning."[36]

The point is taken up in even more detail by Cremin, whom I quote at length.

> [T]here is a point to be made here, one that Dewey argued for the rest of his career but never fully communicated to some who thought themselves his disciples. A teacher cannot know which opportunities to use, which impulses to encourage, or which social attitudes to cultivate without a clear sense of what is to come later. With respect to character, this implies a conception of the kind of individual who is to issue from the school; and with respect to intellect, this implies a thorough acquaintance with organized knowledge as represented in the disciplines... In short, the demand on the teacher is twofold: thorough knowledge of the disciplines and an awareness of those common experiences of childhood that can be utilized to lead children toward the understandings represented by this knowledge. As Dewey himself pointed out, the demand is weighty indeed, and easily side-stepped. For simple as it is to discard traditional curricula in response to cries for reform, it is even simpler to substitute for them a succession of chaotic activities that not only fail to

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facilitate growth but actually end up miseducative in quality and character.[37]

Hirsch, however, quite remarkably misses all of this, characterizing Dewey instead on the basis of selected and often uncharacteristic quotes which he either takes out of context or grossly misinterprets. One example of a quote taken out of context is a passage to which Hirsch alludes, ironically, in Dewey's defense. "Dewey," he writes, "in fact, became appalled by the neutral scientism of those American educational administrators who began to institutionalize progressive ideas."[38] While this claim is true enough, the passage Hirsch cites to support it has absolutely no connection whatsoever to Dewey's critique of scientism in education. On the contrary, when Dewey wrote that "[t]here is always the danger in a new movement that in rejecting the aims and methods of that which it would supplant, it may develop its principles negatively rather than positively and constructively,"[39] he was criticizing precisely the detractors of organized subject matter with whom Hirsch incorrectly identifies Dewey! (As anyone who has actually read Experience and Education knows.) In fact, I know of no passage in that entire book where Dewey takes the "scientific managers" of education to task, so focused is he on trying to correct the misconceived child-centeredness of the progressive education movement.

An example of a misinterpreted quote is Hirsch's citation of

Dewey as "strongly second[ing] Rousseau's opposition to the mere

accumulation of information":

> Development emphasizes the need of intimate and
> extensive personal acquaintance with a small number of
> typical situations with a view to mastering the way of
> dealing with the problems of experience, not the piling up
> of information.[40]

In the first place, to deduce from this passage, as Hirsch does, that

Dewey believed "that a few direct experiences would suffice to

develop the skills that children require" entails the most obvious of

fallacies, as can be seen simply by examining the quoted passage: to

"emphasize" direct acquaintance is by no means to declare that it is a

"sufficient" condition of learning.

More to the point, however, is the fact that it is the "mere

accumulation" and the "piling up of information" to which Dewey was

opposed, and not the learning of information per se.

> Things remote in space and time affect the issue of our
> actions quite as much as things which we can smell and
> handle... Information is the name usually given to this
> kind of subject matter. The place of communication in
> personal doing supplies us with a criterion for estimating
> the value of informational material in school. Does it
> grow naturally out of some question with which the
> student is concerned? Does it fit into his more direct
> acquaintance so as to increase it efficacy and deepen its
> meaning? If it meets these two requirements, it is
> educative.[41]

The difference between information which is educative and that which

is not resides, then, according to Dewey, in whether or not the

student is able to create a place for it within his own active cognitive structures.

> It is no objection to information that it is clothed in words; communication necessarily takes place through words. But in the degree in which what is communicated cannot be organized into the existing experience of the learner, it becomes mere words: that is, pure sense-stimuli, lacking in meaning.[42]

The irony is that Hirsch himself attacks the mere accumulation of knowledge on precisely the same grounds: "Indeed, if traditional facts were to be presented unimaginatively or taught ignorantly or regarded as ends in themselves, we would have much to deplore in a return to traditional education."[43] Writing of the "extensive curriculum" of shared cultural information, he goes on to say: "Of course, this curriculum should be taught not just as a series of terms, or list of words, but as a vivid system of shared associations."[44] In fact, Hirsch ends up endorsing the very principle of intensive study for which he criticizes Dewey:

> [T]he extensive curriculum is not a sufficient basis for education by itself... The intensive curriculum, though different, is equally essential. Intensive study encourages a fully developed understanding of a subject, making one's knowledge of it integrated and coherent. It coincides with Dewey's recommendation that children should be deeply engaged with a small number of typical concrete instances.[45]

"To understand how isolated facts fit together," he continues, "we must always acquire mental models of how they cohere, and these

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schemata can come only from detailed, intensive study and experience."[46]

In spite of Hirsch's characterization that Dewey endorsed only the intensive curriculum, Dewey in fact agreed with Hirsch's estimation of the need for both an extensive body of shared cultural knowledge and a program of intensive study to secure that knowledge in students' cognitive and communicative repertoires.

> The parceling out of instruction among various ends such as acquisition of skill (in reading, spelling, writing, drawing, reciting), acquiring information (in history and geography), and training of thinking is a measure of the ineffective way in which we accomplish all three.[47]

Despite this seeming similarity, however, there are important differences here between Hirsch and Dewey, one of which would seem to be the question of emphasis. Before considering these differences, however, let us first look at two more ways in which Hirsch mischaracterizes Dewey: as an advocate of content-neutral skills and of social utility as educational aims.

Dewey's Rejection of Formalized Skills and Social Utility as Educational Aims

Hirsch blames many of today's educational ills on "educational formalism," a pedagogical approach which he characterizes as follows:

> Educational formalism holds that reading and writing are like baseball and skating; formalism conceives of literacy as a set of techniques that can be developed by proper coaching and practice... Educational formalism assumes that the specific contents used to teach "language arts" do not matter so long as they are closely tied to what the child already knows... Current schoolbooks in language arts pay little systematic attention to conveying a body of culturally significant information from grade to grade.[48]

Teaching reading as a content-neutral skill, he maintains, fails socially because cultural literacy requires culturally specific knowledge, with the result that a content-neutral reading curriculum leads to poor intra-societal communication.

In the course of this otherwise sound argument, however, Hirsch falsely identifies Dewey as one of the forerunners of present-day educational formalism. Along with several unexplained and unsupported references to the "content-neutral curriculum"[49] and "content-neutral ideas of Rousseau and Dewey,"[50] he writes that "Dewey assumed that early education need not be tied to specific content."[51] In actuality, Dewey deplored the separation of skills and subject matter in education. To begin with, he believed that although we can draw a distinction between them in theory, they cannot in fact be separated in human intellectual functioning. In an extended critique of what he calls the "theory of 'formal discipline,'"[52] Dewey wrote that

> the fundamental fallacy of the theory is its dualism: that is to say, its separation of activities and capacities from subject matter. There is no such thing as an ability to see

or hear or remember in general; there is only the ability to see or hear or remember something. To talk about training a power, mental or physical, in general, apart from the subject matter involved in its exercise, is nonsense.[53]

Even more pertinent to Hirsch's critique are Dewey's comments on the negative consequences that accrue from divorcing the teaching of skills from the transmission of socially desirable subject matter (a practice which he attributed, in part, to the misguided psychological doctrine of formal discipline just cited).

> If the how and the what, the psychological and the social, method and subject matter, must interact cooperatively in order to secure good results, a hard and fast distinction between them is fraught with danger. We want a method that will select subject-matter that aids psychological development, and we want a subject-matter that will secure the use of methods psychologically correct. We cannot begin by dividing the field between the psychology of individual activity and growth[,] and studies or subject-matters that are socially desirable, and then expect that at the end in practical operation the two things will balance each other.[54]

With specific regard to the teaching of reading, Dewey wrote that "[t]he question of **what** one learns to read is thus inextricably bound up with the question of **how** one learns to read."[55] In discussing the dangers of basing educational practice on incomplete psychological theories, Dewey complained that "the tools that are recognized to be social [e.g., literacy] are not treated socially but are relegated to the mechanics of psychology."[56] He then went on to give the following illustration of the ills which result from this separation:

The kind of reading-matter that now most abounds socially, as may be gathered from a glance at newsstands, is largely of a socially undesirable character. Yet it can be sold only to readers, to those in possession of the so-called social tools. Pages of exposition would not speak more eloquently of what is bound to happen when educational theory separates, in the name of science, the psychological processes that regulate the mere mechanism of acquiring a skill from the social conditions and needs which have to do with the application of that skill.[57]

Far from arguing, then, that skills can or should be taught apart from subject matter, Dewey agreed with Hirsch's opinion that reading, writing, and even figuring are social skills, tied to specific social content.

But what of the charge that Dewey advocated social utility itself as an educational aim? Once again, Hirsch flagrantly misrepresents Dewey in this regard. Hirsch refers to "Dewey's pragmatic emphasis on direct social utility as an educational goal,"[58] and maintains that the emphasis on "utility and the direct application of knowledge" which the NEA's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education advanced in its 1918 report Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education[59] originated in "European romanticism and American pragmatism as amalgamated in the educational philosophy of John Dewey."[60]

In fact, Dewey adamantly opposed social utility as an educational aim on several grounds. In the first place, he maintained that studies which aim to prepare people for specific vocational

callings fail precisely because vocational callings themselves are not stable but subject to constant change.

> As a matter of fact, industry at the present time undergoes rapid and abrupt changes through the evolution of new inventions. New industries spring up, and old ones are revolutionized. Consequently an attempt to train for too specific a mode of efficiency defeats its own purpose. When the occupation changes it methods, such individuals are left behind with even less ability to readjust themselves than if they had a less definite training.[61]

Hirsch makes precisely the same point when he writes that

> [t]he flaw in utilitarianism is its lack of utility for the modern world. Narrow vocational education, adjusted to the needs of the moment, is made ever more obsolete by changing technology. Vocations have multiplied beyond the abilities of the schools to accommodate them. What is required is education for change, not for static job competencies.[62]

Indeed, Dewey believed that the subject matter of a genuinely vocational education should be largely traditional in content.

> [A]n education which acknowledges the full intellectual and social meaning of a vocation would include instruction in the historic background of present conditions; training in science to give intelligence and initiative in dealing with material and agencies of production; and study of economics, civics, and politics, to bring the future worker into touch with the problems of the day and the various methods for its improvement. Above all, it would train power of readaptation to changing conditions so that future workers would not become blindly subject to a fate imposed upon them.[63]

Following this same basic line of reasoning, Dewey further attacked social utility as an educational aim on the grounds that preoccupation with present-day social needs is often bought at the

expense of the very historical and accumulated past knowledge which would enable people to understand and cope with current problems.

> [T]he achievements of the past provide the only means at command for understanding the present. Just as the individual has to draw in memory upon his own past to understand the conditions in which he individually finds himself, so the issues and problems of present social life are in such intimate and direct connection with the past that students cannot be prepared to understand either these problems or the best way of dealing with them without delving into their roots in the past.[84]

Again, Hirsch advances much the same point in his attack on the Commission's 1918 report:

> History was seen as an indirect and inefficient means of achieving ... social goals, and was transformed into social studies. Like vocational courses, social studies courses were directed "to the activities of life rather than to the demands of any subject as a logically organized science."[85]

Not only did Dewey agree, then, with Hirsch's estimation that the "antitraditional goals of the progressive movement have turned out to depend upon traditional information,"[66] but he stated as a matter principle that educational values must never be subordinated to present societal conditions.

> [T]he belief that social conditions determine educational objectives ... is a fallacy. Education is autonomous and should be free to determine its own ends, its own objectives... To look to some outside source to provide aims is to fail to know what education is as an ongoing process. What a society is, it is, by and large, as a product of education, as far as its animating spirit and purpose are concerned. Hence it does not furnish a standard to which education is to conform.[87]

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According to Dewey, education ultimately finds its direction in the democratic principle of growth, by which he meant not Rousseau's spontaneous development of individual potentialities but rather growth in the range and depth of understanding, communication, and shared purposes between people in a democratic society.[88] Indeed, Dewey's suggestion that all social institutions (including the contents of its shared cultural vocabulary) should be judged in terms of the extent to which they promote democratic growth seems, if anything, less utilitarian than Hirsch's suggestion that the contents of a national vocabulary should be judged only in terms of the extent to which they are already shared.[69] Be that as it may, Dewey and Hirsch clearly agree not only that communication between the people in a society is a fundamental aim of education, but that a body of shared cultural information is crucial to the realization of that end, and should not be sacrificed to misguided notions of spontaneous natural development, deprecation of traditional knowledge, or content-neutral skills and direct social utility as educational aims.

Three Crucial Differences Between Hirsch and Dewey

Despite this shared commitment to the transmission of shared cultural knowledge, Dewey would take issue with Hirsch on three

crucial points, all having to do with the way in which shared cultural knowledge is taught. First, Dewey's epistemology is more active (or at least more consistent) than Hirsch's, and assigns a more active role to the learner. Second, Dewey maintained that shared meanings could not be transmitted through direct formal presentation but could only be learned in the context of shared activities and concerns. Third, Dewey's primary concern was not with transmitting cultural knowledge per se but with promoting rational habits of reflective inquiry and social-minded discourse, of which shared cultural knowledge is but one component.

The Principle of Interaction

The first place where Dewey would disagree with Hirsch concerns the point on which Hirsch himself is the most inconsistent. Within an individual's cognition, by Hirsch's own account, a vital system of stored information must be organized in a meaningful pattern in order for it to be accessible. Such organization can only be achieved, he says, through active individual processing: "To understand how isolated facts fit together in some coherent way, we must always acquire mental modes of how they cohere, and these schemata can come only from detailed, intensive study and

experience."[70] Hirsch cites the prototypical example of the reading process:

> [T]he reader is not just passively receiving meaning but actively selecting the most appropriate schemata for making sense of the incoming words. Then the reader actively adjusts those schemata to the incoming words until a good fit is achieved. This process can work efficiently only if the reader has quick access to appropriate schemata.[71]

Quick access depends on existing schemata having themselves been constructed into meaningful systems.

> [S]chemata perform two essential functions that are relevant to literacy. The first is storing knowledge in retrievable form; the second is organizing knowledge in more and more efficient ways, so that it can be applied rapidly and efficiently. Without appropriate background knowledge, people cannot adequately understand written or spoken language. And unless that knowledge is organized for rapid and efficient deployment, people cannot perform reading tasks of any complexity.[72]

Hirsch correctly construes this need for organized background information as an argument in favor of his extensive curriculum of shared cultural knowledge. What he seems to overlook, however, is the way in which individuals organize this body of information in the first place. Rather than acknowledging that young children must be led somehow to organize their background knowledge for themselves -- which would seem to follow from the premise that "[w]e are able to make our present experiences take on meaning by assimilating them to prototypes formed from our past experiences"[73] -- Hirsch seems to want to short-circuit the process by giving children

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quantities of unassimilated adult information upon which they can then begin organizing future experience.

> Of course, we must always present material to children in an interesting way. But very young children are interested in extensive, limited information. In the early grades, truly intensive study is in any case difficult to pursue. The predicted difficulties of teaching the extensive curriculum simply do not apply to young children... They like to pick up adult information long before they can make sense of it... Young children are fascinated by straightforward information and absorb it without strain... Children don't have to be forced to memorize facts; they do it anyway.[74]

What Hirsch does in this passage is essentially to postulate that what is true of adults -- that they make sense of experience through the mutual adjustment of present and prior experience -- is somehow different for children -- who seem to have the mysterious ability to absorb knowledge in prearranged systems. This claim is not only unsupported (especially when compared to Hirsch's scholarly defense of reading as an active process of cognitive reconstruction), but it contradicts the very evidence Hirsch cites to support his claim that reading is not a content-neutral skill but depends upon relevant information having been organized into accessible systems.

The real conclusion to be drawn from the need for an organized system of background information is not that we must first transmit it to children directly so that they can then begin the task of making sense of experience. It is rather that we must somehow lead children to organize this knowledge for themselves from the first. Dewey

called this the principle of interaction -- in reference to the view, advanced by Hirsch himself, that intellectual growth entails the mutual adaptation, or interaction, of existing mental structures and the data of present experience. The difference is that for Dewey the principle of interaction applied to the whole spectrum of learning, not just to the more advanced levels.

> [T]he educator cannot start with knowledge already organized and proceed to ladle it out in doses... [T]he active process of organizing facts and ideas is an ever-present educational process. No experience is educative that does not tend both to knowledge of more facts and entertaining of more ideas and to a better, a more orderly, arrangement of them.[75]

The difference between Hirsch's and Dewey's views is highlighted by their distinct anthropological conceptions. Whereas Hirsch asserts that cultures simply transmit their past learning to the young, Dewey notes that how this is done changes as cultures progress. It is worth quoting Dewey at length:

> For the most part, [subsistence cultures] depend upon children learning the customs of the adults, acquiring their emotional set and stock of ideas, by sharing in what the elders are doing... But as civilization advances, the gap between the capacities of the young and the concerns of adults widens. Learning by direct sharing in the pursuits of grown-ups becomes increasingly difficult... Without ... formal education, it is not possible to transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society... But there are conspicuous dangers attendant upon the transition from indirect to formal education... There is the standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life-experience.[76]

We are thus met by the danger of ... the tendency to assume that pupils have a foundation of direct realization of situations sufficient for the superstructure of representative experience erected by formulated school studies...[77]

What Dewey here warns against is precisely the trap into which Hirsch has fallen when he recommends that children in the early grades do not need intensive study but should be made to memorize quantities of adult information. Dewey, by contrast, advocated a very different approach:

> Before teaching can safely enter upon conveying facts and ideas through the media of signs, schooling must provide genuine situations in which personal participation brings home the import of the material and the problems which it conveys. From the standpoint of the pupil, the resulting experiences are worth while on their own account; from the standpoint of the teacher they are also means of supplying subject matter required for understanding instruction involving signs, and of evoking attitudes of open-mindedness and concern as to the material symbolically conveyed.[78]

Children, in other words, need more than traditional information; they need to learn it in a way that is continuous with their past and present experience. Only that way can they construct it such a manner that it is integral with their active knowledge and beliefs. The teacher's job thus becomes that of finding or creating conditions which will compel students to learn subject matter in the course of making sense of their own experience.

Shared Meanings Are Learned in a Social Context

Experience, however, is not something that goes on only in the mind and heart of the individual, as romantic educators have tended to conceive it. Nor is it something that can be separated from past and present social conditions, as Rousseau had advocated. Rather, experience is social and requires a social context to develop. Herein lies a second point on which Dewey would find fault with Hirsch. For although Hirsch maintains that children should learn the social meanings of the contents of the national vocabulary, he makes no particular provision by which they can in fact learn those meanings.

"Successful communication," writes Hirsch, "depends upon shared associations. To participate in the literate national culture is to have acquired a sense of the information that is shared in that culture."[79] With regard to reading, he writes:

> The comprehending reader must bring to the text appropriate background information that includes knowledge not only about the topic but also the shared attitudes and conventions that color a piece of writing... Our children can learn this information only by being taught it.[80]

Hirsch seems to think that children will acquire a sense of these shared attitudes and meanings simply by absorbing the contents of the national vocabulary: "Only by piling up specific, communally shared information can children learn to participate in complex cooperative activities with other members of their community."[81]

Dewey's more complete anthropological conception once again suggests the superficiality of this view. According to him, people learn shared meanings not through the formal presentation of subject matter, but through shared activity where information is exchanged in the context of achieving and negotiating shared purposes.

> The development within the young of the attitudes and dispositions necessary to the continuous and progressive life of a society cannot take place by direct conveyance of beliefs, emotions, and knowledge. It takes place through the intermediary of the environment... The social environment ... is truly educative ... in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity. By doing his share in the associated activity, the individual appropriates the purpose which actuates it, becomes familiar with its methods and subject matters, acquires needed skill, and is saturated with its emotional spirit.[82]

Hirsch, by contrast, cites the example of children learning sports statistics as evidence that they can memorize and learn the meaning of complex adult information:

> At an early age when their memories are most retentive, children have an almost instinctive urge to learn specific tribal traditions. At that age they seem to be fascinated by catalogues of information and are eager to master the materials that authenticate their membership in adult society. Observe for example how they memorize the rather complex materials of football, baseball, and basketball, even without benefit of formal avenues by which that information is inculcated.[83]

Dewey's view suggests a different interpretation. Children who memorize sports statistics not only have an active interest in these things; they share it with their peers, elders, and the larger culture. Formal avenues of instruction are not only unnecessary to such

learning, they would almost certainly detract from the sense of vital,

shared experience which such children feel with regard to this

information. If anything the example illustrates that children memorize

and develop a sense of the meaning of facts for reasons vital to their

own, socially-motivated interests and not through some intrinsic

desire to absorb adult culture irrespective of their ability to understand

it.

For Dewey, shared cultural knowledge must be constructed

through conjoint, purposeful activity.

> To have the same ideas about things which others have,
> to be like-minded with them, and thus to be really
> members of a social group, is ... to attach the same
> meanings to things and to acts which others attach... [I]n
> shared activity, each person refers what he is doing to
> what the other is doing and vice-versa. That is, the
> activity of each is placed in the same inclusive situation...
> [I]f each views the consequences of his own acts as
> having a bearing upon what others are doing and takes
> into account the consequences of their behavior upon
> himself, then there is a common mind...[84]

By the same token, shared meanings can only be learned in a

social context.

> In social situations the young have to refer their way of
> acting to what others are doing and make it fit in. This
> directs their action to a common result, and gives an
> understanding common to the participants... This
> common understanding of the means and ends of action
> is the essence of social control ... [which] is intrinsic to
> the disposition of the person, not external and coercive.
> To achieve this internal control through identity of
> interest and understanding is the business of
> education.[85]

But in an advanced culture, where instruction must necessarily be removed from the social purposes that normally motivate learning, it becomes necessary to provide those conditions consciously.

> While books and conversation can do much, these agencies are usually relied upon too exclusively. Schools require for their full efficiency more opportunity for conjoint activities in which those instructed take part, so that they may acquire a social sense of their own powers and of the materials and appliances used.[86]

Democratic Participation as the Aim of Education

Where Dewey would perhaps take the greatest issue with Hirsch is with the lack of provision in Hirsch's educational scheme for the ways in which citizens in a democratic society learn to negotiate their shared knowledge and purposes among themselves. Hirsch's educational agenda does not prepare students for such active citizenship because it does nothing to foster such rational and socially-minded habits of inquiry and discourse as are necessary to negotiate knowledge and purposes in a democracy. In some respects, Hirsch's agenda may even work against the inculcation of such habits.

Hirsch seems to think that by simply transmitting the shared vocabulary of the culture (to be sure, a necessary part of a democratic education), democratic results will thereby follow. Writes Hirsch:

> Putting aside for the moment the practical arguments about the economic uses of literacy [that it is ultimately more utilitarian than narrow vocational training], we can

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contemplate the even more basic principle that underlies our national system of education in the first place -- that people in a democracy can be entrusted to decide all important matters for themselves because they can deliberate and communicate with one another... Illiterate and semiliterate Americans are condemned not only to poverty, but also to the powerlessness of incomprehension... They do not feel themselves to be active participants in our republic, and they often do not turn out to vote. The civic importance of cultural literacy lies in the fact that true enfranchisement depends upon knowledge, knowledge upon literacy, and literacy upon cultural literacy.[87]

True as this passage's concluding sentence and implicit criticism of the content-neutral curriculum are, the passage leaves completely unanswered -- indeed, the question is not even asked -- how people learn to "feel themselves active participants in our republic." Hirsch seems to think that if people are taught the literate culture, they will not only feel ownership of that culture, but they will know how to deliberate about its mutual concerns and even be inclined to do so. He overlooks that **how** people acquire cultural literacy is at least as important as the fact **that** they acquire it. Not only does his educational scheme fail to provide the conditions by which people learn to deliberate together, but his recommendation that children should acquire the basic framework of the literate culture through rote memorization offers an educational foundation which is quite at odds with the sort of active, democratic disposition he wants to foster in the long run.

Dewey's remarks concerning the teaching of reading as a content-neutral skill are instructive in this regard:

> [E]ducationally speaking the problems of attendant radiations, expansions and contractions ... are in the end more important [than whether or not skill in reading is acquired]... Nor is it satisfactory to say that the part must be mastered before the whole can be attacked. For, by the nature of the case, the whole enters into the part, that is, it is a determining factor in the **way** in which one learns to read. Thus the consideration of how one learns to read in its connection with its effect upon future personal development and interests demands attention to desirable subject-matter.[88]

Dewey here points out the fallacy in believing that reading skills acquired in isolation from particular subject matter will eventually secure desirable reading habits, a criticism with which Hirsch is clearly sympathetic. By the same token, however, it is just as fallacious to assume that subject matter acquired through rote means will thereby secure an active disposition with regard to that subject matter.

Dewey attributed both mistakes to a failure to grasp the principle of collateral learning: "Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future."[89] He severely criticized the belief that students should be prepared for future life by imparting upon them knowledge and skills in isolation from the sorts of contexts in which those things were later to be used.

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The ideal of using the present simply to get ready for the future contradicts itself. It omits, and even shuts out, the very conditions by which a person can be prepared for his future. We always live at the time we live and not at some other time, and only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future. This is the only preparation which in the long run amounts to anything.[90]

It is in the context of Dewey's democratic vision of education that these ideas achieve their full expression, as reflected in the following passage -- among the most famous Dewey ever wrote:

The devotion of democracy to eduction is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated... But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. These more numerous and more varied points of contact ... secure a liberation of powers which remain suppressed as long as the incitations to action are partial, as they must be in a group which in its exclusiveness shuts out many interests.

The widening of the area of shared concerns, and the liberation of a greater diversity of personal capacities which characterize a democracy, are not of course the product of deliberation and conscious effort... But after greater individualization on one hand, and a broader community of interest on the other have come into existence, it is a matter of deliberate effort to sustain and extend them... A society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. Otherwise, they

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will be overwhelmed by the changes in which they are caught and whose significance or connections they do not perceive.[91]

The primary educational aim in a democracy, according to Dewey, thus becomes that of securing active habits of democratic participation and deliberation:

> A society which makes provision for participation in [the] good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure changes without introducing disorder.[92]

For Dewey, this meant that education should provide a context that replicates those features which most characterize the democratic way of life: namely, interaction among its people towards the negotiation and accomplishment of communal purposes. The teacher's role in such an environment is twofold. From the students' point of view, she is primarily a more knowledgeable participant, an elder of the community who embodies its knowledge, purposes, and animating spirit. From the teacher's own standpoint, she is an organizer of such an environment as will elicit students' natural social impulses, and progressively order them into more intelligent patterns through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and reflective habits of mind.[93]

When measured against Dewey's criteria of participation and readjustment through interaction, Hirsch's educational agenda comes up short. For in making no provision for the ways in which people

learn to negotiate knowledge and purposes, Hirsch assumes a level of homogeneity and stability that is neither attainable nor desirable. We do need a shared national vocabulary, and we do want students to acquire a knowledge of what others are likely to know and feel. And Hirsch is quite right to criticize content-neutral curricula on the grounds that they fail to provide for such common understanding. But even if subject matter could be poured into children like water into cups, like-mindedness and common understanding cannot be transmitted in such a fashion, for the simple reason that social conditions are not static. What Hirsch elsewhere says of technological knowledge is also true of cultural knowledge: it is changing and diverse. He attempts to acknowledge this fact by suggesting that the contents of the national vocabulary will change with time, but he makes no mention of how. The contents of the national vocabulary change through negotiation among the citizens in a democracy, and people learn to partake in such negotiation through education. What we need to do educationally, then, is to foster in students an intellectual and socially-minded disposition which will enable and encourage them to inquire, discuss, and negotiate such a vocabulary and such knowledge and purposes for and among themselves.

By this means, Dewey hoped that eventually his educational ideal might be realized: "that we may produce in schools a projection in type of the society we should like to realize, and by forming minds

in accord with it gradually modify the larger and more recalcitrant features of adult society."[94] This point is well summarized by Cremin:

> [Dewey] wanted education constantly to expand the range of social situations in which individuals perceived issues and made and acted upon choices. He wanted schools to inculcate habits that would enable individuals to control their surroundings rather than merely adapt to them. And he wanted each generation to go beyond its predecessors in the quality of behavior it sought to nurture in its children. Progressive societies, he counseled, "endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society be an improvement on their own."[95]

The notion that education should thus be an agent of the progressive and ongoing reconstruction of communal experience lies at the heart of Dewey's educational writings. It is an idea which Hirsch not only ignores in Dewey's writings but which he fails to consider in his own educational vision.

Three Reasons Why People Mischaracterize Dewey

What has led otherwise thoughtful scholars to mischaracterize Dewey's work in education? Cremin[96] offers three explanations. First is Dewey's writing style, which is infamous for the remarkable (some would say impossible) complexes of meaning it ascribes to key words. Cremin cites "experience," "growth," "inquiry," and "interest" as examples, though almost as noteworthy are "democracy,"

"interaction," "continuity," and "habit." The problem with Dewey's penchant for intricate meanings is not that he used them to mask inconsistencies or sloppy thinking. On the contrary, most devoted scholars of Dewey's work will tell you his use of terminology is part and parcel of a remarkably inclusive and consistent philosophical system.[97]

The problem is rather that Dewey's complex use of language opened the way for his key terms to be construed in all manner of ways which Dewey himself never intended. As Cremin points out, the culprits were chiefly those people who either did not read Dewey thoroughly, or did not read him at all. For example, "interest," which for Dewey was a value-neutral term denoting an object or goal towards which our behavioral and attitudinal tendencies compel us, was stripped by educational romantics of its empirical meaning to connote instead a spontaneous impulse to be encouraged for its own sake. Dewey, by contrast, construed interests as the termini of native tendencies which generally need to be **frustrated** in order to lead students to develop reflective habits of mind.[98] The romantic interpretation of "interest" is, of course, the one that stays with us today.

A second and related explanation cited by Cremin is that Dewey's influence was so widespread that people frequently learned of his philosophy indirectly, through secondary and still more distant

sources. As an example, Cremin cites William Heard Kilpatrick, a student and noted disciple of Dewey's whom Dewey allegedly challenged for certain misapplications of Dewey's work.[99] According to Cremin, Kilpatrick taught some 35,000 graduate students during his forty year tenure at Columbia.[100] And, to paraphrase Cremin, who can guess what influence these students had? As the popular misinterpretation of the term "interest" illustrates, the interpretations to which people were many times exposed not only frequently ran counter to Dewey's original meaning, but were often espoused by some of his most ardent "supporters." Such distortions led many critics to believe that they were attacking Dewey's ideas, when in fact they were as often as not advancing criticisms of progressive education very similar to Dewey's own.

The final and, for Cremin, the most important explanation of why otherwise intelligent commentators have mischaracterized Dewey's work is the tendency to interpret influential ideas in terms of present social needs and concerns rather than in the light of their original historical contexts. In order to understand the meaning of Dewey's writings, both at the time of their origin and in terms of present conditions, we must understand the evolving social climate that engendered them and of which they became an integral part. Otherwise, we may interpret them in the light of present educational conditions alone, conditions which at any given historical moment are

likely to offer a very different set of problems than confronted Dewey in the early part of this century. As Dewey himself observed:

> [W]e do not emphasize things which do not require emphasis --that is, such things as are taking care of themselves fairly well. We tend rather to frame our statement on the basis of the defects and needs of the contemporary situation... It is, then, no paradox requiring explanation that a given epoch or generation tends to emphasize in its conscious projections just the things which it has least of in actual fact. A time of domination by authority will call out as response the desirability of great individual freedom; one of disorganized individual activities the need of social control as an educational aim.[101]

In particular, turn of the century schools were much more formal and dogmatic than they have ever been since or are likely ever to be again, and the educational experiments of the Progressive Era had not yet occurred. Dewey no doubt felt he could thus assume of his initial audience a basic respect for cultural traditions and the role of the school in transmitting those traditions to the next generation. Indeed, given the educational practices of his day, his first concern was to point out the fallacy of assuming that children would automatically share their parents and teachers' enthusiasm for, and grasp of, the formal products of culture. He noted many times that the more sophisticated and technological a culture becomes, the greater the distance there is between the immediately social interests of the young and the formal organization of the academic disciplines. His most often repeated educational prescription was accordingly that we must do what we can to bridge that gap, so as best to initiate

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students into the conceptual and ethical norms of society but which

they are unable to assimilate in adult form.

It would, moreover, be a very great mistake to assume that

Dewey broadly supported the radical practices advanced in his name.

On the contrary, Dewey was, as I have tried to demonstrate here, one

of the progressive education movement's harshest critics. The

optimistic tones with which Dewey and his daughter, Evelyn, wrote of

the experimental efforts of such progressive educators as the

Rousseauan-influenced Marietta Johnson in Schools of To-Morrow

reflected not so much his support of their specific practices as they

did his approval of the general climate of educational experimentation

of the 1910's. Indeed, as Cremin notes:

> [T]he reader ... derives the unmistakable sense that all
> the systems expounded are not of equal worth. Mrs.
> Johnson's Rousseauan pedagogy, which comes first in
> order, is not allowed to stand alone but is soon
> incorporated into a larger social reformism that bears the
> earmarks of Dewey's own philosophy. Moreover, while
> each of the individual schools is supposed to exemplify
> one or another of the central principles of progressivism,
> the further one reads in the volume, the more
> comprehensive the example.[102]

Patricia Graham adds to this explanation that "[t]he

fundamental difficulty in assessing Dewey's own attitude toward

progressivism results from his apparent unwillingness in his later years

to criticize specifically those who called themselves his followers and

who justified their work by his phrases."[103] She later goes on to

mention his seemingly limitless "patience with 'overzealous and

underbright' disciples."[104] William Brickman completes the picture in his introduction to <u>Schools of To-Morrow</u> when he writes that

> Dewey might have dwelled to some extent on the shortcomings of the schools which were presumably putting his doctrines into practice. In 1938, he was to pin-point criticism of some tendencies in Progressive education. Had he done so in 1915, it might have been less necessary in the succeeding decades.[105]

Finally, contrary to the popular misconception that Dewey's ideas underwent significant transformations as a result of failed progressive educational experiments, Dewey's later educational writings are almost entirely consistent with those from before his experience with the progressive schools. The changes in tone and emphasis are the result not of some transformation in his philosophy but instead of changed social and educational conditions brought about in large part by those "disciples" who distorted his early work, taking it to extremes unforseen by Dewey himself. For in their zeal to attend to students' "interests," progressive educators frequently eliminated the curriculum, instead of finding ways to match the two as Dewey had advocated. And, in their ardor to "democratize" the classroom, they often dispensed with the teacher's authority altogether, rather than using it, as Dewey had recommended, to guide students towards an active understanding of cultural traditions, especially as they relate to present social concerns.

Summary

Transmitting the shared cultural information of a society is but a means to the end of preparing people for active participation in the affairs, decision-making processes, and characteristic way of life of that society. This principle is equally present in Hirsch and Dewey. Hirsch, however, does not fully come to terms with the question of how to transmit that knowledge in a way that promotes democratic habits of participation. The very evidence which he cites to support his claim that familiarity with the shared knowledge of a society is crucial to being able to participate in that society's affairs simultaneously demonstrates the need to learn that knowledge in the context of actively and socially constructing one's own knowledge and belief systems. Hirsch, however, disregards this need in the education of children on the dubious and self-contradictory claim that children do not, or do not need to, learn in the same way as adults. In contrast, Dewey's principles (1) that the content of education must interact with students' present experience, and (2) that the method of education must provide for the collateral learning of constructive attitudes and habits of continued learning, both show the need for an educational context that is not only active but social as well. For Dewey, teaching students to construct knowledge in the process of

negotiating and realizing shared purposes is the primary way to

prepare people for the democratic way of life.

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Notes

1. Lawrence A. Cremin, <u>The Transformation of the School</u> (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 237.

2. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., <u>Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know</u> (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

3. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. xvi.

4. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, ch. 2, "The Discovery of the Schema," pp. 33-69.

5. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, ch. 3, "National Language and National Culture," pp. 70-93.

6. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 113.

7. Such mischaracterizations are not only understandable, but are in fact unavoidable, given Hirsch ambiguity on this point; see, e.g., Walter Feinberg, "Foundationalism and Recent Critiques of Education," <u>Educational Theory</u>, 39 (1989): 133-138.

8. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 53.

9. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 127.

10. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, pp. xv, xvii, 30, 130-131.

11. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 129.

12. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 130.

13. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, pp. 126-127.

14. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 144.

15. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. xv.

16. A similar but more detailed account of Rousseau's educational philosophy can be found in Allan Bloom's introduction to his translation of the <u>Emile</u>. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, <u>Emile</u>, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979).

17.   John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey, Schools of To-Morrow (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1915/1943/1962).

18.   Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. xv.

19.   John Dewey, Democracy and Education (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1944/1966), pp. 60, 91-3, 112-18.

20.   Dewey and Dewey, Schools, p. 1.

21.   Dewey and Dewey, Schools, p. 1.

22.   Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 60.

23.   Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 31.

24.   John Dewey, "The Need for a Philosophy of Education" (1934), in Reginald Archambault, ed., John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings (New York: Modern Library, 1964), pp. 4-5.

25.   Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 114.

26.   Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 3-4.

27.   Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 21-22.

28.   Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. xvi.

29.   John Dewey, Experience and Education (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1938/1963), p. 82.

30.   Patricia Graham, Progressive Education: From Arcady to Academe (New York, Teacher's College Press, 1967), p. 50; cf., "Progressive Education and the Science of Education," Progressive Education, 5 (1928): 201.

31.   John Dewey, "How Much Freedom in the New Schools?" New Republic, July 9 (1930): 204-206.

32.   Dewey, "The Need."

33.   Graham, Progressive Education.

34.   Cremin, Transformation.

35.   Graham, Progressive Education, p. 50; cf., John Dewey, "Progressive Education," p. 201.

36.   Graham, Progressive Education, p. 50.

37. Cremin, Transformation, p. 138.

38. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 122.

39. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, pp. 236-237; cf., Dewey, Experience and Education, p. 6.

40. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. xv; cf. Dewey and Dewey, Schools, p. 13.

41. Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 186.

42. Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 188.

43. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 125.

44. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 127.

45. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 128.

46. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 129.

47. Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 152.

48. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, pp. 111-112.

49. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. xvi.

50. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 19.

51. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. xv.

52. Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 61-67.

53. Dewey, Democracy and Education, p. 65.

54. John Dewey, Sources of a Science of Education (New York: Liveright, 1929), p. 61. Dewey offers an extended discussion of the unity of method and subject matter in education, and the negative consequences resulting from their separation, in Democracy and Education, chapter 13, "The Nature of Method," pp. 164-179.

55. Dewey, Sources, p. 63.

56. Dewey, Sources, p. 71.

57. Dewey, Sources, p. 72.

58. Hirsch, Cultural Literacy, p. 119.

59. C. D. Kingsley, ed., <u>Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education: A Report of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, Appointed by the National Education Association</u>, Bulletin, 1918, No. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, Government Printing Office, 1918).

60. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 118.

61. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 119.

62. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 126.

63. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, pp. 318-319.

64. Dewey, <u>Experience and Education</u>, p. 77.

65. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 123; cf., Kingsley, <u>Cardinal Principles</u>, pp. 7-12.

66. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 126.

67. Dewey, <u>Sources</u>, pp. 74-75.

68. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, pp. 81-88.

69. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 107.

70. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literal</u>, p. 129.

71. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 53.

72. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, pp. 56-57.

73. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 51.

74. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, pp. 130-131.

75. Dewey, <u>Experience and Education</u>, pp. 82-83.

76. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, pp. 7-8.

77. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 233.

78. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 233.

79. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 59.

80. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, pp. 13-14.

81. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. xv.

82. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 22.

83. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 30.

84. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 30.

85. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 40.

86. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 40.

87. Hirsch, <u>Cultural Literacy</u>, p. 12.

88. Dewey, <u>Sources</u>, p. 64.

89. Dewey, <u>Experience and Education</u>, p. 48.

90. Dewey, <u>Experience and Education</u>, p. 49.

91. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, pp. 87-88.

92. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 99.

93. These functions are brought out, among other places, in Katherine Camp Mayhew and Anna Camp Edwards, <u>The Dewey School</u> (New York: Atherton, 1936/1966).

94. Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, p. 317.

95. Cremin, <u>Transformation</u>, p. 123; cf. <u>Democracy and Education</u>, 1916, p. 92; 1944, p. 79.

96. Cremin, <u>Transformation</u>, pp. 237-239.

97. See especially Richard Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); <u>Consequences of Pragmatism</u> (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). Rorty argues, quite correctly, that Dewey was trying to establish a new vocabulary within which to discuss philosophical issues, a vocabulary which he believed would prove more fruitful than the language of traditional philosophy.

98. See, e.g., Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u>, ch. 10, "Interest and Discipline," pp. 124-138.

99. Cremin's interpretation is taken to task by John Beinke, who quotes Dewey as saying that

Dr. Kilpatrick has never fallen a victim to the one-sidedness of identifying progressive education with child-centered education. This does not mean that he has not given attention to the capacities, interests and achievements and failures of those who are still students, but he has always balanced regard for the psychological conditions and processes of those who are learning with consideration of the social and cultural conditions in which as human beings the pupils are living.

See John Beinke, "A Progressive at the Pinnacle: William Heard Kilpatrick's Final Years at Teachers College Columbia University," Educational Theory 39, (1989): 144. This passage would seem to suggest that Kilpatrick was himself a victim of the same sort of misplaced criticisms which were leveled against Dewey.

100. Cremin, Transformation, p. 238.

101. Dewey, Democracy and Education, pp. 111-112.

102. Cremin, Transformation, pp. 153-154.

103. Graham, Progressive Education, pp. 15-16.

104. Graham, Progressive Education, p. 78.

105. Dewey and Dewey, Schools of To-Morrow, p. xxv.

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CRITICAL THINKING AS TRANSFER: THE
RECONSTRUCTIVE INTEGRATION OF OTHERWISE
DISCRETE INTERPRETATIONS OF EXPERIENCE

One of the most debated issues in the current critical thinking

literature is whether critical thinking should be taught as a single body

of general, transferable skills, or as a body of diverse sets of skills,

each peculiar to an academic subject area. In his landmark paper, "A

Concept of Critical Thinking,"[1] Robert H. Ennis, building on the work

of John Dewey, Max Black, and B. Othanel Smith,[2] identified twelve

general "aspects" of critical thinking which he claimed were both

teachable and transferable, and, in so doing, laid the groundwork for

the present critical thinking movement. The list has since been revised

and added to by many, including Ennis,[3] and has acquired something

of the status of a taxonomy, itself being further broken down into

composite sets of "dispositions" and "abilities." The basic premise

behind such inventories is that identifying the general components of

critical thinking constitutes a major step towards teaching people to

be critical thinkers. Proponents of this general skills approach hold

that these aspects, once learned, can be transferred from one content

area to another, given adequate knowledge of the subject area in

question. Accordingly, they maintain that critical thinking can be

taught both in general skills courses and in courses that "infuse"[4]
general skills into the subject areas.

In Critical Thinking and Education,[5] John E. McPeck challenges
the basic premise of the critical thinking movement by claiming that
since all thinking is necessarily thinking about X, there can be no such
thing as a set of general critical thinking skills, dispositions, or abilities
that can be applied in all contexts, and that to teach critical thinking
"in general" is therefore fruitless, perhaps even misguided. McPeck
bases his argument on the notion that all thinking develops and occurs
within the specific epistemological and logical frameworks of discrete
subject areas, and cannot, therefore, be separated from the
conceptual, evidential, semantic, and logical norms that comprise each
of them. McPeck defines "critical thinking" as "the appropriate use of
reflective skepticism"[6] to establish "good reasons for various
beliefs,"[7] and maintains that since what constitutes "good reasons"
depends on the peculiar epistemological and logical norms of the
subject area in question, critical thinking necessarily varies from one
domain to the next. Rather than trying to teach critical thinking in
general, McPeck believes we should concentrate instead on giving
students a more thorough grounding in the epistemological
underpinnings of the key subject areas.

Although McPeck's critique has stirred a good deal of
controversy, there is nevertheless widespread agreement that it has

revealed the need for a closer examination of the claim that critical

thinking is transferable. Not surprisingly, this need is being met in

large part through public, dialogic exchanges -- a mode of knowledge

construction that, in the eyes of at least one prominent theorist,[8]

captures the essence of what it means to think critically. Although

these dialogic exchanges are being supplemented by empirical

research in the cognitive sciences and education,[9] our main concern

here will be with a conceptual analysis of the transferability question -

- on the grounds that all empirical studies are unavoidably guided by

theory (not overlooking the fact that they, in turn, inform it). In short,

whenever we pursue or interpret "facts," we invariably impose certain

theoretical perspectives, whether consciously or not. One purpose of

the present analysis, then, is to make the theoretical underpinnings of

the transfer question more explicit.

Rather than giving separate summary analyses of the

viewpoints in question,[10] the present essay discusses them in

something of a dialogic fashion intended to delineate and clarify some

of the key interactions between the two main sides in the debate.

Among the conclusions which emerge from this discussion are the

following: (1) that although McPeck may be correct that mastery of

subject-specific knowledge and skills is the major challenge in learning

to think critically, general concepts and procedures of thinking

nevertheless exist, are teachable, and are potentially useful

instruments of improved thinking and knowledge transfer, (2) that although McPeck's denial of the existence and teachability of general thinking skills is overstated, it should not obscure his otherwise legitimate point that thinking can neither occur nor be taught independently of the epistemological norms of some frame of reference or knowledge domain, and (3) that, although both general and subject-specific knowledge and skills are important conditions of critical thinking, the teaching of neither adequately addresses the fundamental problem of getting students to transfer their knowledge and skills to new areas. This is because critical thinking ability is not so much comprised of general and/or subject-specific knowledge and skills to be transferred (though it is that, too) as it is itself a habit of ongoing transfer, reconstruction, and integration of otherwise discrete interpretations of experience.

The present essay concludes by reasserting, in a modified form, a thesis put forward most notably by Richard Paul -- that the foremost task in the teaching of critical thinking is less the transmission of any particular knowledge and/or skills than it is the fostering in students of those habits of reflective and reconstructive inquiry which ultimately lead to an ongoing disposition to seek intellectual, moral, and social integrity, or what is sometimes referred to as "the critical spirit."

The Argument for Subject-Specificity

McPeck's claim that there are no such things as general,

teachable skills of critical thinking begins with the following, much

cited argument from the first chapter of his book:

> It is a matter of conceptual truth that thinking is
> always **thinking about X**, and that X can never be
> 'everything in general' but must always be something in
> particular...
> Thinking, then, is logically connected to an X...and
> so critical thinking, too, must be directed toward
> something...
> In isolation from a particular subject, the phrase
> 'critical thinking' neither refers to nor denotes any
> particular skill. It follows from this that it makes no sense
> to talk about critical thinking as a distinct subject and
> that it therefore cannot profitably be taught as such.[11]

The argument basically consists of the following chain of inferences:

(1) Thinking must be about X.

(2) Hence there can be no thinking which is not about

something.

(3) Thus there can be no general thinking skills.

(4) Therefore thinking cannot be taught as such.

Clearly, there is no denying that the second premise follows from the

first, just as the fourth follows from the third. The crux of the

argument, then, lies in the notion that because we cannot think about

everything in general, there are no such things as general thinking

skills.

Counterargument: Topic-Specificity Not Exclusive of General Skills

As more than one of McPeck's critics has pointed out,

however, the argument is invalid: because thinking must be about

some topic, it does not follow that there are no general skills which

apply to many topics. Drawing an analogy between bicycling and

thinking, for example, Harvey Siegel holds that "the general activity of

thinking is [no more] 'logically connected to an X,'... than the general

activity of cycling is logically connected to any particular bicycle."

Siegel continues:

> It is true that any given act of cycling must be done on
> some bicycle or other. But it surely does not follow that
> the general activity of cycling cannot be discussed
> independently of any particular bicycle. Indeed, we can
> state, and teach people, general skills of cycling (e.g.,
> "lean to the left when making a left-hand turn," "slow
> down before cornering, not during cornering," etc.), even
> though instantiating these maneuvers and so exhibiting
> mastery of the general skills requires some particular
> bicycle."[12]

Similarly, Ennis holds that McPeck "has failed to **prove** his point about

general thinking and logic," maintaining that common sense shows us

many examples of general skills:

> With respect to general thinking, there are a number of
> concerns and problems that bridge fields, including:
> assumption identification, definition strategy, detecting
> and avoiding equivocation, being clear, inferring to an
> explanation, seeing possible alternative explanations,
> consistency, and judging credibility of putative
> authorities, to mention a few."[13]

In the first instance, however, McPeck responds that what is true of cycling does not necessarily hold true for thinking. The difference between them, according to him, is that:

> "cycling"... denote[s] a specific skill, whereas "thinking" does not... Cycling has a rather limited, if not unique set of standards and criteria which determine what counts as effective cycling. But there is no similar set of finite criteria which determine (or define) effective thinking... Different destinations and purposes do not change the specific nature of the skill of cycling. But different problems and purposes do change the inherent nature of the skills required in thinking.[14]

In the second instance, McPeck argues that although we can ascribe to any one of the "general thinking skills" the same **label** -- "identifying assumptions," "recognizing fallacies," etc. -- because of the specific semantic, conceptual, and evidential norms peculiar to separate knowledge domains, the **skills** themselves vary, sometimes dramatically, from one domain to the next:

> Take, for example, "the ability to recognize underlying assumptions." That this is not a singular ability can be appreciated by considering the fact that to recognize an underlying assumption in mathematics requires a different set of skills and abilities from those required for recognizing them in a political dispute, which are different again from those required in a scientific dispute. Thus, the phrase "ability to recognize underlying assumptions" does not denote any singular ability, but rather a wide variety of them.[15]

It is important to note, however, that McPeck includes in these and similar rebuttals a premise not found in his initial argument, but to

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which a major portion of his book is actually devoted. He began that argument, it will be recalled, from the premise that "thinking is always thinking **about** X [-- X being the particular topic at hand],"[16] when what he really seems to be advancing is the notion that thinking is always thinking **within** X -- X being the epistemological norms of a particular subject area. He does not undertake the necessary explanation, however, until chapter 2, though it is best summarized in the following passage from his concluding chapter:

> In chapter 2 it was argued that epistemology is, in effect, the analysis of good reasons for belief, including their specific character and foundation. Also, because collective human experience has discovered that different kinds of belief often have different kinds of good reason supporting them, it follows that there will be many different epistemologies corresponding to different fields of human endeavor. A corollary of this is that logic itself is parasitic upon epistemology, since logic is merely the formalization of good reasons once they have been discovered. Thus epistemology, and to some extent logic, have intra-field validity but not necessarily inter-field validity (see chapter 2).[17]

Because McPeck does not reveal this claim to the epistemological subject-specificity of thinking in his initial argument, however, it is not as clear as it should be that it comprises his key premise. As such, it is helpful to put it in the context of some of his related assumptions.

Borrowing from the philosophy of science, McPeck draws a distinction between two related contexts of thinking: the "context of discovery" -- that side of thinking concerned with generating and formulating plausible hypotheses to solve problems and explain

relationships -- and the "context of justification" -- that side concerned with determining the adequacy of hypotheses once they have been formulated.[18] According to McPeck, deductive, formal logic (for him, the one aspect of thinking that can be at all divorced from subject-specific content) is restricted to the context of justification, and affects the context of discovery only insofar as it **eliminates** certain possibilities as logically invalid. But, he maintains, formal logic cannot **generate** possible solutions itself, as these are necessarily contextual; i.e., they depend on knowledge of and familiarity with the epistemological -- semantic, conceptual, and evidential[19] -- norms of the relevant problem-area(s). Moreover, even though the context of discovery is, for McPeck, restricted to content-bound or inductive modes of thinking, it is evident that the context of justification admits of both inductive and deductive modes, as an hypothesis must be subjected to criteria of empirical truth as well as of logical validity to determine its adequacy. And, according to McPeck, these evidential criteria are again peculiar to specific subject areas. Thus, for McPeck, any complete act or description of thinking necessarily entails both the formulating and the testing of plausible hypotheses within the epistemological norms of the subject area(s) in question, and therefore cannot be separated from them.

In short, then, the essence of McPeck's critique of the general skills approach hinges, not on the premise that thinking must be about

some **topic** (a premise which, so far as I can tell, is superfluous to his

argument), but rather on the premise that thinking must occur within

the epistemological norms of some specific **subject** area.[20] One of

the apparent consequences of this postulation of the epistemological

subject-specificity of thinking, for McPeck, is the subject-specificity of

thinking **skills.** For him, "skills are born of knowledge of, and

experience in, specific areas," and, hence, "are parasitic upon detailed

knowledge of, and experience in, parent fields and problem areas."[21]

The key argument in his critique of the general skills approach,

therefore, would be more accurately stated as follows: that because

thinking must occur within the epistemological norms of some specific

subject area, there can be no such things as general thinking skills.

The Argument for General Skills

For general skills proponents, however, the existence of

subject-specific norms and skills no more precludes the existence of

"general" skills than does the claim to the topic-specificity of thinking.

(Thus, Siegel's assertion that "there are readily identifiable reasoning

skills which do not refer to any specific subject matter"[22] could just

as easily read that 'there are readily identifiable reasoning skills which

do not refer to any specific subject area.') While not specifically

denying that many, perhaps "most," reasoning skills are subject-

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specific, general skills proponents believe that there are nevertheless

certain "general" skills, or certain generalizable features of otherwise

subject-specific skills, which enable us to refer to them with a general

nomenclature.[23] Thus, the general skill of "assumption identification"

would include knowing both what an assumption is and how generally

to go about looking for one (in the most basic sense, by identifying

the premise and conclusion of an argument, then formulating the

missing premise). Moreover, practice in "assumption identification"

would improve one's ability to identify assumptions generally.

Counterargument: Facility with General Concepts and Procedures Not the Same as Critical Thinking Ability

This latter claim, however, is precisely the sort to which

McPeck so adamantly objects, because for him there is no "general

ability" to "identify assumptions." A moment ago I said that

"assumption identification" as a "general skill" would include both a

knowledge of what an assumption is and a knowledge of how to look

for one generally. While McPeck has no particular objection to either

of these claims as such, he does object to the implication that a

knowledge of general concepts and procedures constitutes a general

"skill" in thinking:

There is certainly something to be said for understanding what an assumption is, what a deductive inference is, etc. But I...object to such understanding being cashed-out as providing general "critical thinking skill."[24]

This is because, for McPeck, while it would be possible to know what an assumption is (the concept) and even how to go about looking for one generally (the procedure), the actual "skill" of "assumption identification" would be peculiar to the particular knowledge domain being thought about: "the so-called 'thinking skills' are an inherent part of the warp and woof of the various disciplines, and must, therefore, be taught as part of them."[25] Moreover, according to McPeck, in any situation where the grounds for belief are uncertain -- i.e., in any situation which calls for critical thinking -- it is not so much the general form or logical validity of the relevant claims that is hard to assess as it is the subject-specific content or truth of the premises:

> [I]n deciding upon real public questions it is usually not the logical validity of an argument that we find difficult but rather the task of determining whether certain premises are in fact true. And this latter difficulty invariably takes us into the unfamiliar ground of some technical subject area, where each question seems to generate several others and epistemological uncertainties abound.[26]

As far as McPeck is concerned, the general skills approach reverses this order by creating the misleading impression that learning to think critically is primarily a matter of mastering a given body of general thinking concepts and procedures.

Thus, the problem with the general skills approach, for McPeck, seems not so much to be that certain general concepts and procedures of thinking do not exist as it is (1) that, even with the addition of subject-specific knowledge, an understanding of general thinking concepts and procedures does not automatically translate into critical thinking ability in that subject area, and (2) that, on the whole, an understanding of these general concepts and procedures is not really very important compared to field-specific knowledge and skills themselves in imparting critical thinking ability. To achieve that kind of ability, McPeck maintains, it would make much more sense to concentrate instead on "explaining and laying bare, as it were, the epistemic foundations and logical peculiarities of the various disciplines."[27]

Response: General Skills as Supportive of Multi-Logical Thinking

McPeck's point, however, has not been lost on general skills advocates, who readily concede that a thorough grounding in the peculiar norms of a subject area is necessary to thinking critically within that subject area. As Ennis states: "I do not know of anyone who thinks that having the relevant information and concepts in a discipline is not a necessary condition for understanding a good reason in [that] discipline."[28] Nevertheless, according to Ennis, while

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a knowledge of subject-specific concepts and procedures is a **necessary** condition of critical thinking, it is not a **sufficient** one, as there are "many people who are educated conceptually and informationally in a field of study, but make a range of logical and critical thinking mistakes in [it]."[29] Obviously, however, instruction in general skills is no guarantee of critical thinking ability, either. Indeed, as McPeck has pointed out, such instruction does not even appear to be a **necessary** condition, as "is evidenced by the fact that many people can and do display critical thinking who have never been directly taught, and perhaps never heard of, the specific skills supposedly required of critical thinkers."[30] Of course, this does not prove that these people do not possess such skills; it only proves that they did not **need** to be taught them in a general skills course. Ennis, however, never claims otherwise. His main concern is only to argue that there are good reasons for believing that instruction in general thinking skills can **help** people become more critical thinkers.[31]

One reason Ennis considers the general thinking skills helpful in learning to think critically is that they appear to play a particularly useful role in the transfer of thinking from one domain to another, especially in those situations where the topic being thought about is not confined to any single, established subject area. According to Ennis:

> [M]any issues calling for good thinking are not
> within a single discipline, nor is it reasonable to expect

that most people exposed to them would have mastered all of the disciplines involved in the issue. Nor is it even clear in many issues what all the disciplines would be... So, even if McPeck were right about good thinking within a discipline being achieved by study of the discipline, there is a large set of significant situations that would not thus be provided with previous thinking instruction under his plan...

Thus, though McPeck may have successfully argued that information and a grasp of field-specific concepts are necessary conditions for critical thinking in and out of a discipline, he has not shown that they are sufficient conditions for thinking within and outside of a discipline. He has not shown that logic and general critical thinking skills and instruction therein do not also help.[32]

Ennis's point is that McPeck's subject-specific approach to teaching critical thinking does not adequately prepare a person to think about problems that fall into more than one subject area, or into subject areas other than those in which a person has background. General skills, on the other hand, seem to be useful in helping us learn to think both between discrete subject areas and within new ones, since they provide a general conceptual and procedural basis from which to launch even unfamiliar lines of inquiry.

Richard Paul makes a similar point when he argues that:

Even concepts and lines of reasoning clearly within one category are also simultaneous[ly] within others. Most of what we say and think...is not only open but multi-textured as well. For example, in what logical domain does the (technical?) concept of alcoholism solely belong: disease, addiction, crime, moral failing, cultural pattern, lifestyle choice, defect of socialization, self-comforting behavior, psychological escape, personal weakness,....? How many points of view can be used to illuminate it?[33]

Like Ennis, Paul is arguing that background in the epistemological norms of discrete subject areas does not prepare one to think about those topics which fall into more than a single subject area. The basic inference of both passages seems to be that because **problems** often fall into more than a single subject area, thinking **itself** is not constrained by subject-specific norms; hence critical thinking instruction should not be either.

Counterargument: Cross-Disciplinary Nature of Problems Not Sufficient Grounds for the Claim to Multi-Logical Thought

While I agree with this conclusion, the inference is not a valid one, as is evident in McPeck's counterresponse:

> My answer to all these questions [raised by Paul] is that
> it depends on what, precisely, you want to know or say
> about alcoholism. If one is interested in how widespread
> it is, or in which age-group, then it is a sociological
> question. If one wants to know if it is right or wrong,
> then it is a moral question. If one wants to know why
> people become alcoholics, then it is a psychological
> question. If one wants to know whether it is sinful, then I
> suppose this is a religious question.[34]

In other words, from the premises that topics do not always fall neatly into one subject area or another, and that they can, in fact, be approached from the perspectives of many different subject areas simultaneously, it does not necessarily follow that thinking itself must be cross-disciplinary or that it should be taught through a cross-disciplinary or general approach.[35] Rather, as the McPeck passage

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makes evident, it is also plausible to infer that we simply apply to the

same topics epistemological and logical norms from discrete subject

areas or knowledge domains. Thus, for McPeck, the best way to learn

to think critically about topics which fall into more than one subject

area is to learn the epistemological norms of a wide range of them:

> One of the reasons I have been such a strong advocate
> of liberal education to develop critical thinking capacity is
> because I believe such an education helps to anticipate
> the multi-categorical nature of most problems. A person
> needs several different kinds of knowledge and
> understanding to appreciate the different dimensions of
> most real problems.[36]

Response: Intuitive "Wrongness" of Strict Epistemological Relativism

There is in McPeck's counterresponse, however, a certain

rigidity about the separateness of discrete knowledge domains that

both Paul and Ennis find objectionable. As Paul states:

> From a logical atomist's point of view (everything to be
> carefully placed in an appropriate sui generis logical
> category, there to be settled by appropriate specialists in
> that category), dialectical, multi-categorical questions are
> anomalous. When noticed the tendency is to try to
> fabricate specialized categories for them or to break them
> down into a summary complex of mono-categorical
> elements. Hence the problem of peace in relation to the
> military industrial complex would be broken down by
> atomists into discrete sets of economic, social, ethical,
> historical, and psychological problems, or what have you,
> each to be analyzed and settled discretely.[37]

Drawing on their work in transfer research, David Perkins and Gavriel

Salomon express much the same sentiment:

> To be sure, general heuristics that fail to make contact
> with a rich domain-specific knowledge base are weak.
> But when a domain-specific knowledge base operates
> without general heuristics, it is brittle -- it serves mostly
> in handling formulaic problems.[38]

And, indeed, the McPeck passages do leave him open to such

criticisms.

Critical Thinking as a Process of Reconstructive Transfer

In truth, however, McPeck no more subscribes to the view that

thinking is mono-categorical than Paul subscribes to the view that

simply because **problems** fall into many domains, thinking **itself** must

be inter-disciplinary. Rather, they both operate from a premise which

not only makes the claim to multi-categorical thought a necessary

conclusion, but which has significant implications for the entire

transfer question as well. For, according to both, **what we think in**

one context or domain usually, perhaps inevitably, affects what we

think in others -- indeed, **it must do so if what we think is to be**

considered rational -- with the obvious implication that thinking in one

domain must, at times, transfer to others:

> Consider for example Copernicus' statements about the
> earth in relation to the sun. These are, you may be
> tempted to say, astronomical statements and nothing
> else. But if they become a part of concepts and lines of
> thought that have radically reoriented philosophical,
> social, religious, economic and personal thought, as
> indeed they have, are they merely in that one
> category?[39]

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McPeck agrees, but he is careful to distinguish between the notion that thinking is multi-categorical and the notion that it is a general skill:

> One kind of knowledge about things (like alcoholism) can often affect other beliefs one has about it as well. For example, if you believed alcoholism to be a disease, then you might not view it as a sin. But all of these cross-influences, and multi-texturedness, does not gainsay the existence of categories through which we perceive, talk and think about things. Indeed, rational belief and action is often predicated on seeing things from these different perspectives.[40]

That thinking always occurs within a given frame of reference is, in fact, a point on which Paul agrees with McPeck: "The process of gaining knowledge is at its roots dialogical. Our minds are never empty of beliefs and never without a point of view. They cannot function framelessly."[41] But whereas McPeck's concern is to warn against the dangers of conceiving of thinking in excessively formalistic terms -- that is, as something that can be reduced to a body of universal skills, principles, and procedures that transcend the various contexts and content areas in which thinking occurs -- Paul's concern is to warn against the dangers of conceiving of thinking in excessively relativistic terms -- that is, as something that is so subject-specific that there remains no basis on which to consider the impact of discrete frames of reference on one another. In fact, however, where both McPeck and Paul come out is with a view of thinking as a process by which the perspectives of otherwise discrete frames of

reference enter into a reconstructive dialogue tending towards greater integrity.

Indeed, as the remainder of this essay will argue, we might all be better served than we are with the present debate by a conception of thinking itself **as** transfer, or at least as the means by which transfer occurs. For what else can thinking be than the reconstruction and application of knowledge and skills gleaned in one context to meet the demands of new contexts? And if thinking is transfer, then critical thinking is critical transfer, or the deliberate attempt to postulate, test, account for, use, and mutually reconstruct otherwise field-dependent semantic, conceptual, evidential, and logical norms in and in light of new situations for the purposes of solving problems, explaining relationships, and, above all, constructing increasingly powerful knowledge systems that integrate previously discrete frames of reference. Thus, while the general skills advocates are correct that knowledge and skills learned in one context **can** transfer to others, the means by which that transfer takes place is not so much through the use of "general thinking skills" as it is through "thinking" itself, which is, as McPeck says, highly contextual. The chief limitation, then, of the general skills approach is that it fails to take **adequate** account of the fact that transfer is neither general nor automatic, but subject-specific and constructive in a way general taxonomies fail to capture. At the same time, however, in rejecting the notion of general skills in

favor of an apparently strict epistemological relativism, McPeck offers

no clear explanation of how integrated knowledge systems can be

constructed, a function which **both** he **and** Paul seem to regard as the

pinnacle of critical thought.

Thinking and the Construction of Integrated Knowledge Systems

Richard Paul, of course, is already known for his advocation of

a model of critical thinking as a dialogical process culminating in the

construction of increasingly more integrated world views. But consider

the following passage by McPeck:

> The process of justifying one's beliefs...has two
> distinguishable dimensions. One is to assess the veracity
> and internal validity of the evidence as presented, and
> the other is to judge whether the belief, together with its
> supporting evidence, is compatible with an existing belief
> system. If it is not compatible, then an adjustment
> somewhere in the system will be required: there is
> something amiss either with the new evidence or with
> the system of beliefs. The importance of this process of
> assessing, fitting and adjusting beliefs cannot be
> overemphasized because it is this process that makes the
> belief 'belong' to a person as distinct from being merely a
> proposition or belief that he knows about.[42]

Paul makes precisely the same point, when, utilizing Whitehead's

notion of "inert knowledge" as "knowledge that we in some sense

have but do not use when logically relevant, knowledge that just sits

there in our minds, as it were, without activating force," and his own

notion of "activated ignorance" as those "beliefs that are firmly

entrenched in instinctual egocentric thinking [despite their inconsistency with knowledge gleaned through more rational means],"[43] he says the following:

> Students leave school not only with unreconstructed [i.e., unintegrated] mathematical and physical ideas but with unreconstructed personal, social, moral, historical, economic, and political views. Students leave school not knowing what they **really**, that is **deeply**, believe. Students leave school with a great deal of inert knowledge and even more activated ignorance. Therefore, students do not understand how to read, write, think, listen, or speak in such a way as to organize and express what they believe.[44]

What Paul and McPeck are both concerned with in these passages is that education should lead to the active reconstruction and integration of existing belief systems with and in light of new knowledge or evidence, a process which they both equate with the term "critical thinking." Such a conception, moreover, bears a striking resemblance to Piaget's conception of cognitive development as a process of ongoing "equilibration,"[45] where every instance of thinking sees the assimilation of some new knowledge or belief into an existing belief system together with the simultaneous adjustment of the existing belief system to accommodate the new knowledge or belief. "Critical thinking," by this conception, would similarly entail the deliberate reconstruction, transfer, and integration of otherwise discrete interpretations of experience, as is evident in both the Paul and McPeck passages.

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Despite this conceptual similarity, however, there are certain important differences in Paul's and McPeck's respective accounts of critical thinking and how it should be taught. Not surprisingly, high among these is the relative emphasis each places on the general versus the subject-specific features of thinking. According to Paul:

> The most important place that knowledge has in any lives is, on my view, that of shaping our concept of things <u>uberhaupt</u>, our system of values, meanings, and interpretive schemes.... Logical synthesis, cutting across categories, extracting metaphors from one domain and using them to organize others, arguing for or against the global metaphors of others, are intellectual acts that are grounded ultimately not in the criteria and skills of specialists, not in some science or other or any combination thereof, but in the **art** of rational-dialectical-critical thought.[46]

He goes on to say that "a global perspective....can be assessed only by appeal to general dialectical skills, not domain or subject-specific ones."[47] McPeck, on the other hand, argues that thinking is grounded ultimately not in some general art or skill of critical thinking but in the epistemological structures of the various knowledge domains which humanity has evolved over time:

> Paul states in several places that a person's "world view," or knowledge "<u>uberhaupt</u>," plays a crucial role in their critical thinking capacities. I could not agree more. However, if Paul would take the time to examine seriously the ingredients of a person's "world view," I think he would find it composed of certain kinds of beliefs and knowledge structures (i.e. cognitive

schemata) which is precisely what liberal education attempts to influence and enlighten.[48]

From the perspective of a conception of critical thinking as culminating in the construction of integrated knowledge systems, however, this dichotomy over which is more important -- the general form or the domain-specific content of thought -- is more apparent than real, as the McPeck quotation begins to suggest. Such a perspective is, curiously enough, even more evident in the following passage by Paul:

> The only way to test whole frames of reference without begging the question is by setting the frames of reference dialectically against each other so that the logical strength of one can be tested against the logical strength of the contending others by appealing to standards not peculiar to either.[49]

What Paul is doing in this passage is describing the process which he alternatively refers to as "the art of rational-dialectical-critical thought" or as being composed of "general skills of critical-cross-examination"[50] in such a way as to make apparent that the necessary referents upon which beliefs are justified, and integrated knowledge systems constructed, are not just the general principles of dialectical thought to which he refers but also the overlapping norms of the otherwise discrete knowledge domains about which one is thinking. In other words, the general, dialogical, and procedural form of critical thinking is no more the ultimate arbiter of knowledge construction than are subject-specific epistemological and logical

norms. In fact, the general and field-dependent norms of thinking

necessarily work together in such a way that to conceive of them

separately inevitably oversimplifies the actual dynamic process by

which multi-categorical belief systems are constructed.

A further clue as to how such knowledge construction works

lies in the following response by Paul to what he sees as McPeck's

excessively rigid conception of the domain-specificity of particular

lines of thought:

> The category a thing is in is logically dependent upon
> what it is like, but all things (including conceptual
> schemes) are like any number of other things (other
> conceptual schemes for example) in any number of ways
> and so are in, dependent on our purposes, any number of
> logical domains.[51]

Paul seems to be arguing that concepts and conceptual schemes have

points of similarity that effectively put them in each others' domains,

and, moreover, that these points of similarity vary according to the

diverse contexts which call forth our deliberations about them. If this

is his point, I would go one step further and argue, as Dewey does in

How We Think, that "thinking" entails, in this regard, precisely the

intentional grasping of these common elements:

> Similar qualities are always the bridge over which the
> mind passes in going from a former experience to a new
> one. Now thinking....is a process of grasping in a
> conscious way the common elements. It thus adds
> greatly to the availability of common elements for
> purposes of transfer. Unless these elements are seized
> and held by the mind....any transfer occurs only blindly,
> by sheer accident.[52]

In other words, knowledge and skills learned in a previous context (including a knowledge domain) apply in new contexts (new knowledge domains included) in the degree to which the new contexts share features with the old. And it is **thinking** which makes the grasping of such similarities possible.

Thinking and the Construction of New Knowledge

This conception of critical thinking as including the grasping of similarities between otherwise discrete contexts of reasoning also has important implications for what we consider a "subject area" or "knowledge domain." Whereas McPeck seems to adhere to the conventional taxonomy of subject areas that comprise a liberal education, Paul holds a more flexible notion:

> On my view the logics we use, and which we are daily constructing and reconstructing, are far more mutable, less discrete, more general, more open- and multi-textured, more social, more dialectical, and even more personal -- and hence far less susceptible to domain-specific skills and concepts -- than McPeck dares to imagine.[53]

Although the present essay's account of the role of subject-specific norms in knowledge reconstruction challenges Paul's notion that our ways of reasoning are in any way exempt from domain-specific concepts and skills, it does suggest that our definition of a subject area should almost certainly be more flexible and progressive than the

traditional taxonomy of liberal education admits.[54] For although the conventional academic disciplines are the most reliable and powerful conceptual systems we have (their criteria and procedures having been constructed over time through ongoing and progressive dialogue regarding the recurring issues and concerns of the communities of people working within those frameworks), a conception of critical thinking as including the reconstruction and integration of otherwise domain-specific norms carries with it the implication that the conventional academic disciplines neither delineate nor circumscribe all the possible ways of thinking or knowing. Indeed, if thinking entails the reconstructive transfer of otherwise discrete concepts and norms, then it also entails the ongoing construction of new and potentially more integrated ways of understanding and explaining the world.

Broadening the Scope of Our Conception

This view of thinking as a process of ongoing construction, reconstruction, and integration of otherwise discrete knowledge systems brings to light the major shortcoming of both the general skills and subject-specific approaches. For although general and subject-specific knowledge and skills are perhaps both necessary conditions of the mutual reconstructive integration of otherwise discrete frames of reference, those models of critical thinking which

emphasize them do not capture the highly constructive nature of actual thinking, a process from which the natural human drive for connectedness and integrity[55] simply cannot be separated. Such a conception suggests to me that the guiding criterion against which all thinking can or should be measured is as much moral as it is rational, the two terms being highly complementary.

On this point I agree wholeheartedly with Richard Paul, who has so strongly advocated that our goal in teaching critical thinking should be the cultivation of critical thinking in the "strong sense" -- that is, of critical thinking as including an ongoing disposition of fair-mindedness and self-examination that makes intellectual, emotional, behavioral, and, indeed, social, integrity possible. Rationality and morality alike dictate that we think, feel, and act in a self-consistent manner. And while it is unclear which criterion -- rationality or morality -- ultimately motivates us to broaden actively the range and depth of our understanding so as to include, even enlist, the viewpoints of others, the important point is that growth in understanding and appreciation is a universal criterion against which all rational acts can be measured. It is no accident, in this regard, that Paul and McPeck alike take for granted the value of having or constructing a "world view," for the valuing of such an ideal is implicit in the very concept of rationality.

Teaching for Transfer: A Moral Task

In "Questions and Answers about the Nature and Teaching of

Thinking Skills, " Robert J. Sternberg asks what he considers to be

"**the** fundamental question in the teaching of thinking skills": "What

can we do to maximize transfer of training for thinking skills to

students' everyday lives?"[56] For McPeck, the answer seems to be

that we should better acquaint students with the epistemological

underpinnings and real-life applications of the subject areas -- on the

grounds (1) that thinking cannot be separated from the subject-

specific norms of discrete knowledge domains, and (2) that familiarity

with a wide range of conceptual and procedural norms is the best

preparation for dealing with complex, real-life problems. For general

skills proponents, the answer seems to be that we should teach

general concepts, procedures, and principles of thinking which are

common to many subject areas -- on the grounds that such skills are

applicable to a wide range of multi-dimensional, everyday problems for

which no person could ever be adequately prepared using a strictly

subject-specific approach.

Not only do both approaches seem sound -- McPeck's, because

the power and range of applicability of the subject areas is formidable,

and the general skills advocates', because general skills can provide

students with familiar means of approaching unfamiliar topics -- but

they seem complementary as well. Indeed, the trend in critical thinking research and instruction seems to be towards just such a conception, alternatively labelled the "mixed model" or "synthesis" approach, and according to which, as Ennis puts it, "there is a separate thread or course aimed at teaching general principles of critical thinking, but [where] students are also involved in subject-specific critical thinking instruction."[57] Such an approach, write Perkins and Salomon, acknowledges that "there **are** general cognitive skills; but [that] they always function in contextualized ways."[58] Nonetheless, while both approaches supply skills that are both useful and necessary in dealing with real-life problems, neither one (alone or even, necessarily, together) really answers the question of how to get students **themselves** transferring and applying -- actively, creatively, and autonomously -- the particular skills it advocates. The irony of this situation is that such transfer is tantamount to thinking itself. That is, for students to transfer their thinking skills they would have to think about the relevance and applicability of those skills to new contexts.

Sternberg, in answer to his own question of how to maximize transfer, begins by suggesting that we should be sure to teach those "executive" or "metacomponential" thinking skills that would help students plan, monitor, and evaluate their own thinking, thus helping them to become more aware of how to apply their thinking skills in new contexts.[59] Such "skills" as Ennis's "identifying or formulating

questions," "identifying or formulating criteria for judging possible answers," and "keeping the situation in mind"[60] would function, in other words, somewhat as skills of transfer.

As Sternberg himself acknowledges, however, merely acquainting students with such skills still will not ensure that students will learn to transfer them. He thus goes on to emphasize not **what** thinking skills we should teach but **how** we should teach them. Towards this end, he recommends such strategies as presenting thinking skills across a range of disciplines, in concrete, abstract, academic, and practical situations, and using a variety of presentation techniques (video, audio etc.). And, indeed, showing students, by a variety of methods, how thinking strategies and skills function across a range of fields and exemplars is excellent pedagogical advice. But it still fails to address directly the question of how to get students initiating and extending such transfer themselves.

Dispositions, Not skills, the Essence of Thinking

The dilemma brings home the already obvious fact that "thinking skills" and "thinking" are not the same thing. As Sternberg writes: "Unless students can learn to **think** flexibly, **look** for opportunities to **transfer** their skills, and seek analogies between past and future situations, transfer is most unlikely to ensue."[61] What is

interesting about this passage (and many others like it, by many other writers) is that the verbs -- "learn," "think," "look," "transfer," and "seek" -- all refer not to "skills" but to "ongoing behaviors," or "dispositions." Indeed, critical thinking as a "disposition" is almost always invoked in the wake of the anticipated failure of skills instruction to impart **autonomous** critical thinking ability. And yet, the treatment of critical thinking as a disposition, with the notable exception of Richard Paul's work, usually amounts to little more than obligatory concluding statements to the effect that 'the teaching of thinking skills is all for naught unless we can develop in students a critical disposition.'

In fact, as long as we emphasize the transmission of skills in the teaching of critical thinking, we will continue to formulate the problem of transfer as the problem of how to get students to transfer their thinking skills to new contexts. A concept of critical thinking **as** transfer, on the other hand, calls attention to the fact that teaching for transfer is less a matter of transmitting knowledge, skills, strategies, and principles of thinking (though it is that, too) than it is of fostering in students from the start an inquiring disposition, by which I mean a "readiness"[62] to consider the bearing of apparently discrete frames of reference on one another and towards the construction of a more integrated world view.[63]

Herein, then, lies the educational bearing which framing the concept of critical thinking in moral terms has on the question of how to teach for transfer. For if critical thinking entails the ongoing construction, reconstruction, and integration of a person's world view and ways of knowing, then the aim of "critical thinking instruction" (indeed, the aim of education) is not so much the transmission of time-tested knowledge and skills (though these are, of course, important!) as it is the fostering of those habits of rational inquiry that lead a person always to seek the expansion, deepening, and integration of her own belief structures. Familiarity with subject-specific and general conceptual and procedural norms may be a necessary condition of critical thought -- it is certainly a primary aim of a liberal education -- but more important is a **disposition** that consistently leads one to strive for intellectual, emotional, and behavioral integrity, or what is sometimes called "the critical spirit."[64] And dispositions are not so much taught as nurtured, by creating the appropriate educational conditions.

In fact, the only way to develop in students the disposition to pursue actively the integrity and expansion of their own belief systems is to lead them to conclude for themselves that such a pursuit is worthwhile, and this means creating educational conditions that simultaneously challenge and engage the interests of students as individuals.[65] Difficult as this may be, it necessarily follows from a

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conception of thinking as the constructing of integrated knowledge and belief systems. For, as I will discuss momentarily, it is only by engaging, then tactfully challenging, the habitual belief patterns to which students uncritically cling, that they will be motivated to examine critically and reconstruct their own otherwise unexamined assumptions.

Some Educational Guidelines

In this regard, educators concerned with the teaching of critical thinking have forwarded many ideas as to the necessary conditions for fostering a critical disposition. One such condition, on which at least three prominent theorists agree,[66] is that teachers themselves should model critical thinking. In light of the view advanced in the present essay, such modeling would consist largely in public, interactive, dialogic exchanges with both class materials and students themselves, resulting in visible reconstructions of the teachers' knowledge and beliefs in light of class content and the students' input. Such modeling should not, of course, usurp the teacher's authority; it should rather demonstrate that even someone with more extensive knowledge and experience continues to grow intellectually by reconstructing and integrating new points of view with the old.

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The whole purpose of modeling, of course, is to encourage students to follow the teacher's lead. And this means that the teacher must raise issues, or allow students to raise issues, that not only, as Richard Paul has suggested, engage students' egocentric or unexamined beliefs,[87] but which the teacher is confident she can challenge without intimidating or unduly discouraging students. Although one temptation here might be to get involved in students' immediate or personal concerns, such an approach tends only to reflect back to students their own egocentric beliefs, when what we really want to be doing is encouraging them to reexamine critically those beliefs in light of frames of reference with which they are as yet unfamiliar. My own strategy as a writing teacher has been to engage students' activated (and often uncritical) public beliefs on such issues as abortion, gay rights, public smoking, drug policies, SDI, etc., where I can help them locate and/or generate the alternative points of view that stimulate multi-logical reflection. Working with a range of issues such as these is relatively easy in a writing class, but teachers in the subject areas can similarly engage and challenge students' habitual thinking patterns: in the sciences, for example, by creating doubtful situations to which students themselves must seek answers, or, in the humanities, by having students generate and compare alternative interpretations of, and explanations and metaphors for works, theories, and points of view that intrigue them.

The key to making such issues into vehicles for learning to think critically, and a third condition for getting students to do so, is that students be required, much as Richard Paul has suggested,[68] to formulate, articulate, and respond to alternative viewpoints from competing frames of reference, (in the sciences, for example, by generating, formulating, and testing competing hypotheses -- which is the way actual scientific inquiries typically operate). With highly opinionated students, teachers should generally concentrate on getting them to see and articulate the strengths of alternative arguments and theories, and the weaknesses of their own. Vacillating and indecisive students, on the other hand, should typically be asked to do the near opposite: to formulate and develop their own ideas in light of the many viewpoints between which they cannot decide. In both cases, the educational principle is the same: **Put in students' way only such obstacles as are necessary to prevent them from being satisfied with habitual trains of thought but which do not discourage them from attempting to construct new ones.** The artful teacher is the one who has taken the time to acquaint herself with the thinking habits of her individual students, so that she knows when and how to challenge, and when and how to offer support.

A good deal more could be said about what educational conditions best foster a critical disposition, for example, concerning the appropriate social contexts of learning.[69] For now, though, I

conclude with a single, modest suggestion. As teachers concerned

with the difficulty we see students having initiating and sustaining

their own lines of inquiry, I believe we would all do well to study

closely Dewey's classic work in this field, How We Think.[70] For

more than any other source I have seen, this book outlines the

conditions which provoke "reflective thinking" (which Dewey basically

defines as the search for reliable grounds for belief) and translates

them into educational principles. The book is often misconstrued as an

attempt to outline a five step model of inquiry, but only someone who

skimmed the chapters dealing with that model could miss Dewey's

repeated reminders that the "five steps" are neither linear, discrete,

nor restricted to five in number. What the book really attempts is to

describe in considerable detail the dynamic processes involved in

"reflective thinking" and the educational conditions which **elicit,**

regulate, and **sustain** those processes. In this author's opinion, it is

the most significant work in the field of critical thinking instruction to

date, and one which I hope, in future essays, to discuss in the light of

recent developments in the critical thinking literature.

Notes

1. Robert H. Ennis, "A Concept of Critical Thinking," Harvard Educational Review, 32 (1962): 81-111.

2. John Dewey, How We Think (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1933/1960); M. Black, Critical Thinking (New York: Prentice Hall, 1952); B. Othanel Smith, "The Improvement of Critical Thinking," Progressive Education, 30 (1953): 129-134.

3. Robert H. Ennis, "A Conception of Rational Thinking," in J.R. Coombs, ed., Philosophy of Education 1979 (Normal, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1980); "A Taxonomy of Critical Thinking Dispositions and Abilities," in Joan B. Baron and Robert J. Sternberg, eds., Teaching Thinking Skills: Theory and Practice (New York: Freeman, 1987).

4. See Robert J. Swartz, "Teaching for Thinking: A Developmental Model for the Infusion of Thinking Skills into Mainstream Instruction," in Baron and Sternberg, Teaching Thinking Skills, pp. 106-126.

5. John E. McPeck, Critical Thinking and Education (New York: St. Martin's, 1981).

6. McPeck, Critical Thinking, 7.

7. McPeck, Critical Thinking, 22.

8. Richard W. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking: Critical Thought Essential to the Acquisition of Rational Knowledge and Passions," in Baron and Sternberg, Teaching Thinking Skills, pp. 127-148.

9. For a fine historical overview and summary of recent conclusions drawn from this research see David N. Perkins and Gavriel Salomon, "Are Cognitive Skills Context-Bound?" Educational Researcher, 18, no. 1 (1989): 16-25.

10. For a good clarifying summary of the major positions, see Robert H. Ennis, "Critical Thinking and Subject Specificity: Clarification and Needed Research," Educational Researcher, 18, no. 3 (1989): 4-10.

11. McPeck, Critical Thinking, pp. 4-5.

12. Harvey Siegel, "McPeck, Informal Logic and the Nature of Critical Thinking," in D. Nyberg, ed., <u>Philosophy of Education 1985: Proceedings of the Forty-First Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society</u> (Normal, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1986), p. 63.

13. Robert H. Ennis, "Logic and Critical Thinking," in D.R. Nicola, ed., <u>Philosophy of Education 1981: Proceedings of the Thirty-Sixth Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society</u> (Normal, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1982), p. 231.

14. John E. McPeck, "Response to Siegel," in Nyberg, <u>Philosophy of Education 1985</u>, p. 73.

15. McPeck, "Response to Siegel," p. 74.

16. McPeck, <u>Critical Thinking</u>, p. 4, underline added.

17. McPeck, <u>Critical Thinking</u>, p. 155.

18. McPeck, <u>Critical Thinking</u>, pp. 14-16.

19. McPeck, <u>Critical Thinking</u>, p. 24.

20. A similar distinction has been noted by Ennis, who points out the ambiguous use of the term "subject," in general, to denote both "topic" and "school subject." See Ennis, "Subject Specificity," p. 5.

21. McPeck, <u>Critical Thinking</u>, pp. 9-10.

22. Siegel, "McPeck, Informal Logic," p. 63.

23. As Stephen Norris has pointed out, recent work in the relativity of standard conditions in the sciences would seem to suggest that there no absolute determinants of either generality or specificity, and that how one uses these terms depends mostly on whether one's purposes are theoretical or practical (though McPeck still challenges the notion of general skills on both grounds). See Stephen Norris, "The Choice of Standard Conditions in Defining Critical Thinking Competence," <u>Educational Theory</u>, 35 (1985): 97-107.

24. McPeck, "Response to Siegel," pp. 74-5.

25. John E. McPeck, "Critical Thinking and Trivial Pursuit," <u>Teaching Philosophy</u>, 8 (1985): 307.

26. McPeck, <u>Critical Thinking</u>, pp. 25-6.

27. McPeck, "Trivial Pursuit," pp. 307-308.

28. Ennis, "Logic and Critical Thinking," p. 229.

29. Ennis, "Logic," p.229. For a more detailed explanation of the insufficiency of subject-specific knowledge for good thinking, see Ennis, "Subject Specificity," p. 6.

30. McPeck, "Trivial Pursuit," p. 300.

31. For a list of researchers who both share and criticize Ennis' belief in the helpfulness of a general skills approach see Ennis, "Subject Specificity," p. 7.

32. Ennis, "Logic and Critical Thinking," p. 230.

33. Richard W. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," Informal Logic, 7, no. 1 (1985): 40.

34. John E. McPeck, "Paul's Critique of Critical Thinking and Education," Informal Logic, 7, no. 1 (1985): 50-1.

35. To make such an inference would be to commit the fallacy of affirming the consequent, since doing so would be to mistake an apparently necessary condition for a sufficient one.

36. McPeck, "Paul's Critique," p. 50.

37. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 38.

38. Perkins and Salomon, "Are Cognitive Skills," p. 23.

39. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 40.

40. McPeck, "Paul's Critique," p. 51.

41. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 143.

42. McPeck, Critical Thinking, p. 35.

43. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 134.

44. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 137.

45. Jean Piaget, Structuralism (New York: Harper & Row, 1970.)

46. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 41.

47. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 42.

48. McPeck, "Paul's Critique," p. 52.

49. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 128.

50. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 41.

51. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 40.

52. Dewey, How We Think, p. 67.

53. Paul, "McPeck's Mistakes," p. 42.

54. Recent developments in ethics, for example, have come about largely through cross-disciplinary mergings of philosophical and biological concepts and procedures, or, again, of philosophical and psychological ones. Our own "discipline" of "educational philosophy" is itself a non-traditional blending of what have often been considered discrete domains, with which new ones (cognitive science, developmental psychology, etc.) are constantly being cross-referenced.

55. The question of whether human beings are by nature egocentric or benevolent is, of course, one of the enduring philosophical questions. I personally share Mill's view that while moral feelings may not be innate, they are acquired naturally through social intercourse: "The deeply rooted conception which every individual ... has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures." See John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1861/1957), pp.42-43.

56. Robert J. Sternberg, "Questions and Answers about the Nature and Teaching of Thinking Skills," in Baron & Sternberg, Teaching Thinking Skills, p. 258.

57. Ennis, "Subject Specificity," p. 5.

58. Perkins and Salomon, "Are Cognitive Skills," p. 19.

59. Sternberg, "Questions," p. 252.

60. Sternberg, "Questions," p. 252.

61. Sternberg, "Questions," p. 258, emphases added.

62. To use Dewey's term. See How We Think, p. 34.

63. Indeed, I am led to wonder if many of the so-called "general thinking skills" might not themselves be just as fruitfully thought of as "dispositions." Take, for example, Perkins and Salomon's references to "the strategy of looking for counterexamples to test claims" (in "Are Cognitive Skills" pp. 19-20). On the basis of four criteria of generality -- that the pattern (a) shows a seeming use, (b) plays an important role, (c) is demonstrably transferable, and (d) is commonly absent from people's everyday reasoning -- the authors informally conclude that the strategy of seeking counterexamples is a "general cognitive skill." While their argument certainly advances a useful set of conditions for generality, what strikes me about it are its inherent dispositional overtones. The seeking of counterexamples, which is itself a form of considering alternative perspectives (I am reminded of how Socrates, in the presence of his Athenian audiences, would allude to the way the Spartans did things), would seem to evolve out of its perceived usefulness and importance in constructing more integrated knowledge systems. And its common absence, as opposed to its general application (or transfer), in the thinking of most people seems more descriptive of a disposition or, to use Perkins and Salomon's phrase, a "habit of mind" than of any skill per se.

64. It is worth noting that the "critical spirit" is often thought of or referred to as an "attitude" or "affect." By "disposition" I mean something like Aristotle's hexis -- something not only affective but behavioral as well, in the sense that a critical thinker not only has certain knowledge and attitudes but is also in the habit of employing them. See Nicomachean Ethics, II. 4, 1105a30-35, in Martin Ostwald, trans., Nicomachean Ethics (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), pp. 39, 308-9.

65. Such individualization of instruction, incidentally, constitutes Sternberg's sixth and final suggestion. See Sternberg, "Questions," pp. 258-259.

66. See McPeck, Critical Thinking, p. 19; Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 142; and John Passmore, "On Teaching to be Critical," in R.S. Peters, ed., The Concept of Education (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 28.

67. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 140.

68. Paul, "Dialogical Thinking," p. 140.

69. See fn. 55.

70. Dewey, How We Think.

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JUSTICE AND CARING AND
THE PROBLEM OF MORAL RELATIVISM:
REFRAMING THE GENDER QUESTION IN ETHICS

Recent psychological research by Carol Gilligan and others suggests that men and women, as a result of certain general features of their respective gender experience, tend to develop morally somewhat differently, a fact which previous research into moral development overlooked. It appears that whereas men tend to construe moral problems in terms of the competing rights of separate individuals, women tend to do so in terms of the conflicting obligations they feel towards individuals with whom they feel connected.[1] Gilligan has referred to the masculine moral experience as a "justice" or "fairness" orientation, and the feminine as a "responsibility" or "caring" orientation, and has argued that in each case these are the criteria by which men and women tend to make their moral decisions.

Whether or not men and women do, in fact, develop along these two different lines,[2] Gilligan's thesis has not only given rise to arguments concerning the scope of inquiry into moral development, but it has also refueled old debates concerning the nature of morality itself. Among the many philosophical questions which this

genderization of moral development has raised is that of which criterion, caring or justice, if either, defines a more mature form of moral reasoning, and, by implication, a more adequate morality.

Most theoreticians of men's and/or women's moral development agree that the developmental crisis which marks the transition from conventional, adolescent morality to principled, mature moral reasoning is the confrontation with the problem of moral relativism -- the apparent contradiction between the philosophic assumption that morality is in some sense universal and the fact that people's moral beliefs differ. The hallmark of mature moral reasoning, for most theorists, is that it offers some way out of the problem without lapsing into dogmatism -- the arbitrary proclamation that one set of beliefs is right and all others wrong.

Despite these similarities, however, developmental theorists disagree as to what constitutes a viable resolution of the problem. While none of them advocates unlimited moral relativism -- the belief that there are no shared moral standards, i.e., that right and wrong are strictly matters of personal opinion -- conceptions of what constitutes mature moral reasoning range from Gilligan's notion of multiple moral contexts regulated by contextually relative criteria, which include caring and justice, to Kohlberg's notion of conflicting individual goods regulated by a single, universal justice criterion. Although Gilligan and Kohlberg alike maintain that justice and caring

are both proper moral concerns, and that a resolution is desirable, neither has articulated just how the two might work together to form a more comprehensive morality that transcends "gender" differences. Such a resolution could serve as a valuable guide for educators concerned with creating sufficiently integrated educational environments to foster moral autonomy in students.

This paper examines the problem of moral relativism as it pertains to the gender question in moral development. It begins by reviewing the debate between Kohlberg and Gilligan as to whether mature moral reasoning uses formal or contextually relative criteria. The function of this review is to reveal and clarify the strengths and weaknesses of both positions for the purpose of setting the scene for a reframing of the problem of moral relativism. I argue that neither a justice nor a caring ethic by itself can solve the problem of moral relativism -- which is ultimately a question of how to choose between alternative conceptions of the good -- since neither ethic addresses adequately the teleological question of what constitutes a quality life. Only by combining the justice and caring approaches can we sufficiently broaden the scope of morality to provide a principled referent for integrating the alternative moral constructions that give rise to the problem of moral relativism. I conclude by suggesting that John Dewey's postulation of growth as the ultimate moral standard

provides a principled, natural criterion that integrates the formalism of justice and the contextual relativism of caring.

Kohlberg's Deontological Formalism

The problem of moral relativism amounts to this. If what is considered moral varies from person to person, or from culture to culture, then what guide do we have for choosing between alternative moral constructions when they conflict? Kohlberg's answer begins with the claim that while the specific **content** of our moral beliefs will inevitably differ, the **forms** of our moral reasoning are nevertheless universal. To cite a famous example, stage 2 boys in a Taiwanese village said a husband ought to steal food for his starving wife because a funeral would cost a lot of money if she died. Boys at the same stage in an Atayal village, in contrast, said he ought to steal the food because he needs his wife to cook for him. As Kohlberg points out, although the content of the two groups' judgments differs, the form of their reasoning is the same: the husband should do what is ultimately most convenient.[3] There are similarly "universal" forms and criteria for all the stages.

While the form/content distinction does not, in itself, offer a guide for choosing between conflicting moral constructions, it suggested to Kohlberg that it is within the forms and not the content

of moral judgments that a universal moral criterion might be found. In other words, he rejects locating his criterion of moral adequacy in the content of moral judgments on the grounds that the content is contextually relative and therefore incapable of yielding a universal moral criterion:

> The focus of Piaget and myself on morality as deontological justice springs, in part, from a concern with moral and ethical universality in moral judgment. The search for moral universality implies the search for some minimal value conception(s) on which all persons could agree, regardless of personal differences in detailed aims or goals.[4]

As the above quotation implies, Kohlberg includes individual aims and goals in his definition of "content." As such, he believes them to be subjectively relative. And although he does not explicitly state the connection, Kohlberg sees individual aims as being derived from subjectively relative conceptions of the good, a connection which is implicit in this citation of Dwight Boyd by Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer:

> [F]or Rawls or Kohlberg..., pursuit of the good and human perfection is subordinated as a concern to adjudicating differences among individuals on how the good and human perfection are to be defined, furthered and distributed. One cannot understand this entry point unless one understands that they assume that individuals do and will differ in this fundamental way. This presumption of human conflict rests on a more fundamental belief that the good, even for one individual, is not one but pluralistic....[5]

If people's conceptions of the good differ in general, it necessarily follows that individuals will have different conceptions of

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what is good in specific situations. Thus, for Kohlberg, any

consideration of the actual consequences of specific moral judgments

is necessarily relative to the particular context of the judgement being

made. In fact, it is not necessary to posit subjective "goods" (what I

term "subjective relativism") in order to hold that the good as it is

manifested in particular situations is relative to its context (what I

term "contextual relativism"). But it is worth mentioning Kohlberg's

more extreme position to show that he is as sensitive as any

contextual relativist to the difficulties inherent in determining the good

in particular situations. (Indeed, as I will argue shortly, it is this very

postulation of multiple subjective goods that makes Kohlberg's

solution to the problem of moral relativism ultimately unworkable.)

It is what Kohlberg does to circumvent the problem which the

relativity of the good poses for a universal moral criterion that

distinguishes him from contextual relativists like Gilligan. Since

conceptions of the good are, for Kohlberg, contextually and

subjectively relative, the search for a universal moral criterion, he

reasons, must limit them from its purview:

> Morality as justice best renders our view of morality as
> universal. It restricts morality to a central minimal core,
> striving for universal agreement in the face of more
> relativist conceptions of the good.[6]

Thus, justice is not a guide for choosing between alternative moral

constructions or conceptions of the good (a central task of moral

theory for teleologists), a point which Kohlberg emphasizes

repeatedly:

> I make no direct claims about the ultimate aims of
> people, about the good life, or about other problems that
> a teleological theory must handle. These are problems
> beyond the scope of the sphere of morality or moral
> principles, which I define as principles of choice for
> resolving conflicts of obligation.[7]

Rather, justice is a guide for regulating human interaction --

specifically, through the mandate that each person's claim to pursue

his own individual good should be given equal and impartial

consideration.

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The Primacy of Justice

Part of what makes justice the best guide for adjudicating

between conflicting claims, according to Kohlberg, is that it is that

principle on which all rational persons can agree, regardless of their

specific aims and corresponding conceptions of the good. Of all the

moral principles which philosophers have ever put forth, Kohlberg

maintains, justice best achieves this (theoretical) universality because

it is the most reversible logically -- people can adhere to it regardless

of their position in the moral equation, and regardless of their

individual preferences for this or that moral outcome. What makes

justice the most reversible of all moral principles, for Kohlberg, is that

it is the most "differentiated" -- it best filters out all that is

contextually or individually relative, that is, "non-moral," from the "moral" domain. In other words, it "solves" the problem of moral relativism by reducing morality to the one principle people can agree on, given the shared assumption that they can't agree on what is good.

Kohlberg's exegesis of why a formal stage 6 principle of deontological justice is more adequate morally than either a stage 5, act utilitarian principle of benevolence or a rule utilitarian conception of social contract[8] illustrates how this restriction of the definition of morality "solves" the problem of moral relativism. Unlike stage 4 morality, which ignores the problem of moral relativism by construing all opinions that deviate from established custom as simply immoral and unlawful, stage 5 morality provides a rational criterion -- the maximization of welfare, or benevolence -- that acknowledges the right of individuals to pursue their own ends as long as those ends do not conflict with the greater good. This criterion, Kohlberg maintains, is manifest in both act utilitarianism -- "consider the amount of good and harm produced" -- and rule utilitarianism -- "consider the results of everyone's acting on the rule."[9]

Although he doesn't state it explicitly, it is fair to assume that the problem with benevolence, for Kohlberg, is that although it can be universalized in the sense that we should take into account the "good" of everyone, people's conceptions as to what is, in fact,

"good" differ. Thus, as Kohlberg sees it, the consequences or "results" which both forms of utilitarianism obligate us to consider are not something that can be agreed on. As a result, utilitarianism imposes a conception of the aggregate good at the expense of the good of the least advantaged. It must resort to this solution, according to Kohlberg, because it fails to differentiate adequately the consequences of moral judgement from the form:

> Although benevolence can be universalized (that is, everyone should care for the welfare of all other humans), it cannot resolve a conflict of welfares, except by quantitative maximization. The content of moral concerns and claims is always **welfare**, but maximization is no true moral principle....Concern for the welfare of other beings...is the precondition for experiencing a moral conflict rather than a mechanism for its resolution. The **moral** question is 'Whose role do I take?' or 'Whose claim do I favor?' The working core of the utilitarian principle is the maximization principle. As everyone knows, and our studies document, 'Consider everyone's happiness equally' is not a working principle of justice.[10]

Welfare, in other words, is both contextually and subjectively relative for Kohlberg, in that it means different things in different circumstances and for different people. As such, he eliminates it as a basis for agreement by differentiating it from the formal principles of equality and respect from which he claims it is derived. In the end, Kohlberg claims, we are left with a universal moral criterion that is not subject to changing conceptions of the good.

"The Dilemma of the Fact"

Kohlberg's postulation of a formal justice principle as the most philosophically and psychologically adequate moral criterion has met with considerable criticism from his former student and colleague, Carol Gilligan. Aside from the more well-known charge of sex bias itself, Gilligan makes at least the following claims: (1) that the contextual and relativistic properties of mature moral thought are not adequately covered by a model of justice reasoning, (2) that moral reasoning based solely on formal justice structures cannot adequately solve the problem of moral relativism, and (3) that justice and caring define separate moral contexts which inevitably conflict, but which can be regulated by personal commitment within a moral universe understood to be contextually relative.

According to Gilligan and her colleague John Murphy,[11] research shows that the problem of moral relativism often persists after people are scored at Stage 5, at which point the problem was supposed to have been solved, by Kohlberg's account. Even after the 1978 revisions of the original Kohlberg scoring manual, which yielded relatively high rates of regression from stages 5 and 6 to either pre-principled stages or to the transitional 4/5 stage, Gilligan and Murphy found instances of regressive scores due to subjects framing the hypothetical dilemmas in more contextual terms than in their earlier

responses. Such contextual framing of moral dilemmas is the result, they claim, of adult encounters with real-life moral dilemmas in which people discover the existence of alternative value frames of reference for interpreting moral situations. They go on to say that mature moral reasoning actually witnesses the abandonment of a universal justice criterion in favor of a more contextual form of thinking which admits of different criteria -- of which justice is but one -- appropriate to different moral contexts.

To date, Gilligan has specified only one other possible "moral context" than that of justice concerns, and that is the domain of special obligations defined by a criterion of caring (that domain more associated with women than with men), a context that she maintains inevitably conflicts with interpretations framed in terms of justice.[12]

"The dilemma of the fact" offers an example of a real life situation in which Gilligan claims such a conflict occurs. Faced with the decision of whether to reveal to his lover's husband that he was having an affair with her, or to withhold that truth temporarily in order to protect his lover from undue emotional stress, Philosopher Two (previously scored at Stage 5) chose not to inform the husband, even though he believed it was the "fair" or "just" thing to do. Philosopher Two had this to say about his decision:

> The justice approach....really blinded me to a lot of realities of the problem....I think that the moral issue was simply the matter of honesty and truth in the relationship. But even if that had been fulfilled, we would have been

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left with the interpersonal dilemma of life choices, of what kind of relationship you want in your life....And morality won't do you one bit of good in that decision.[13]

(Although neither Philosopher Two nor Gilligan and Murphy specify what they mean, exactly, by "life choices," it is safe to assume they mean such options as 'to uphold truth at the expense of the well-being of loved ones,' 'to value the well-being of loved ones over honesty,' 'to remain in a relationship with someone who is married to someone else,' 'to refuse to be involved with someone who is married to someone else,' etc. A justice principle, they claim, does not adequately address such options. Thus, commitment to any one of them would constitute an example of what Gilligan means by "commitment in relativism.")

Citing this example, Gilligan and Murphy maintain that a justice approach (equated with "morality" by Philosopher Two) does not provide an adequate guide for making the life choices that underlie the contextual decision making process inherent in any "moral" judgement (in the broad sense of the term):

> Equating morality with 'the justice approach'...The perceived disparity between the justice solution (telling the truth to honor respect) and the remaining problems of responsibility and consequence leads [Philosopher Two] to the further realization that while the problem was at once both moral and not moral, the 'moral' solution wouldn't solve the problem. Then the question becomes one of definition as to what is included in the moral domain, since the justice approach does not adequately address the responsibilities and obligations that ensue from 'life choices.'[14]

Redefining the Moral

Kohlberg's response to these criticisms[15] is mixed. He agrees that his model does not give an adequate description of the contextual aspects of moral reasoning, but he also explains that it was never supposed to do so. Justice, for Kohlberg, only insures that other people's claims to pursue their own life choices are honored. Life choices themselves, and the contextual judgments that follow from them, are, for Kohlberg, part of the content of moral judgments, not of their form, and as such are not covered by a formal justice principle. He reiterates that his decision to focus on justice concerns stemmed largely from his desire to locate a universal moral criterion on which people could agree regardless of differences due to contextual interpretations and varying conceptions of the good, and that such a principle must meet certain formal requirements, particularly reversibility, which is impossible with contextual principles like benevolence or caring.

Kohlberg does concede, however, that his earlier restriction of the definition of morality to the domain of justice concerns was misleading; (what he was really doing was restricting the scope of his inquiry). Admitting that justice is not an adequate moral principle by itself, he accordingly broadened his definition of morality to include not merely contextual thinking[16] -- considerations of the specific

welfare outcomes of moral judgments -- but also the underlying ethical conceptions of human nature, society, the good, and reality itself[17] on which those more contextual judgments are based. And although he sees these contextual and ethical concerns as an integral part of mature moral thinking, he also argues that they must be the subjects of "soft stage," that is, non-formal, analyses.

Nonetheless, this broadening of the scope of morality amounts to the admission that the problem of moral relativism is not adequately dealt with by a theory of justice reasoning per se. For although a formal justice criterion tells us to respect other people's right to pursue their own individual goods (it even provides us with a mutually acceptable method for doing so -- Ideal Role Taking, or Moral Musical Chairs), when it comes to actually deciding whose claim is reversible in a moral conflict, contextual and ethical judgments not covered by a formal justice criterion inevitably arise.

In the dilemma of the fact, for example, what Philosopher Two wants to know is whether he should tell the husband the truth or withhold it to protect his lover. Assuming (for now) that Kohlberg is correct that this dilemma does not constitute a conflict between justice and caring, but rather that Philosopher Two fell short of applying his justice principle in this particular context,[18] even if Philosopher Two had completed the deliberative process of Moral Musical Chairs, he would still have been faced with the decision of

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whose claim to honor: the husband's or the wife's. Kohlberg says this about the decision:

> **assuming** it is correct that disclosure of the truth would risk the wife's sanity, then if Philosopher 2 were to imaginatively continue the process and ask whether the husband's claim to truth would be valid if he placed himself in the wife's position, he would be likely to conclude that justice is better served by withholding the truth, because if the husband puts himself in the wife's position he sees her right to sanity. In other words, in this case Philosopher 2 **realizes** that choosing sanity over truth telling is a more reversible decision than the converse.[19]

There are two assumptions here, one factual, the other ethical, neither of which is supported by a formal justice principle. The factual assumption, as Kohlberg himself notes, is that one of the likely consequences of Philosopher Two's telling the truth would, in fact, be the loss of the wife's "sanity" (assuming, of course, that we can agree on its definition). A plethora of contextual judgments go into the making of such an inference: the nature of the wife's other problems, the relevance of her history in handling emotional stress, the extent of her feelings of guilt, the husband's likely response (will he fly into a rage? will he be understanding? will he seek a divorce?), the pattern of the husband and wife's relationship, etc. Such contextual judgments are "factual" because they attempt to answer the question: what **would** the likely outcome be? And as Kohlberg himself points out, "...the most problematic, changing, historically relative aspect of

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moral choice is attending to the factual aspects of a moral dilemma."[20]

Of course there will never be a principled moral criterion that can answer such questions, so we can hardly fault justice for not doing so.[21] But implicit in Kohlberg's conclusion that Philosopher Two would have chosen the wife's right to sanity as the more reversible claim -- i.e., as the more "just" solution -- is the ethical assumption that sanity is more intrinsically valuable than either honesty or the right to truth. Such a conclusion is hardly a given (the husband might or might not choose the wife's right to sanity as the more reversible claim in this dilemma), and necessarily implies epistemological and ethical assumptions not covered by a justice principle -- for example, that one person's "well-being" justifies lying to another, and that a person can be considered "well" or "sane" though living in deceit. My purpose is not to pass judgement on these assumptions; avoiding a nervous breakdown may justify deceit in some situations. Rather, the point is that a formal justice criterion fails to provide an adequate guide for making or evaluating these sorts of contextual life choices, or for choosing which underlying conception of the good to embrace in general.

Justice and Caring

Nevertheless, while Kohlberg admits that justice by itself is not

a sufficient moral principle -- precisely because it does not provide an

adequate guide for making life choices -- he still maintains that it is a

necessary one, and, as such, does not conflict with decisions framed

in terms of caring. In the dilemma of the fact, for example, what

Gilligan construes as a conflict between justice and caring, Kohlberg

sees as uncertainty about how to apply justice in a specific context:

> In our interpretation, Philosopher 2 is struggling to
> formulate a principle of justice which would resolve the
> situation of conflict between the husband's right to the
> truth and the wife's right to sanity.[22]

Viewed in this light, it is hard to see how Gilligan infers that justice

conflicts with caring, unless one confuses "justice" with a narrow

adherence to "honesty and truth" (as Philosopher Two does), or as

"telling the truth to honor respect" (as Gilligan and Murphy seem to

do).[23] But, as Kohlberg points out, even Philosopher Two frames the

dilemma in justice terms when he asks, "was [the wife's] right to

sanity, which I think was being jeopardized, less important than [the

husband's] right to know?"[24] The point is that a formal justice

principle does not, and is not supposed to, prescribe contextual

judgments such as "tell the truth" or "protect loved ones," which are

part of the content, not the form, of morality; its whole purpose,

rather, is to leave room for such decisions to be made contextually (which is, of course, both its strength and its limitation).

There is, however, another sense in which justice and caring could be said to conflict, and that is not as moral principles but as two human capacities that are sometimes difficult to integrate. As Philosopher Two puts it:

> the dilemma I have is in the fact that....the Veil of Ignorance is not down. It is very difficult for me to completely withdraw from the situation and say if I was K. or if I were T., I would certainly want to know the truth.[25]

But, if anything, this difficulty only points to the need for a principle of justice, so that the husband's claim be given equal and impartial consideration when compared with the wife's. Besides, Philosopher Two's inability to employ the Veil of Ignorance (i.e., to be impartial) violates not only his own sense of justice but of caring, or "principled non-violence," as well, since it prevents him from fully considering the welfare consequences which withholding the truth might have for the husband. Thus, rather than demonstrating that justice and caring comprise two contradictory ways of framing moral dilemmas, the dilemma of the fact illustrates the "fact" that human beings are not (generally) capable of universal or impartial love.[26]

To construe this difficulty as a conflict between justice and caring is to frame the dilemma in conventional, "genderized" terms, for it is when principles are interpreted as rules that they inevitably

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conflict. Such conflicts are unavoidably the case with all conventional moralities, which are, by definition, contextually determined. And the postulation of different moral contexts defined by gender is no different than that of different moral contexts defined by culture. The combined facts (1) that women have tended to function in different social contexts than men, and (2) that the role expectations which society imposes on them at the conventional level differ, are enough to explain why men and women might (and I believe they do) tend to follow different developmental paths, a point which Gilligan makes poignantly in <u>In a Different Voice</u>.[27] But to infer from these facts that moral **principles** necessarily conflict is to commit a form of the naturalistic fallacy: specifically, to confuse the conventional, social "is" with the principled, moral "ought."

Rather than mature moral reasoning being characterized by the criteria which distinguish conventional, "genderized" moral thought, moral reasoning at the post-conventional level should transcend such dichotomization, leading to neither "justice" nor "caring," but to some sort of reconciliation. Gilligan is actually an advocate of such a resolution, but her postulation of multiple moral contexts, each with its own guiding criterion to be chosen on the basis of personal commitment, does not provide one, for it fails to articulate the basis on which such personal commitments are to be made -- a basis,

moreover, which would define a more encompassing value context

that contradicts the postulation of multiple moral contexts.

Murphy and Gilligan assert that there are:

> two essentially different kinds of moral relativism which
> stand in different relation to postconventional or
> principled moral judgement. In making this distinction, we
> rely on the contrast described by Perry ... between
> relativistic **multiplicity** (position 4 in Perry's scheme), the
> postulation that there are many right answers to moral
> problems and no way of choosing among them, and
> **contextual relativism** (position 5), the position that while
> no answer may be objectively right in the sense of being
> context-free, some answers and some ways of thinking
> are better than others.[28]

By this account, the transition from "multiplicity" to "contextual

relativism" marks the key transition from immature to mature moral

reasoning, where the individual postulates that although there are no

absolute, universal, or objective moral referents ("multiplicity"),

relative judgments are nevertheless possible ("contextual relativism").

There are, however, two related problems with this distinction. The

obvious one is that neither Murphy and Gilligan (nor Perry) articulate

any criteria by which "some answers and some ways of thinking" can

be determined as "better." Nor does Perry's model of the higher

stages of commitment[29] provide an answer. It merely asserts that

we commit ourselves to our evolving conceptions of the good,

without indicating the direction which that evolution should take, or

helping us decide which conception is better or how to reconcile them

when they conflict. In this sense, the "contextual relativism" which

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Gilligan posits as the hallmark of mature moral reasoning is little

different than the stage of "multiplicity" which precedes it, except

that it replaces "uncertainty" with "commitment" about which good

to pursue. Thus, although this transition seems to mark an important

psychological step in the related processes of intellectual development

and identity formation, it is dubious that the two stages differ morally

in any significant sense.

More importantly, however, this failure to articulate a criterion

on which to base personal commitment reveals the fundamental

difficulty with Gilligan and Murphy's conception of "contextual

relativism" as a solution to the problem of moral relativism, and that is

that it begs the question: commitment to what, on the basis of what?

The postulation that "some answers and some ways of thinking are

better than others" implies the existence of some broader, more

encompassing value criterion (whether formal or contextual), since

different value contexts cannot be regulated by "personal

commitment" alone. That commitment must be to something if the

question of which moral construction to embrace is to be answered.

And that "something" implies a larger, more encompassing value

context that contradicts the postulation of discrete multiple moral

contexts as defining the moral domain. Moreover, because the

principle referent by which Gilligan and Murphy (and Perry, except

that his is a psychological and not an ethical theory) would have us

regulate what are otherwise relative moral values is the self, or "personal commitment," their position would, in fact, be better termed "subjective relativism" than "contextual relativism."

Gilligan and Murphy have attempted to show, it could be argued, that mature moral reasoners "commit" themselves to the actual welfare consequences of their moral judgments. But although this positing of responsibility for consequences gives necessary substance to Kohlberg's conception of the formal properties of mature moral reasoning, it still fails to answer the question: which welfare consequences are desirable? And, as I have tried to argue, such judgments, though "contextually relative" (in the sense that they, of necessity, vary with the contextual realities of particular moral situations), ultimately depend on one's ethical conception of the good.

In the dilemma of the fact, for example, what Philosopher Two needs is some guide for choosing, not just between the wife's "right" to sanity and the husband's "right" to the truth, but between the two sets of likely "welfare consequences" that accompany the two avenues his decision might take. What will happen to the wife if he talks to the husband? What will happen to the husband if he remains silent? Who will be more hurt? Phrased in this way, the dilemma of the fact is both a "caring" and a "justice" dilemma.[30] But the decision itself, if taken to the level of reflectivity, ultimately rests on Philosopher Two's conception of what constitutes "hurt," which is

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nothing more than the opposite of "welfare." And it is "welfare" that ultimately needs defining in this situation, if Philosopher Two's judgement is to be morally adequate.

Reframing the Problem

Kohlberg's criticism of utilitarianism, it will be recalled, is that it ultimately solves moral conflicts by prescribing those judgments which deliver the greatest good to the greatest number, and that this principle of maximization is a less than satisfying solution morally because it does not adequately represent the claims of the least advantaged.[31] But it will also be recalled that this criticism rests on the premise that "the good" is subjectively relative -- i.e., that, ultimately, people cannot agree on it or its content. Given this assumption, Kohlberg restricts any concern with defining "the good" from his formal model of the ontogenesis of "universal" justice reasoning, (though he does flirt with it in his postulation of a seventh stage of ethical reflectivity), and in so doing bypasses the teleological question in the problem of moral relativism.

Gilligan's critique, on the other hand, despite its failure to show that justice and caring define separate moral contexts at the principled level, makes it apparent that when people are faced with choices between two or more alternative courses of action that each lead to

discrete welfare outcomes, they must ultimately choose between alternative conceptions of the good. But this necessary foray into teleology does not commit us, as she would have it, to subjective commitments within an otherwise contextually relative moral universe. Such a solution to the problem of moral relativism is really a non-solution, since it denies the very question it begs: to which "moral context" should I commit myself?

In fact, Kohlberg's and Gilligan's underlying assumption of irreconcilable subjectively relative goods is the same, but the scope of the problem of moral relativism goes beyond what either of them considers. What Kohlberg appears to have overlooked is the possibility that it is not the **quantity** of welfare but its **quality** which lies at the heart of all moral conflicts.[32] And although Gilligan does not reduce the concern with welfare to a question of quantity, her postulation of multiple moral contexts regulated by personal commitment never really comes to terms with the question of quality, either. In actuality, any genuine moral conflict, when taken to the level of reflectivity, leads to a reappraisal of either one's conception of the good or of how it manifests itself in a particular context -- a reappraisal not adequately dealt with by either "personal commitment" or "justice."

In Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education,[33] Nel Noddings offers "caring" as a principled, natural moral criterion, accessible to and ultimately desired by all persons.

This postulation of caring as an ultimate good is premised on the assumption that the meeting between subjective human consciousnesses evokes an affective response of "joy" that is a natural good for human beings, whether they are conscious of it or not. For Noddings, moral judgement relies, finally, not on principles, which she argues are ultimately ambiguous, but rather on the "ethical ideal" we each construct of ourselves as "ones-caring" in our effort to consciously reproduce those feelings of connectedness that we remember from previous experiences of "natural caring." As pursuers of the ethical ideal we see ourselves as people who seek not only to appreciate the needs and goals of others but to nurture that receptivity in others as well.   In such an ethic (to paraphrase Noddings somewhat loosely), "welfare" -- as an outcome desired by subjective "individuals" -- is subordinated to "welfare" -- as the enhancement of caring relations between "persons," who are in any case connected by virtue of living in society together. The caring relationship, in turn, it could be argued, leads to a shared vision of desirable outcomes, of which caring itself is the most important. Thus, in a conflict of welfares the caring ethic that Noddings puts forth prescribes the following imperative: "Do that which best fosters future caring," which, for her, means to do that which best nurtures the ethical ideal in oneself and in others. In other words, rather than avoiding or begging the question of which good to pursue, a caring

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ethic posits enhanced relations through conscious, reciprocal "motivational displacement" as an end in itself.

Probably the most serious criticism leveled against Noddings' "feminine" ethic is that it requires face-to-face contact to produce the necessary motivational displacement for a full appreciation of others. Betty Sichel writes:

> Caring and response focus morality on a very limited population, which may be directly affected by our moral voice, which may hear our response, feel and be affected by our care. Should moral agents only be concerned with this narrowed moral universe and ignore all of the world's millions of unfortunates?...Can the feminine approach to ethics include these unfortunates? If not, are we left with a theory which concentrates on limited, concentric circles and thus, focusses on the traditional categories of women's private lives?[34]

As Sichel points out, although Noddings advocates the application of a "feminine" ethic to the public domain, it is not clear how such an ethic can be applied, given the limited "moral context" it assumes -- that of intimate circles and chains of caring. Rather than accepting Gilligan's and (to a lesser extent)[35] Noddings' premise that men's and women's moralities comprise two different approaches in need of reconciliation, Sichel suggests instead that we concentrate on constructing a more comprehensive ethic and model of moral development which transcends the limitations of "genderized ethics" from the start (without ignoring that which both conceptions have to offer).[36]

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Towards that end we can see that implicit in Noddings' feminine ethic lies an intrinsic valuing of ongoing dialogue and enhanced relations as moral aims. If we combine her notion of caring, as an ethical ideal which motivates us to maintain and extend our special relations, with a criterion of justice, which mandates that we universalize our ideal through practiced impartiality, we arrive at a more extensive, public moral criterion which not only promotes those conditions that foster "caring" but which also promotes a more comprehensive ethical ideal of world unity.

John Dewey's moral and educational writings[37] do precisely this by positing "growth" itself as the ultimate moral criterion, in which the moral aim is to cultivate a social disposition that seeks always to broaden and deepen our shared experience. Such an ethic offers a solution to the problem of moral relativism that neither suspends from the moral domain subjectively relative conceptions of the good, nor begs the question "which conception do I adopt?" It suggests, rather, that the problem of moral relativism is not so much a question of choosing between conflicting moral conceptions as of continually reconstructing a more encompassing one, (always with the understanding that the increase and enhancement of shared meaning is an end which needs no justification).

The details of such a resolution are the subject of another essay, but a few general features are worth noting here. Growth

defines a broader moral context than genderized moralities -- a context within which both justice reasoning and a caring disposition could conceivably be seen to develop. For Dewey,[38] how we reason, feel, and behave are all the result of pre-established active tendencies, or habits, which in turn stem from the interaction of personal dispositions with given social conditions. Thus, our primary moral concern should be with establishing those habits of reasoning, feeling and acting most conducive to growth -- the expanding and deepening of shared meanings.[39]

An ethic defined by growth offers the sort of principled resolution to subjective and contextual moral differences that Gilligan seeks, without denying the validity of the multiple moral contexts idea as **descriptive** of relative moralities prior to dialogue. Like Gilligan's ethic, Dewey's prescribes dialogue, but his offers the possibility for a **reflective transformation** of relative moralities that is more workable than Gilligan's notion of irreconcilable contexts. It does this by positing a dynamic, principled criterion that both prescribes the direction of change and maximizes the role of reflective intelligence. With the exception of her postulation of the irreconcilability of separate moral contexts, the rest of Gilligan's model makes a great deal of sense within Dewey's framework, particularly her description of the role self-concept plays in the ontogenesis of principled moral reasoning.

Dewey's ethic of growth, like Noddings' of caring, posits the ethical ideal -- the intervening means between a natural good and a consciously desired one -- as the primary faculty of moral judgement and the primary moral concern. But it also generalizes this ideal from the individual to the societal level. Like Noddings, Dewey believes that what matters most morally is the effect of moral judgments on people's characters: both those of the people affected by our judgments, and that of the moral agent herself. Consistent with Noddings,[40] but more reminiscent of Kohlberg, however, Dewey sees a habit of reasoning in accordance with principles of impartiality and justice as a strong component of a moral character.[41] And, like Kohlberg, he believes democracy (as a mode of associated living rather than as a form of government per se) to be a necessary social condition of growth.[42]

Growth combines the rational criterion of justice with the intrinsic valuing of social connections of caring, and, in so doing, solves the problem of moral relativism by providing a principled, natural criterion which simultaneously stands up to formal requirements of inclusiveness, prescriptivity, and universality, while also explaining the role of deliberation and character in handling contextual variations. Above all, life choices, personal commitments, and conceptions of the good are not subjectively relative within a moral perspective guided by a criterion of growth, which defines a

sufficiently expanded conception of morality to provide a referent for

making moral judgments on the basis of their impact on the quality of

communal life. For all these reasons, growth, as an educational

principle, mandates that autonomous rationality and a sense of

community be complementary aims of a complete moral education.

Notes

1. Carol Gilligan, <u>In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development</u> (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 19.

2. For some convincing evidence to the contrary, see Lawrence J. Walker, "Sex Differences in the Development of Morality and Reasoning," <u>Child Development</u>, 55 (1984): 677-691. Despite this evidence, however, Gilligan's conclusion nevertheless remains plausible. According to Gilligan, who cites the research of Nancy Chodorow, whereas male development is largely defined by the process of increasing autonomy, leading to a justice orientation, female development is defined largely by the strengthening of empathic and affectional ties, resulting in the caring orientation attributed to women. Gilligan's own research, moreover, seems to indicate that these gender differences get reinforced throughout the lifespan of most adults by virtue of the social roles men and women generally play. See Gilligan, <u>In a Different Voice</u>, ch. 1; cf., Nancy Chodorow, <u>The Reproduction of Mothering</u> (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978).

3. Lawrence Kohlberg, "From Is to Ought: How to Commit the Naturalistic Fallacy and Get Away with It in the Study of Moral Development" (1971), in Lawrence Kohlberg, <u>The Philosophy of Moral Development</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 115-116.

4. Lawrence Kohlberg, Charles Levine, and Alexandra Hewer, "The Current Formulation of the Theory" (1983), in Lawrence Kohlberg, <u>The Psychology of Moral Development</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 248.

5. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," p. 306; cf., Dwight Boyd, "The Rawls Connection," in Brenda Munsey, ed., <u>Moral Development, Moral Education, and Kohlberg</u> (Birmingham, Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1980), pp. 185-213.

6. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," p. 306.

7. Kohlberg, "Is to Ought," p. 169, my emphasis. He does, of course, broaden this definition in "The Current Formulation of the Theory," as I will discuss shortly.

8. Kohlberg, "Is to Ought," pp. 152-168.

9. Kohlberg, "Is to Ought," p. 164, emphasis added.

10. Kohlberg, "Is to Ought," p. 175, my emphases.

11. Carol Gilligan and John Michael Murphy, "Development from Adolescence to Adulthood: The Philosopher and the Dilemma of the Fact," In D. Kuhn, ed., Intellectual Development Beyond Childhood (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979), pp. 85-99; John Michael Murphy and Carol Gilligan, "Moral Development in Late Adolescence and Adulthood: a Critique and Reconstruction of Kohlberg's Theory," Human Development, 23 (1980): 77-104.

12. Gilligan's reason for defining a separate moral context defined by caring stemmed, largely, (ironically enough) from the "unfairness" of the Kohlberg model in representing the moral thinking of women, whose responses to hypothetical justice dilemmas were frequently framed in more narrative and contextual terms than men's.

13. Gilligan and Murphy, "Dilemma of the Fact," p. 96.

14. Gilligan and Murphy, "Dilemma of the Fact," p. 97.

15. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," pp. 224-236; Lawrence Kohlberg, Charles Levine, and Alexandra Hewer, "Synopses and Detailed Replies to Critics" (1983) in Lawrence Kohlberg, The Psychology of Moral Development (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 361-370.

16. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," p. 227.

17. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," pp. 237-238, 249-250.

18. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "Synopses," pp. 367-368.

19. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "Synopses," p. 367, emphases added.

20. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," p. 300.

21. Nonetheless, a more comprehensive model of mature moral reasoning would include a description of how mature moral reasoners deliberate about such questions of fact.

22. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "Synopses," p. 367.

23.   What both Philosopher Two and Gilligan and Murphy seem to have done is to confuse the principle of justice -- "consider the claims of everyone equally and impartially" -- with a rule that might be justified by that principle -- "tell the truth because everyone has an equal right to it." This apparent regression on the part of Philosopher Two to rule-oriented moral reasoning constitutes an example of what Kohlberg calls the "second-order" nature of Stage 5 moral principles, one of the many factors which led him to hypothesize a sixth stage where formal justice becomes a principle of the "first order." See Lawrence Kohlberg, "Justice as Reversibility: The Claim to Adequacy of a Highest Moral Stage" (1978), in Kohlberg, The Philosophy of Moral Development (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), pp. 190-226. See especially pp. 220-221ff.

24. Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "Synopses," p. 367; cf., Gilligan and Murphy, "Dilemma of the Fact," p. 95.

25. Gilligan and Murphy, "Dilemma of the Fact," p. 95.

26.   Kohlberg himself makes this point in "Justice as Reversibility," pp. 218-219, and Kohlberg, Levine, and Hewer, "The Current Formulation," p. 307, as do Murphy and Gilligan in "Moral Development," p. 98.

27. Particularly striking is her account of the contradiction between conventional conceptions of "adulthood" and "femininity," a chief factor in explaining women's moral development as focusing on resolving the conflict between "self-preservation" and "self-sacrifice." See Gilligan, In a Different Voice, pp. 64-107, especially pp. 70-71.

28. Murphy and Gilligan, "Moral Development," pp. 82-83; cf., William G. Perry, Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years, 2nd Edition. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970).

29. Perry summarizes these higher positions as follows:
     Position 6: The student apprehends the necessity of orienting himself in a relativistic world through some from of personal Commitment (as distinct from unquestioned or unconsidered commitment to simple belief in certainty).
     Position 7: The student makes an initial Commitment in some area.
     Position 8: The student experiences the implications of Commitment, and explores the subjective and stylistic issues of responsibility.
     Position 9: The student experiences the affirmation of identity among multiple responsibilities and realizes Commitment as an ongoing, unfolding activity through which he expresses his life style.

See Perry, <u>Forms</u>, p. 10. A more detailed description can be found on pp. 134-176.

30.   As I will argue shortly, justice and caring as moral principles are not at odds, but work together. Caring helps us consider in all their contextual detail the claims of everyone involved in a moral situation. And justice insures that we are not unduly swayed by our attachments to certain people and outcomes. Together they imply the valuing of the expansion and deepening of a shared conception of the good which John Dewey termed "growth."

31.   In the dilemma of the fact, for example, Philosopher Two could have simply chosen that solution which did the least "harm" to the majority, in this case, himself and the wife -- clearly an unjust resolution (given the assumption that people's definitions of "harm" conflict).

32.   This same point forms the basis of Mill's critique of Bentham's hedonistic utilitarianism, and is elaborated on by Dewey. It is what Mill means when he says that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." See John Stuart Mill, <u>Utilitarianism</u> (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1861/1957); John Dewey, <u>Human Nature and Conduct</u> (New York: Modern Library, 1922/1930).

33. Nel Noddings, <u>Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education</u> (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

34. Betty Sichel, "Beyond Genderized Ethics," Paper presented at Philosophy of Education Society Forty-Third Annual Meeting: April 1987.

35.   Noddings' ethics, she says, is peculiarly feminine, which is not to say it is only for women, but rather that it has its root in the "receptive" side of the human psyche usually associated with, and, for the most part, more developed in women. See Noddings, <u>Caring</u>, pp. 2, 130.

36. Betty Sichel, "Women's Moral Development in Search of Philosophical Assumptions," <u>The Journal of Moral Education</u>, 14 (1985): pp. 149-161.

37. John Dewey, <u>Democracy and Education</u> (New York: Free Press, 1916/1966); <u>Reconstruction in Philosophy</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1920/1948); <u>Human Nature and Conduct</u> (New York: Modern Library, 1922/1930; John Dewey and James H. Tufts, <u>Ethics</u> (New York: Holt, 1910/1932).

38. Dewey, Human Nature and conduct.

39. Dewey, Democracy and Education; Reconstruction.

40. Noddings, Caring, pp. 25-26, 35-37.

41. Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct; Dewey and Tufts, Ethics.

42. Dewey, Democracy and Education; Reconstruction.

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CHAPTER 5

THE INDETERMINACY OF KNOWLEDGE
AND DISCOURSE COMMUNITIES: HOW
COGNITION AND CONTEXT INTERACT
IN REFLECTIVE THINKING AND WRITING

One of the more fruitful debates in composition studies of late

has been over the relative importance of individual cognition and

social context in the writing process. On one side of the fence sit

cognitive theorists (Flower,[1] Kroll,[2] Larson,[3] Perl,[4] Sommers,[5] and

so on), who emphasize the thinking and composing strategies by

which successful writers make and communicate meaning. On the

other side sit social constructionists (Bartholomae,[6] Berlin,[7]

Berthoff,[8] Bizzell,[9] Bruffee,[10] et cetera), who concern themselves

chiefly with the social contexts in which thinking and writing take

place.

Although proponents of the two schools frame what is being

debated somewhat differently, the following formulation more or less

captures the gist of that debate. Social constructionists basically

accuse cognitive theorists of holding a conception of language as

nothing more than a medium of communication which people use to

achieve purposes formed independently of their sociolinguistic

contexts, contexts which social constructionists believe are actually

the major determinants of how we think and act in the world.

Cognitive theorists, in their turn, charge social constructionists with a determinism that undervalues the role of the self-conscious individual in negotiating among and between socially constrained options, options which cognitive theorists admit may indeed shape a great deal of our thinking but which do not override the capacity of individuals to construct their own meanings and achieve their own purposes.

Part of what has made the debate a fruitful one is that it has compelled both camps to refine and broaden their respective conceptions in response to the shortcomings raised by the opposition. Even more promising have been the overtures made on both sides towards a model of writing in which cognition and context are conceived as interacting components in a single, dynamic process. Thus, cognitive process theorist Linda Flower advocates

> a grounded vision that can place cognition in its context, while celebrating the power of cognition to change that context, in a theory so richly specified that it can describe how individual writers develop those powers for themselves.[11]

And social constructionist James Berlin advances a "notion of rhetoric as a political act involving a dialectical interaction engaging the material, the social, and the individual writer, with language as the agency of mediation."[12]

Such overtures are encouraging. Yet, as the above quotations suggest, both parties still tend to focus on their own particular agendas, saying little that is specific (or constructive) about the

"complementary" perspective. This phenomenon is largely the result of the need to clarify misunderstandings which have arisen between the two camps. Linda Flower, for example, devotes virtually the entire second half of her most accommodating essay to date[13] essentially to countering the charge that she construes her observation-based theory as anything other than one possible rhetorical mode (albeit a very fruitful one) among many. Although no comparably conciliatory response has (as yet) come from the social constructionist camp, proponents of that perspective[14] have made respectable efforts to show that their socially-driven model, despite its relative determinism, not only leaves room for but advocates individual choice. Although the defensiveness of such responses may seem an obstacle to the construction of a more interactive conception, it is in fact a positive and necessary step, and signifies the desire on both sides to communicate their perspectives in terms the other can understand.

The present essay supports such efforts and seeks to take them one step further. Its primary aim is to suggest an interactive conception of the writing process that cognitive theorists and social constructionists alike might find plausible. The key to such a conception, I believe, lies in the often-heard but rarely explored notion that cognition and context, thought and language, operate in a "dialectical" relationship with each other. While many composition theorists share this hypothesis, it nevertheless needs considerable

development, both conceptually and empirically. In particular, we need to consider much more carefully than we have what we mean by it, how it might manifest in the writing process, and what its implications for writing instruction might be.

The present essay attempts to advance our conceptual understanding of this dialectic in some small measure. It begins with an analysis of the social constructionist critique that cognitive process models underestimate the role context plays in forming ideas and purposes. It next considers the cognitive theorists' charge that social constructionist models do not adequately explain the role cognition plays in navigating among and between alternative social and linguistic contexts. In both cases, rejoinders are considered and conclusions drawn about the validity and implications of the various arguments.

The third part of the essay attempts to reconcile the dichotomy by advancing the idea that cognition and context only make sense in terms of one another, and that we thus diminish our conception of both to the extent that we devalue either one. Cognition, I argue, can no more be disembedded from context than context can be understood as determining cognition. There are two reasons for this. First, while the cognitive theorists' claim that the individual agent constructs and communicates her own unique representations of reality is true, formal and structural models of thinking and writing can

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never adequately represent the contextual nature of these processes in practice. Second, while it is thus also true that all thinking and writing are necessarily contextually situated, there is no such thing as a definitive context. All contexts, including the knowledge and discourse "communities" into which we seek to "initiate" students, are themselves indeterminate. Reflective inquiry and discourse are precisely the attempt to make sense of this indeterminacy.

As the means by which we negotiate among indeterminate contexts of experience, reflective inquiry and discourse are not so much general cognitive or contextually determined functions as they are intercontextual ones. As such, they are constantly in the process of inventing, reconstructing, and integrating themselves, and can only be understood as entailing the interaction of cognition and context.

What such a conception means for writing instruction is essentially this: that the key to teaching students to write meaningfully is neither to provide them with formal problem-solving strategies and heuristics nor to explain to them the discourse conventions and concerns of a variety of knowledge communities (though these are both important objectives); it is rather to provide students with situations which they experience as both indeterminate and socially compelling, thus motivating them to construct and negotiate their own ways of knowing and communicating in order to achieve psychologically and socially satisfying resolutions. Creating

such conditions is primarily a matter of juxtaposing competing or alternative interpretive frameworks that challenge students' habitual ways of thinking and conversing. Such a pedagogy requires teachers who are sensitive to both individual cognition and the multitude of interpretive frameworks which characterize all human inquiry.

Limitations of Cognitive Formalism

A significant portion of the cognition/context debate has revolved around Linda Flower and John Hayes's "cognitive process" model of writing,[15] widely regarded as the most comprehensive of its kind.[16] Based on the thinking-aloud protocols of writers engaged in writing, the Flower-Hayes model seeks to describe the basic cognitive processes which underlie all successful composing. The model itself consists of three main divisions: the "task environment" (or writing context), the "writer's long-term memory" (a sort of data storage component), and the actual "writing processes" which guide composing.

It is the "writing processes" which constitute the main subject of Flower and Hayes's research, and Flower and Hayes divide these processes into four main groups. "Planning" refers to the ways in which writers formulate ideas and purposes, and is sub-divided into "generating," "organizing," and "goal-setting." "Translating" denotes

the putting of thoughts into language. "Reviewing" includes the

"evaluating" and "revising" of writing once it has been recorded. And

the "monitor" is that part of the writer's mind which governs the

whole process, deciding which sub-processes to employ and when.

The Flower-Hayes model has been hailed generally for its

characterization of the writing process as a complex phenomenon

involving the "recursive" networking of distinctive but interrelated

sub-processes. What is controversial about the model is primarily the

way it disembeds cognitive processes from the sociolinguistic

contexts in which they necessarily operate. In describing the writing

process in terms of underlying cognitive processes, Flower and Hayes

assume that cognition can be usefully described in general terms,

outside the constraints of particular linguistic and social contexts.

> In a process model, the major units of analysis are
> elementary mental processes, such as the process of
> generating ideas... One major advantage of identifying
> these basic cognitive processes or thinking skills writers
> use is that we can then compare the composing
> strategies of good and poor writers. And we can look at
> writing in a much more detailed way.[17]

Pedagogically, Flower and Hayes's aim is to articulate a set of

basic cognitive processing tools which writers can use to generate,

communicate, and revise their own interpretations of experience.

> By placing emphasis on the inventive power of the writer,
> who is able to explore ideas, to develop, act on, test, and
> regenerate his or her own goals, we are putting an
> important part of creativity where it belongs -- in the
> hands of the working, thinking writer.[18]

This disembedding of cognitive skills from their sociolinguistic

contexts has been the source of much controversy. Criticism has been

along several lines, with critics leveling charges of positivism, political

obfuscation, and educational insensitivity, to name a few. While these

charges are sometimes based on debatable interpretations of the

methods and motives of cognitive research, they all entail the

legitimate questioning of the formalist assumptions on which cognitive

theory is based. I will begin with the charge of positivism, as it is the

most misplaced.

Echoing Ann Berthoff's 1971 critique[19] of Janice Lauer's

1970 essay, "Heuristics and Composition,"[20] Patricia Bizzell takes

Flower and Hayes to task for pursuing the kind of positivistic certainty

that "is supposed to end all debate" on the grounds that they base

their model on "the supposedly unimpeachable evidence" of empirical

research.[21] Berthoff, too, in a 1984 essay,[22] renews her earlier line

of attack when she argues,

> Empiricists do not generally recognize that all method,
> including scientific method, entails interpretation; they do
> not generally recognize that there are no raw data; there
> are no self-sufficient facts; there is no context-free
> evaluation. Their method is not to recognize the fact that
> all knowledge is mediated and that facts must be
> formulated, but to proceed as if interpretation were
> supererogatory.[23]

Flower's response to such charges[24] provides a most helpful

overview of what is in fact her non-positivistic approach to scientific

inquiry, and is required reading for anyone unfamiliar with the

discourse conventions and knowledge-making procedures of empirical

research in the area of composition studies. Besides refuting the

charge of positivism, her exegesis illustrates that Flower views the

empirical approach to composition studies as only one possible mode

of inquiry and discourse -- one that attempts to guard against its own

limitations by relying on communally-established procedures and

standards. As Flower puts it,

> Terms such as "evidence," "results," and validity" are
> loaded concepts to a reader entering the discourse. They
> contribute to misunderstandings in part because their
> meaning must be grasped in the context of specific
> research methods. Seen in situ, they do not refer to
> ultimates or absolutes, but to tools that help build more
> persuasive arguments.[25]

Flower goes on to explain how tests of "reliability" and "fit" are not

efforts at certainty but are rather methods for guarding against the

preconceived theoretical biases which researchers "inevitably,

constantly, and energetically impose ... on the data of experience."[26]

"The point of all this," writes Flower, "is not to prove a claim but to

understand more about the strength and predictive power of the

patterns we have created."[27]

In fact, the charge that cognitive researchers are on a

positivistic quest for empirical certainty is a red herring. All theory is

based on empirical evidence, and all theorists must assume a tentative

isomorphism between their models and objective reality; without this

assumption all inquiry would halt, just as it would if absolute certainty

were ever claimed. Empirical research is simply one way of proceeding, just as Frank D'Angelo's phenomenological approach[28] and James Berlin's historicist approach are others. "[A]rguments based on the permanent rational structures of the universe ... should not be accepted without question," writes Berlin.[29] But Flower never claims otherwise.

What is problematic about cognitive research is not its alleged positivism, or even its supposed claim to a superior methodology. (The tone of Flower's rationales, after all, has always been more justificatory and defensive than incontestable or irrefutable. And one can hardly fault her for the unwarranted faith which many people put in "science" narrowly conceived, any more than one can fault social constructionists for the unthinking relativism of college freshpersons who hold "that every belief ... is as good as every other."[30])

What is really at issue here is the fruitfulness of a model which postulates universal cognitive processes as providing the underlying structure of all acts of composing. Flower believes that such a model is useful because it offers a concrete means for empowering novice writers regardless of the varied contexts in which specific acts of writing take place. Social constructionists question the fruitfulness of such an approach on the grounds that cognition cannot be separated from the plurality of contexts which give it meaning and determine its contents and functioning.

In this regard, the major criticisms which social constructionists have launched against the Flower-Hayes model are

(1)   that it ignores the generative force of language in cognition,

(2)   that it does not account for the influence of the rhetorical situation in invention, organization, and goal-setting,

(3)   that it neglects the interpretive, and hence generative, function of discourse communities and their attendant conventions,

(4)   that it overlooks the ways in which historically and culturally embedded assumptions shape thinking,

(5)   that its alleged value-neutrality begs the ideological question of which social and political arrangements it supports,

(6)   that it is insensitive to the need -- of poor writers in particular -- to learn discourse conventions and not to "advance" cognitively,

and   (7)   that its pedagogy tends to put form before function.

In the years since Flower and Hayes first introduced their cognitive process theory, Flower has responded to most of these criticisms without substantially altering the original model. Most notably, in "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building," she takes to task her own early work with Hayes for failing "to account for how

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the situation in which the writer operates might shape composing."[31] Declaring "context cues cognition" as one of three major principles of a more interactive conception, she outlines the many ways in which it does so: from the unconscious cultural and linguistically embedded assumptions people hold, to the specific goals, criteria, and strategies which the rhetorical situation imposes on the individual writer.[32] She nevertheless defends her formal approach on the grounds that general cognitive processes provide a powerful means for negotiating among the constraints imposed by these contextual factors.

> I want a framework that acknowledges the pressure and the potential the social context can provide, at the same time it explains how writers negotiate that context, create their own goals, and develop a sense of themselves as problem-solvers, speakers, or subjects who create meaning and affect other people through their writing.[33]

As to why such an approach focuses on general problem solving strategies as opposed to how people manipulate the contextual elements of the rhetorical situation, Flower intimates that observation-based theory can't really say anything useful about the latter.

> Cognitive action is often initiated in response to a cue from the environment -- in response to an "ill-defined problem" that the "solver" may have to define from limited and ambiguous cues in the world around. Research in cognition tends to concentrate on the response of the individual rather than on the situational cues, for obvious reasons: one can observe a writer's actions with some clarity; however, the cues which stimulated a given action often need to be inferred or may even remain a mystery.[34]

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Here lies the real limitation of Flower's approach, not in its alleged attempt at certainty. In essence, she leaves the learning and implementation of the contextual elements of the rhetorical situation out of account. She does so apparently because she thinks useful empirical generalizations about such processes cannot be made. While it should be said in Flower's defense that she has come to recognize this limitation, one wonders why it should be any more difficult to make inferences about how people manipulate the contextual elements in a rhetorical situation than the cognitive ones (assuming the two can even be separated). And even if it is more difficult, does that mean we shouldn't try? Isn't this, after all, something like what social constructionists do, for example, when they analyze discourse conventions?

When social constructionists take this line of argument, they are on solid ground. Bizzell states the point and it implications most succinctly:

> The Flower-Hayes model of writing ... cannot alone give us a complete picture of the process. We might say that if this model describes the form of the composing process, the process cannot go on without the content which is knowledge of the conventions of discourse communities. In practice, however, form and content cannot be separated in this way, since discourse conventions shape the goals that drive the writing process. To let the model stand alone as an account of composing is to mask the necessity for the socially situated knowledge without which no writing project gets under way. The problems of letting this model stand alone can be seen in the pedagogy emerging from Flower

and Hayes's work. They are inclined to treat the model itself as an heuristic...[35]

Writing about heuristic-based models in general, John Gage develops this last point:

> In writing, the sort of competence we desire is not the mere ability to exercise paradigmatic patterns, but the ability to adjust and fine tune those means to fit particular situations... The problem for teachers is not, however, to factor the rules for making this adjustment out of the composing process so that they can be taught prescriptively, even though such factoring seems to be the goal of much current research into the composing process... We mislead our students and ourselves when by our methods we imply that the difference between knowing how to write and not knowing how to write is a matter of being in possession of some secret formula...[36]
>
> I resist absolute categorization, but such methods as teach what I have called empty forms ... seem to promulgate just such a faith in a priori, mechanistic means of solving problems of knowledge and persuasion. I disagree that, by idealizing the form, we can discover the formula in which thought is presumed to be at its objective best.[37]

Flower's response to such criticisms, as already mentioned, has been to acknowledge the role of context in idea and purpose formation. However, as part of her effort to suggest how her model can function within a more comprehensive framework made up of many alternative approaches, she still chooses to put faith in the notion of universal structures of the mind, as processes over which students can exercise some conscious control. The corollary to "context cues cognition" thus becomes "cognition mediates context," with the idea that it does so, at least in part, through the use of

formal processes of problem solving and invention. The problem with this solution is that it doesn't say enough about how cognition does that. In other words, how does cognition apply these various strategies in specific rhetorical situations? In essence, the formalism of the model bypasses what is probably the most important function of cognition as mediation: the way it negotiates the contextual factors -- the needs of the relevant knowledge communities, the various discourse conventions, the culturally embedded assumptions, etcetera -- of the rhetorical situation.

Ambiguities of Sociolinguistic Determinism

As far as social constructionists are concerned, the shortcomings of the cognitive process approach reside in cognitivists' failure to grasp fully the ways in which sociolinguistic context conditions thinking. Such conditioning, they maintain, occurs at several levels, beginning with the generative force of language in thought itself. According to social constructionists, language and thought are linked in a way that cognitive process models disregard. Language, they maintain, doesn't simply express our thoughts; it profoundly affects what we think. Bizzell, for example, objects to the separation of planning and translating in the Flower-Hayes model.

> During planning, the writer generates and organizes ideas before struggling to put them into words. Language itself

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is not seen as having a generative force in the planning process, except insofar as it stands as a record of the current progress of the writer's thinking in "text produced so far." Planning processes, therefore, have to be elaborated because they are all the writer has to guide her toward a solution to the particular writing problem. What's missing here is the connection to social context afforded by recognition of the dialectical relationship between thought and language.[38]

Bizzell cites Lev Vygotsky's conception of this dialectic:

> At first, language use and thinking develop separately in the child. But eventually the child comes to understand that language not only names ideas but develops and evaluates them... The child's linguistic and cognitive development culminates in "verbal thought," which "is not a natural, innate form of behavior but is determined by a historical-cultural process..." To illustrate the mature relationship between thought and language, Vygotsky uses situations that are strongly context-bound, such as conversations between lovers or among actors in a play.[39]

Bizzell goes on to argue that Vygotsky's analysis advises against separating planning and translating in "describing adult language-using because these activities are never separate in adult language-using."[40]

In fact, however, Vygotsky's position is extremely complex and open to other interpretations. For Vygotsky, the convergence of thought and language is indeed a culminating step in the child's linguistic and cognitive development, an achievement which Vygotsky remarks upon as the feature which most distinguishes humans from other mammals.[41] But it is hardly the culminating step in the adult's linguistic and cognitive development, which, according to him, is in

fact marked by the increasing differentiation of two forms of verbal thought: inner speech and social speech (both oral and written).

What Vygotsky[42] is illustrating in the context-bound examples to which Bizzell refers is in fact the separate structure and function of these two forms of verbal thought. True, inner speech remains a form of verbal thought, and Vygotsky even holds that one of its semantic peculiarities is the preponderance of the contextual sense of words over their dictionary meanings.[43] But he nevertheless regards inner speech as an autonomous speech function, one which is in turn supported by a more inward plane of verbal thought still: thought itself. "The flow of thought," he writes, "is not accompanied by a simultaneous unfolding of speech. The two processes are not identical, and there is no rigid correspondence between the units of thought and speech."[44]

Vygotsky's research on transfer, moreover, coupled with his criticisms of Thorndike in this regard,[45] led him to postulate that awareness, abstraction, and control are general and transferable characteristics of all the higher cognitive functions. All these passages suggest that it may in fact be fruitful to separate planning and translating in describing the way people write, though the full implications of Vygotsky's analysis remain unclear.

At the very least, Vygotsky's research does suggest that any attempt to circumvent context in describing the writing process will

lead to an incomplete description. But Flower already acknowledges this fact. Social constructionists, however, are prone to overstate the case by denying the usefulness of postulating formal structures of reasoning altogether. "[O]uter-directed theorists," writes Bizzell, "believe that universal, fundamental structures can't be taught; thinking and language use can never occur free of a social context that conditions them."[46]

In fact, this argument is a non sequitur; the undeniable contextuality of thought and language does not preclude the existence of universal structures of reasoning any more than the specific skills involved in hitting a tennis ball preclude the existence of the general skill of "keeping one's eye on the ball." While the specific manifestations of this general skill necessarily vary from sport to sport (e.g., from tennis to baseball to golf -- to all of which this skill is crucial), the skill remains a transferable one, **given** that the individual can make the connection. A minimum condition for making the connection is, of course, that one learn the peculiarities of the relevant sport, just as one needs to learn the discourse conventions of the relevant knowledge community in order to think and write within its interpretive framework. But the fact that the skill has peculiar manifestations does not contravene its existence. By the same token, the fact that all thinking is contextual does not rule out the existence of general thinking processes, though it does raise the question of

how far a formal model can take us. In postulating such structures, however, Flower is really only suggesting that a knowledge of general cognitive processes can increase a writers's awareness and control of what he's about (her tendency to rely on them too heavily notwithstanding).

In defending her approach against the charge that the postulation of universal structures is fruitless, Flower maintains that social constructionists have yet to specify a constructive alternative which can explain the power of the individual to make choices within the constraints imposed by context.

> If we would understand how cognition and context interact, we cannot remain satisfied with speculative theories based only on abstract social or political imperatives... Nor can we rely on contributions that offer us only a deconstruction or critique without offering in turn a substantive -- and in some way substantiated -- alternative.[47]

More precisely, Flower maintains that social constructionists have yet to "face the troubled issue of intentionality[:] Are writers 'determined' by their situation, or do they 'control' the meanings they make...?"[48]

> Social theorists who attack the illusion of control, who would locate purpose in the unconscious and dismiss the ephemera of cognition, have a special agenda -- to understand why context and culture controls us as much as it does. Writing researchers and educators may be quite happy to acknowledge such forces, but their agenda is not to explicate or reify them. Rather it is to ask where, within this looming landscape of internalized forces we do not control, does human agency and

intention insert itself? And when it does, how does it do so?[49]

The fact is, social constructionist approaches in general remain extremely vague about the role of individual cognition in overcoming the constraints of social and linguistic determinism. Flower cites peer response as a case in point.

> Peer response places writing in a teacher-designed community of response. If we see writing as a social, context-driven event, this instructional move makes sense because it seems to enact our image of writing as a social, cultural process, happening within a classroom community. But what is happening to the cognition of individual students in this instructional context?... It seems naive to assume that the cognitive processes we desire will naturally follow from the social situations we engineer.[50]

The excessive claims of peer response advocates (of which I nonetheless consider myself one) is a subject in itself (and one which I take up in the next chapter). So it is enough for now to note the accuracy of Flower's critique. In "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'," Kenneth Bruffee advances what is to date the most ambitious attempt at a theoretical rationale for the alleged "necessity" of peer collaboration. Yet, although he refers repeatedly to knowledge-making as a process of "socially justifying belief" within a "community of knowledgeable peers," he really says very little about what that process entails, either in the minds of individuals or, for that matter, communally (though the little he does say[51] helps). Moreover, his rationale for why peer collaboration will

stimulate students to "socially justify belief" is based on the highly dubious claim that reflective thought is not only the **product** of social conversation but is **functionally** the same. In support of this claim, Bruffee, like Bizzell, alludes to Vygotsky's conception of the relationship of thought and language, somehow missing the fact that for Vygotsky not only is the "dialectic" of thought and language a two-way street (neither being the product of the other) but "[i]nner speech is not the interior aspect of external speech -- it is a function in itself."[52] Here we see another example of the tendency of social constructionists to emphasize sociolinguistic context at the expense of an account of individual cognition.

One of the strongest theoretical statements to come from the social constructionist camp of the relationship between sociolinguistic context and individual cognition comes from Berlin.[53] In order to grasp his model it is helpful to visualize it schematically. (What follows is my own representation; I do not guarantee its correspondence to Berlin's conception.) Picture three equally interlocking circles (the Ballantine beer logo) surrounded by two concentric circles. The interlocking circles represent the individual self, the material conditions of reality, and the social group or discourse community in which the individual is functioning. The curved triangle where the circles intersect represents knowledge. The smaller of the two concentric circles represents language -- the medium through

which the three interacting elements and their interactions, including

knowledge, are understood and constructed. And the larger circle

represents the social-historical moment in which all the other

components are situated.

Berlin describes his conception as follows (I quote him at length

so that readers may judge for themselves the accuracy of my

representation):

> [T]he real is located in a relationship that involves the
> dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse
> community (social group) in which the observer is
> functioning, and the material conditions of existence.
> Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can
> only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all
> three come together... Most important, this dialectic is
> grounded in language: the observer, the discourse
> community, and the material conditions of existence are
> all verbal constructs. This does not mean that the three
> do not exist apart from language: they do. This does
> mean that we cannot talk and write about them --
> indeed, we cannot know them -- apart from language.
> Furthermore, since language is a social phenomenon that
> is a product of a particular historical moment, our notions
> of the observing self, the communities in which the self
> functions, and the very structures of the material world
> are social constructions -- all specific to a particular time
> and culture. These social constructions are thus inscribed
> in the very language we are given to inhabit in
> responding to our experience.[54]

In elaborating on this initial description, Berlin anticipates the

objection that the model leaves little room for individual agency.

> The self is always a creation of a particular historical and
> cultural moment. This is not to say that individuals do
> not ever act as individuals. It is to assert, however, that
> they never act with complete freedom. As Marx
> indicated, we make our own histories, but we do not
> make them just as we wish.[55]

He goes on to explain that while consciousness is constrained by the material conditions of reality, it can also affect that reality, but that it always does so through the interpretive framework of one or another discourse community. At the same time, however, according to Berlin, communities themselves can be affected not only by the constraints imposed on them by material reality but by individuals as well: "The community in turn is influenced by the subject and the material conditions of the moment."[56]

The passage thus suggests a conception of self, material reality, and discourse community as more or less equivalent forces in a single dynamic interaction. It thus comes as some surprise (though not really, given his initial description -- the one I have tried to represent pictorially) that his next step is to situate this entire interaction within the constraints imposed by socially-determined language-using practices.

> Thus, the perceiving subject, the discourse communities of which the subject is a part, and the material world itself are all the constructions of an historical discourse, of the ideological formulations inscribed in the language-mediated practical activity of a particular time and place.[57]

Exactly what Berlin intends here is a bit confusing. On the one hand he ascribes to individuals the ability to affect the discourse communities to which they belong. On the other he declares that process itself to be constrained by socially-determined language-using practices, as if to imply that some larger sociolinguistic force

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supervenes not only over the individual and her interactions with material reality but over the individual's interactions with sociolinguistic context as well.

> Knowledge, after all, is an historically bound **social fabrication** rather than an eternal and invariable phenomenon located in some uncomplicated repository -- in the material object or in the subject or in the **social realm.**[58]

One is led to wonder not only how knowledge can be a social fabrication without residing in the social realm but just what the producer of knowledge is in this scheme. Is knowledge a product of the interaction of individual consciousnesses, the knowledge communities to which individuals belong, and the material conditions of reality? Or is it the product of socially-determined language using practices? Or is it the result of some larger, historically-bound sociolinguistic force? And if there is such a force, of what is it comprised if not of the interaction of individuals, the multitude of knowledge communities to which individuals belong, and the material conditions of reality (of which, it should be pointed out, people, social groups, and written marks and spoken sounds are all a part)? And, concerning the issue at hand, what exactly is the role of individual cognition in this scheme? Berlin should be given his due for articulating a model which raises such difficult and thought-provoking questions; unlike many Marxian influenced accounts, his is no simple

diatribe against the inequities and lack of political sophistication of conventional approaches. But the above questions still remain.

As part of his effort to offer a constructive alternative to cognitive-based models, Berlin cites the critical learning approach of Ira Shor[59] as the pedagogical manifestation of his social-epistemic rhetoric. In so doing, he again attempts to come to terms with what Flower refers to as "the troubled issue of intentionality[:] Are writers 'determined' by their situation, or do they 'control' the meanings they make...?" Berlin writes:

> Shor ... situates the individual within social processes, examining in detail the interferences to critical thought that would enable "students to be their own agents for social change, their own creators of democratic culture"...[60]
>
> The self ... is regarded as the product of a dialectical relationship between the individual and the social, each given significance by the other. Self-autonomy and self-fulfillment are thus possible not through becoming detached from the social, but through resisting those social influences that alienate and disempower, doing so, moreover, in and through social activity.[61]

While I appreciate this stressing of the need to develop consciousness through social activity, what puzzles me about this scheme is the ambiguous account of individual agency it advances. Who or what is resisting these interferences to critical thought? What is it that these negative social influences are alienating from what? In overcoming these influences what agency is at work? What is the difference between detachment and resistance? How do we know the

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difference between "false consciousness" and "liberated" consciousness -- i.e., how do we know we are resisting -- if not through some form of detachment? Throughout this exegesis Berlin seems to affirm the capacities of individuals to achieve self-consciousness and to act autonomously at the same time that he denies them.

Like so much Marxist-based theory, what this entire account seems to demonstrate is the inherent contradiction of its own determinism:

(1)   Social arrangements determine ideology.

(2)   Only a change in ideology can alter social arrangements.

(3)   Therefore, while change through human agency should be impossible, it is possible.

It would seem that in declaring the ability of individuals to resist the influence of social and linguistic context, Berlin essentially replaces the premise that cognition is conditioned by context with the premise that it is only conditioned by context to some extent. If such is the case, what remains unclear is the basis on which individual agency rests -- one of the very things Flower attempts to explain with her postulation of universal structures of reasoning.

The Indeterminacy of Context:

The Intercontextuality of Cognition

Whatever Berlin's actual intent, one thing remains evident: social constructionists reject the idea of universal cognitive structures which can be formulated and taught outside particular sociolinguistic contexts. It is just as evident, however, that they do want to acknowledge the role of individual cognition in mediating context, just as Flower wants to acknowledge the role of social context in generating and organizing ideas and forming purposes. The problem is that neither has given an account of how cognition and context interact that satisfies the other.

There is, however, a way of looking at the interplay of cognition and context which unites in a single interactive theory the full range of ways in which context cues cognition as well as the role of cognition in mediating context. It begins from the premise, common to both cognitive process and social constructionist frameworks, that all encounters between cognition and context are mediated (to whatever extent) by community-generated, language-based interpretive frameworks. What neither social constructionists nor cognitive theorists seem to have fully considered -- though they both touch on it at times -- is that these interpretive frameworks are themselves indeterminate, as are the knowledge and discourse

communities to which they are connected. It is within the context of this indeterminacy that cognition takes on its mediating function -- not as a formal problem solving agent, but as an agent of the reconstructive integration of otherwise discrete and indeterminate ways of interpreting experience.

As social constructionists frequently point out, some community-generated interpretive framework always stands between the individual and experience. "'[R]eality,'" writes Bizzell, "only makes sense when organized by the interpretive conventions of a discourse community."[62] But the fact is, there is no such thing as a definitive interpretive framework which can cope with all the permutations of experience. Anomalies are always present; what makes sense in one context falls short in another. As a result, no individual subscribes to only one interpretive framework but has present within her interpretive repertoire a multitude of frameworks. Inevitably, what are otherwise discrete frameworks for interpreting experience come into conflict, and the individual must negotiate some sort of resolution, either by adopting one or the other of these frameworks, or by constructing a more encompassing framework which integrates the elements of the previous ones.

Something like this same process goes on at the social level. Each person's experience is necessarily unique, and no two individuals construe their experience in exactly the same way. Although the ways

in which people interpret experience are learned -- not only from other people but from the dominant culture -- there is no single framework which can successfully explain all aspects of experience, just as there is no person who is subject to the influence of only one framework. The dominant ideology of a society is a powerful force, but even sociolinguistic determinists acknowledge that resistance is possible. To get at the source of that resistance, however, it is not necessary to postulate some innate capacity for self-consciousness which transcends cultural and historical conditioning (though in the last analysis I personally don't see how we could resist that conditioning otherwise). All that's needed is the recognition that no interpretive framework is omnipotent or omnipresent. Ideological conditioning in some degree is a fact of life, one which we must constantly resist. Fortunately, the possibility that any single ideological framework could be everywhere at once or seem to provide all the answers is unlikely (as long as we don't assume that it's too unlikely). In short, indeterminacy is a pervasive characteristic of experience -- one, moreover, that we should embrace.

In an effort to make sense of this indeterminacy and to control the flow of experience, individuals come together and seek to construct ways of talking that they can agree on. But these attempts also fall short, with the result that no discourse community is monolithic: no two people within the same community subscribe to

exactly the same interpretive framework, nor do they as individuals

subscribe to only one framework or belong to only that one

community. In fact, not only is there no one-to-one correspondence

between discourse communities and interpretive frameworks but

neither are there any standard conditions for defining any discourse

community as such. And any community that could establish such

conditions would have ceased to be an instrument of human inquiry

and growth. The term "discourse community" is in fact a

convenience, a linguistic and interpretive construct. It refers to an

approximate network of people who have agreed to use certain

interpretive and language-using frameworks, even while recognizing

that there can never be total agreement about those frameworks, and

that their whole purpose in coming together is eventually to supplant

those frameworks with more comprehensive ones.

Human experience is thus saturated with indeterminacies which

we negotiate by means of a multitude of interpretive frameworks

which are themselves indeterminate. If we accept this premise (which

I take to be the basis of John Dewey's pragmatic theory of inquiry,[83]

as well as the foundation of Richard Rorty's "edifying" philosophy[84]),

then the only possible role cognition can have as a producer of

knowledge is that of constructing mediating connections between

what are otherwise discrete interpretive frameworks (what Rorty calls

"hermeneutics"[85]). Reflective inquiry and discourse, according to this

scheme, are the deliberate attempt to construct just such integrating connections -- the "ideal" aim being to construct a comprehensive picture of how this multitude of interpretive frameworks hangs together.[66] Cognitivism and social constructionism thus become two different perspectives for viewing the same intercontextual process: the ongoing construction and reconstruction of ever more integrated knowledge systems. This process entails not so much the application of general cognitive strategies or the utilization of determinate (or "normal") discourse conventions as it does the intercontextual reconstruction and integration of otherwise discrete and indeterminate ways of interpreting experience, what is sometimes called "abnormal discourse."

Educational Implications

Flower and Bizzell both remark on institutional failures to provide the necessary conditions for students to respond appropriately to college writing assignments:

> Academics are, perhaps, too ready to assume that such operations as 'describe' or 'analyze' are self-evident, when in fact they have meanings specific to the academic discourse community and specific to disciplines within that community... To help poor writers, then, we need to explain that their writing takes place within a community, and to explain what the community's conventions are.[67]

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> Teachers ... hope the holy words of college assignments (e.g., 'analyze,' 'interpret') will cue the bundle of intellectual maneuvers every student should have learned. But 'transfer' is a perennial problem in education in part because the context of a new class may fail to cue a student to use strategies which are appropriate, but were learned elsewhere in a different context... [C]ould meta-knowledge and awareness of one's own process play a role in expanding the cues students perceive and the options they entertain?[68]

In the passage above, Bizzell proposes to rectify the problems of poor and inexperienced writers by explaining to them the discourse conventions and concerns of the relevant knowledge communities. Flower's solution is to provide them with general problem solving strategies and inventional heuristics which would help students respond to situational cues. Bizzell seems to think that if students are first made familiar with the conventions and concerns of discourse communities, they will then know how to respond to the problems of those communities. Flower seems to think that if students are made aware of their own cognitive options, they will then know how to apply those options in specific situations.

Both recommendations miss that the problem of inappropriate student responses lies not so much in students' lack of specific knowledge or general cognitive skills (although either lack can certainly be a sufficient cause for failure. (I prefer to think of "cognitive skills," incidentally, as "intellectual habits," as opposed to some kind of "developmental structures.")) Rather, "student" failure lies more in the fact that the assignments in such cases have no

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particular meaning for students themselves. The task is prescribed by an outside agent, the teacher, who tries to provide students with the necessary background and tools to cope with it. Such assignments fail students because they do not elicit doubt about an indeterminacy which the students themselves perceive; they only produce doubt about how to attend to the task at hand. Discourse conventions and problem solving strategies thus become tools for completing tasks assigned by someone else, rather than means for making sense of the indeterminacies of students' own interpretations of experience.

Meaningful writing doesn't come from discourse communities and their conventions. Nor does it come from problem solving strategies and heuristics. It comes from mind deliberately making sense of the indeterminacies of experience. To enjoin someone to "analyze," "discuss," or "interpret" some allegedly problematic situation about which she has not herself experienced a state of doubt is misguided. Neither making students aware that other people think something is problematic nor making them aware of their own options in solving such problems is going to make students adopt such problems as their own. The difficulties of poor writers aren't overcome by teaching these things. They are solved by designing assignments which induce in students themselves doubt about how to interpret experience, thus compelling students to construct their own solutions. Such a method requires that we focus our attention not on

individual cognition or sociolinguistic context but on the interaction of the two. In short, it means that we must attend to the ways in which the indeterminacies of academic discourse lead students to construct their own interpretive frameworks through the mutual reconstruction of their own active belief systems and the discourse conventions which they encounter.

A key principle here thus becomes that all learning entails abnormal discourse, even the learning of normal discourse conventions, a point upon which Bruffee remarks in promoting his notion of collaborative learning:

> [E]ntering an existing knowledge community involves a process of negotiation. Followed to its logical conclusion this principle implies that education is not a rite a passage in which students passively become initiated into an institution that is monolithic and unchanging. It implies that the means by which students learn to negotiate this entry ... models how knowledge is generated, how it changes and grows.[69]

"Abnormal discourse is therefore necessary to learning," Bruffee later goes on to say, although it cannot be taught directly.

> What we can teach are the tools of normal discourse... To leave openings for change, however, we must not teach these tools as universals. We must teach ... in such a way that, when necessary, students can turn to abnormal discourse in order to undermine their own and other people's reliance on ... normal discourse. We must teach the use of these tools in such a way that students can set them aside ... for the purpose of generating new knowledge, for the purpose, that is, of reconstituting knowledge communities in more satisfactory ways.[70]

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While I am in basic agreement with Bruffee on these points, there is a complication here which he doesn't seem to have fully considered. If students can only learn the conventions of normal discourse by means of abnormal discourse, then they cannot be expected to do so by means of normal discourse, although that is what Bruffee, like Bizzell, seems to be proposing. What distinguishes Bruffee's recommendations from Bizzell's, however, (though I'm quite sure she would agree with him on this point -- and rightly so) is his suggestion that normal discourse should be taught "in such a way" that it can become abnormal discourse. For Bruffee, that way is "collaborative learning." But collaborative learning, as he describes it, is an extremely vague notion ranging anywhere from students talking together about their writing to the very process of thought itself. Bruffee blurs the meaningful distinctions which could be drawn between these manifestations for the sake of advancing his dubious argument that students must work together in collaborative groups in order to embody the principle that knowledge-making is a social activity. Unfortunately, what gets shortchanged is an account of the role of cognition as the intercontextual mediator of otherwise discrete and indeterminate ways of interpreting experience, the sort of account which I have tried to give here.

What an intercontextual account of cognition suggests is that the means to teaching normal discourse so that it can become

abnormal discourse is, in fact, abnormal discourse itself (of which peer collaboration is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition[71]), the reason being that all discourse communities are themselves indeterminate. What makes them communities is that the people who write and speak within them are deliberately trying to negotiate an integrated picture of how their otherwise diverse and indeterminate ways of constructing experience hang together. That process may involve, among other things, direct challenges to another member's interpretations and choice of language, but it is still driven by a desire to communicate and negotiate an alternative vision.

What such an account also suggests, then, is that more important than the particular conventions students learn and even the particular interpretations they construct are the active habits of reconstructive discourse and inquiry they acquire. In other words, more than introducing students to new discourse communities, we want to instill in them the desire and means to negotiate such connections themselves as an ongoing function in their lives. And we do this chiefly by demonstrating to students -- through challenges to their active, social belief structures -- the desirability of ongoing, reflective inquiry and discourse.

The teacher's job is thus not so much that of providing problem solving strategies or explaining discourse conventions as it is of creating a learning environment that induces in students doubt about

what to believe or do. Since reflective thinking and discourse do not originate in social contexts or in individual cognition but in the interaction of the two, there are two conditions of such an environment. The first is that the indeterminacies with which teachers present students be indeterminacies which students themselves feel. Since no two people construct their experience in precisely the same way, this necessarily requires some flexibility on the teacher's part. Teachers must themselves be students of their students' cognitive processes -- of the ways in which students construct and reconstruct their own interpretive and language-using frameworks. Formal processing models can play an important role here, but they should not obscure the fact that it is the unique ways in which individuals manage the particular elements of specific rhetorical contexts and their own prior experience that is the greater concern. More important still are the intellectual and communicative habits which students acquire in the process of negotiating these constructions.

Fortunately, although the ways in which individuals construct their experience are ultimately unique, general patterns do exist, and individuals can be roughly categorized according to learning style, interests, background, etc. I'm not proposing any absolute categorization. I'm merely pointing out that with teaching experience comes the recognition of similarities in the ways students learn, and in the ways we can facilitate that learning. For example, in challenging

students to negotiate their way between competing interpretive frameworks, we invariably see that some students form strong opinions without giving due consideration to alternative viewpoints, while others give proper consideration to alternatives but are unable or unwilling to formulate an interpretation of their own. Generally speaking, what we try to do is find ways to get the first type of student to see the shortcomings of their interpretations and the second type of student the strengths of theirs. Both strategies depend on maneuvering students into positions where they experience doubt about what to believe or do.

This brings us to the second condition of a successful learning environment. In order that students might develop the ability to share their interpretations and purposes with others, it is not enough to present them with indeterminacies only they perceive. The context of learning must be social; it must involve the shared concerns and purposes of some community or communities. Peer collaboration in its many forms (peer response, coauthoring, workshopping, etcetera) can play an important role here. Its use, however, should not obscure the fact that it isn't the social arrangements per se which are thought provoking; it is the interaction of a structuring mind with a context which that mind perceives as indeterminate. Discourse necessarily involves the needs of some community, but that community need not be the other students in a class. Indeed (as I argue in the next

chapter), it is far more important that students be exposed to the concerns of discourse communities beyond the scope represented in the immediate needs and interests of their peers. It is important that they see the ways in which their own habits of thinking and language-using can be situated within those communities, and that they begin building their own unique interpretive frameworks through the mutual reconstruction of those larger communities' frameworks and their own active belief systems.

The same holds true for the teaching of discourse conventions. Explaining the conventions of alternative discourse communities to students plays a role in their learning to negotiate their way within and between those communities. But it should not obscure the fact that students must ultimately negotiate the connections themselves. Students learn that writing takes place in communities by reading and writing within and for those communities, and they learn the conventions the same way. Although explaining comes into play, students learn conventions of writing and thinking chiefly by trying them out and revising them as necessary. That "necessity" arises from giving them assignments which require students to write within a social context that elicits doubt in students' own minds about what to believe or do. Again, the key principle here is that it is neither context nor cognition that elicits reflective activity but the interaction of the two.

As long as this principle is deliberately respected and systematically attended to, there is really no limit to the ways in which students can be taught to think and write. Some varied examples of instructional approaches which attempt, in my mind, to do so include Berthoff's use of assignments which force students to reevaluate their perceptions in the light of new contexts,[72] Gage's use of enthymeme as a tool for making sense of discrete viewpoints in a stasis, or indeterminate rhetorical situation,[73] Annette Rottenberg's employment of the Toulmin model (which is essentially enthymemic) to specific social issues which students find compelling,[74] James Reither and Douglas Vipond's nurturing of reflective inquiry and discourse within a scholarly field through collaborative projects,[75] Kenneth Dowst's epistemic approach,[76] Charles Kay Smith's rhetoric of reperception,[77] and Marilyn Coopers' ecological approach.[78] Indeed, most any approach that I have read about can work; what distinguishes the ones I have just mentioned, however, is that they all make, or speak of the need to make, specific provisions for an indeterminate rhetorical situation which fosters intercontextual thinking and writing, rather than leaving such a situation to chance. They all acknowledge, in short, that learning can only occur where there is the interaction of individual cognition and social context.

Near the beginning of this essay I wrote that cognition can no more be disembedded from context than context can be understood as determining cognition. The reason this is so is that cognition and context produce one another. Context cannot determine cognition because, as a human and social artifact, it is itself indeterminate; cognition cannot be disembedded from context because, as a product of social interaction, it is itself intercontextual. In a very real sense, cognition and context are the same thing; cognitivism and constructionism are but two ways of looking at the same interactive process -- a process about which a great deal more needs to be said.

<u>Notes</u>

1. Linda Flower, "Cognition, Context, and Theory Building," <u>College Composition and Communication</u>, 40 (1989): 282-311; Linda Flower and John R. Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," <u>College Composition and Communication</u>, 32 (1981): 365-387.

2. Barry M. Kroll, "Social-Cognitive Ability and Writing Performance: How Are They Related?" <u>Written Communication</u>, 2 (1985): 293-305.

3. Richard L. Larson, "The Writer's Mind: Recent Research and Unanswered Questions," in J.N. Hays, P.A. Roth, J.R. Ramsey, and R.D. Foulke, eds., <u>The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking</u>. (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1983), pp. 239-251.

4. Sondra Perl, "Understanding Composing," <u>College Composition and Communication</u>, 31 (1980): 363-369.

5. Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," <u>College Composition and Communication</u>, 31 (1980): 378-388.

6. David Bartholomae, "Inventing the University," in Mike Rose, ed., <u>When A Writer Can't Write</u> (New York: Guilford, 1985), pp. 134-165.

7. James A. Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," <u>College English</u>, 50 (1988): 477-494.

8. Ann E. Berthoff, <u>Forming/Thinking/Writing</u> (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden, 1978); "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning, and Higher Order Reasoning," <u>College English</u>, 46 (1984): 743-755.

9. Patricia Bizzell, "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing," <u>PRE/TEXT</u>, 3 (1982): 213-243.

10. Kenneth A. Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" <u>College English</u>, 46 (1984): 635-652.

11. Flower, "Cognition," p. 284.

12. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 488.

13. Flower, "Cognition."

14. See, e.g., Bizzell, "Cognition"; Berlin, "Rhetoric."

15. Flower and Hayes, "A Cognitive."

16. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 481; Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 220; Larson, "The Writer's Mind," p. 245.

17. Flower and Hayes, "A Cognitive," p. 367-8.

18. Flower and Hayes, "A Cognitive," p. 386.

19. Ann E. Berthoff, "The Problem of Problem Solving," College Composition and Communication, 22 (1971): 237-242.

20. Janice Lauer, "Heuristics and Composition," College Composition and Communication, 21 (1970): 396-404.

21. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 235.

22. Berthoff, "Is Teaching."

23. Berthoff, "Is Teaching," p. 745.

24. Flower, "Cognition," pp. 295-309.

25. Flower, "Cognition," p. 300.

26. Flower, "Cognition," p. 303.

27. Flower, "Cognition," p. 307.

28. Frank J. D'Angelo, A Conceptual Theory of Rhetoric (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop, 1975).

29. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 489.

30. Richard Rorty, Consequences of Pragmatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 166.

31. Flower, "Cognition," p. 283.

32. Flower, "Cognition," pp. 287-288.

33. Flower, "Cognition," p. 284.

34. Flower, "Cognition," p. 287.

35. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 231.

36. John Gage, "Towards an Epistemology of Composition," Journal of Advanced Composition, 2 (1981): 4.

37. Gage, "Towards an Epistemology," p. 6.

38. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 223.

39. Bizzell, "Cognition," pp. 223-224.

40. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 224.

41. Lev S. Vygotsky, Thought and Language, trans., Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Boston: MIT Press, 1962), pp. 51, 57; Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes, eds., Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 24.

42. See Vygotsky, Thought, pp. 138-148.

43. Vygotsky, Thought, p. 146.

44. Vygotsky, Thought, p. 149.

45. Vygotsky, Thought, pp. 96-97, 102.

46. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 217.

47. Flower, "Cognition," p. 283.

48. Flower, "Cognition," pp. 291-292.

49. Flower, "Cognition," p. 292.

50. Flower, "Cognition," pp. 285-286.

51. Bruffee, "conversation," p. 646.

52. Vygotsky, Thought, p. 149.

53. Berlin, "Rhetoric."

54. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 488.

55. Berlin "Rhetoric," p. 489.

56. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 489.

57. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 489.

58. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 489, emphases added.

59. Ira Shor, <u>Critical Teaching and Everyday Life</u> (Boston: South End Press, 1980).

60. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 490.

61. Berlin, "Rhetoric," p. 491.

62. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 232.

63. John Dewey, <u>Logic: The Theory of Inquiry</u> (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1938).

64. Richard Rorty, <u>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

65. Rorty, <u>Philosophy</u>, pp. 317-318.

66. Rorty, <u>Consequences</u>, p. 169.

67. Bizzell, "Cognition," p. 230.

68. Flower, "Cognition," p. 288.

69. Bruffee, "Conversation," p. 647.

70. Bruffee, "Conversation," p. 648.

71. Very few advocates of collaborative learning seem to understand this point. For a refreshing exception, see James A. Reither and Douglas Vipond, "Writing as Collaboration," <u>College English</u>, 51 (1989): 855-867.

72. Berthoff, <u>Forming</u>.

73. Gage, "Towards an Epistemology."

74. Annette T. Rottenberg, <u>Elements of Argument</u>, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1988).

75. Reither and Vipond, "Collaboration."

76. Kenneth Dowst, "The Epistemic Approach: Writing, Knowing, and Learning," in Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland, eds., <u>Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition</u> (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980), pp. 65-85.

77. Charles K. Smith, <u>Styles and Structures: Alternative Approaches to College Writing</u> (New York: Norton, 1974).

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CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL RESERVATIONS
ABOUT COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

University faculty from across the disciplines are increasingly

turning to "collaborative learning" as an alternative to more traditional

modes of instruction. The term itself denotes a general pedagogical

style which emphasizes cooperation -- either among students or

between students and faculty -- as the basic mode of learning.[1]

Founded on the premise that learning is fundamentally a social

process, collaborative learning seeks to replicate that process in the

classroom. In practice, it can take the form of small-group exercises,

collaborative research projects, peer-review methods, cooperative

course development, or reconfigured lecture formats -- to name some

of the more widely used techniques.[2]

I have no intention here of raising the usual doubts about

collaborative learning -- that it usurps the teacher's authority, that it

sacrifices coverage of course content in favor of student involvement,

that it asks of students more initiative and commitment than they can

give, that I've tried it and it hasn't worked. During the two years that

I worked as an instructional consultant advising university faculty and

teaching assistants from a range of disciplines, I heard these and

similar objections many times. Yet I probably recommended that

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teachers try making their classes more collaborative as often as any other piece of advice. I personally developed confidence in the effectiveness of collaborative techniques during a six year stint teaching freshman composition in a university writing program noted for its advocacy of peer group methods. So when I raise my doubts about collaborative learning, I do so as a proponent of its techniques but as someone who is nevertheless reluctant to jump on the collaborative bandwagon.

My reservations about collaborative learning stem primarily from too many of its proponents ascribing to it educative powers it doesn't necessarily possess. In saying this I do not mean to deny those powers which it does possess but merely to suggest that we have not yet made an adequate effort to ask what those powers might in fact be. Far too often the objections which I listed at the outset of this essay are presented as the only possible ones, as if the only real grounds for questioning collaboration as a mode of learning are that one isn't comfortable with it or that one doesn't get it. Such an assumption leads to treating all objections as something to be refuted rather than as possible guides to further inquiry.

Unsuccessful efforts to teach collaboratively, for instance, are often diagnosed as having neglected to provide adequate direction or structure. But it is peer collaboration and not the type of direction or structure employed to which good results, when they do occur, are

frequently attributed. In research circles this type of inductive mistake is known as the confounding of variables, though one needn't be an empiricist to see the error: unless one controls the variables (and in this case I'm not sure we can), there is no reliable way of inferring which results follow from which technique.

The truth is I have a good deal of faith in teachers' ability to know if what they're doing is working or not. But when I hear colleagues persist in extolling the virtues of any particular technique over all others, then I begin to worry. I'm all for playing what Peter Elbow calls the "believing game,"[3] but to play it exclusively with one's own convictions is not what I think he had in mind. The virtue of suspending disbelief is that it leads to new ideas. But to increase the power of those ideas we need to play the doubting game -- to entertain objections, to explore limitations, to seek counterexamples, and so on. Indeed, doing so is necessary to the believing game itself, as new ideas do not arise in a vacuum but can only do so in the context of some doubt.

By no means am I saying, then, that there's anything wrong with allowing, encouraging, and even requiring students to work in groups. On the contrary, I believe there are good pedagogical reasons for doing so. What I am saying is that I don't think we yet know what those reasons are as well as we might think we do. Without a clear understanding of what collaborative learning does and, just as

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importantly, does not do, we lack a coherent sense of which techniques to employ, at which points in the learning process, and with which students. Rather than being viewed as objections, then, my reservations should be taken as part of a more general effort to increase our understanding and control of collaborative pedagogy.

Proponents of collaborative learning generally attribute to it three related learning outcomes: increased responsibility for learning, the understanding that knowledge is socially constructed, and the development of higher order reasoning skills (by which is meant primarily the ability to construct and negotiate alternative interpretations of experience both within and between established knowledge/discourse communities). My own experience and ruminations lead me to a more cautious position: while collaborative techniques are excellent motivators and promoters of intellectual tolerance, the development of higher order reasoning in socially significant contexts depends far more on the learning task and how it is structured than on face-to-face interactions with peers. Peer collaboration in its many forms is extremely useful in the teaching of reflective, dialogical thinking. But far more important is a learning environment which is structured so as to sustain and regulate the interplay of doubt and belief in students' reasoning. While collaborative techniques almost invariably enhance such an environment, there is nothing about them per se which provides one.

Neither do they offer the best kind of practice in constructing and negotiating alternative interpretations of experience, though they do provide a useful context in which students can experiment with unfamiliar interpretive and linguistic frameworks.

Personal Reservations

I arrived at these notions by two related paths. The first is my own experience as a student and teacher in various collaborative settings. The second is through my theoretical explorations of college teaching and learning in my home discipline of educational philosophy. Though the two accounts overlap, I'll begin with the first.

My Experience as a Student

My earliest recollection of collaborative learning is as a teenager in a progressive Long Island high school in the late 1960's. At the first meeting of our eighth grade science class, Mr. Marganoff announced that we would spend the next nine months working in groups: conducting experiments, formulating hypotheses, analyzing results, and coming to some sort of consensus about our conclusions. Our first task was to identify fifteen minerals on the basis of their various properties. Though there was only one "right answer," I don't

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recall being graded on it. We didn't hand in any overly formal presentation, either. What I do remember is the spirit of cooperation and friendly competition that permeated the room like the late morning sun. When the Apollo mission landed on the moon a short time later, I don't think a single person from that class missed that this was a shared accomplishment, one made possible by a massive group effort, and one in which we felt we had almost played a part.

Collaborative learning made its way into the English curriculum, too. I remember the year it happened: 1970. One semester Mr. Blake was lecturing to us about images of light and darkness in <u>Hamlet</u>; the next we were reading Jerry Farber's <u>The Student as Nigger</u>,[4] forming collaborative groups from which to launch related inquiries of our own choosing, and convening as a class to "rap" about our ongoing explorations. This class was anything but the "authoritarian-individualist" experience described by Kenneth Bruffee in "The Way Out."[5] Indeed, to paraphrase something which John Dewey once overheard in a child-centered classroom in the 1920's, my attitude towards this class can be summed up by the following question which I once put to Mr. Blake: "Do we have to work in groups today?" (Dewey's tidbit is a good deal more quotable: "Do we have to do what we want today?") I didn't learn much in the way of content that year. And I didn't learn much about collaboration as a form of knowledge making, either. What I did get out of the class I got "on

my own," that is, without much input from my peers or teacher. In the vacuum left by a teacher who saw all external structure as a form of coercion, I spent my time exploring Eastern philosophy, an area for which I still hold much interest.

I'm led to wonder what the difference between these two experiences is. Perhaps it was the relative lack of structure or guidance provided by the English teacher. Or it could have been the absence of any specific task in his class. While I think these are both appropriate answers, I think the most distinguishing feature between the two classes was the deficiency in the English class -- for me -- of any shared sense of purpose with the other people in the class. I can remember other class members enjoying and looking forward to their collaborations, both inside and outside of school. My collaborations, on the other hand, were with people removed from me in time and space. I wasn't able to converse with Alan Watts, Erich Fromm, or Herman Hesse about the differences between their interpretations of Eastern religious thought, but neither did I miss the point that their conjectures either involved or implied ongoing interactions with and interpretations of the works and lives of others: Confucius, Lao Tzu, Gautama Buddha, etc. I wonder, though, just to whom I owe this realization: Mr. Marganoff or Mr. Blake?

In college I had a somewhat different experience, one which is again quite the opposite of the sort which Bruffee and Elbow write

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about in their own lives. For them, the college classroom was usually a teacher-dominated arena, involving students as either passive recipients or intellectual adversaries competing for recognition. (Interestingly enough, and I'm quite serious on this point, the main places where I've had such experiences have been college English classes.) Collaborative learning, with its non-authoritarian philosophy and underlying spirit of cooperation, is a much needed remedy to the excesses of this top-down, competitive approach. As a student of philosophy and education, however, I took dozens of courses which employed collaborative techniques, primarily small groups in which we would interpret passages and books, respond to each others' writing, and negotiate group conclusions with the rest of the class.

What's interesting about this experience is that while I much preferred the collaborative classes to the authoritarian-competitive ones (and I enjoyed the ones which encouraged non-competitive, independent work the most -- more on that in a moment), I often found the collaborative classes extremely frustrating. What I enjoyed were the face-to-face interactions and the exposure to other people's ideas and experiences. What frustrated me was not the lack of closure one might expect but the premature closure which often resulted from the undiscriminating acceptance of "agreeable" ideas and the equally undiscriminating rejection of "disagreeable" ideas.

I couldn't count, for example, the number of times I listened to other students criticize B.F. Skinner without any serious consideration of the obvious merits of his model. And in reading and discussing John Dewey, the way people would select those passages which confirmed their own thinking at the expense of those which did not never ceased (and never ceases) to amaze me. (There is, for instance, a good deal of behaviorism in Dewey which many people overlook. Indeed, Dewey[6] is much closer to Skinner than he is, say, to Carl Rogers.[7]) Though mine was often the only dissenting voice, I generally expressed my reservations -- a quality which endeared me to many teachers though not generally to other students. But as my opinions were only half-formed and I was seldom very articulate, my contributions had little impact on the group.

One might suggest that I could have used these experiences as opportunities better to formulate and articulate my ideas to the class. This is, after all, what we do as professionals in our fields, as well as members of the larger community of liberally educated persons generally. Although I often set out to do just that, what happened instead was that I found myself writing not to my peers in the class but to the community of people whose works we were reading. In other words, I found that my interest in articulating my views to my peers was for the most part supplanted by my desire to enter into the

written dialogue of the knowledge/discourse communities we were studying.

Collaboration was occurring, of course, but a great deal of it was internal. Indeed, whether I had been collaborating with my fellow students or not, the more involved I became in the intricacies of the interpretive frameworks I was studying, the more I found I needed to work privately. The ideas were simply too challenging, and my interactions with them too complex, for spontaneous, in-class negotiations to take me as far as I wanted to go. I participated in class discussions, of course, and enjoyed both hearing other people talk about their ideas and sharing my own. But even here, the people with the most interesting ideas were the ones who had put in a great deal of "individual" effort. For them, as for me, collaborating directly with the other people in the class simply wasn't a priority. Like my experience in Mr. Blake's English class, our collaborations were chiefly with people and communities removed in space and time. And the evidence seemed to indicate that it was collaborations such as these which were the most fruitful and instructive.

Some teachers did require group work, both in and out of class: joint written statements, oral reports, peer response on individual writing, and so on. While I went along with all this cheerfully enough, I never really got that enthused, and found that as time went on I increasingly did only what was required of me and no more. It was in

fact much easier to get enthused about what other people were doing when group work was not required. In such cases, collaboration evolved spontaneously, as a result of our individual involvement with and enthusiasm for the rhetorical situations in which we were engaged. In-class collective efforts may have been small -- recommending to someone an essay or book, giving somebody a photocopy of one of your own papers, suggesting that they go talk to a particular professor or fellow student, continuing class discussions in the hallway, cafeteria, dorm room, or parking lot -- but they were genuine. Above all, such collaborations evolved out of our individual and shared involvement with academic discourse communities beyond the classroom. The classroom was its own community, of course, but not the most compelling one. Indeed, it clearly depended on the larger knowledge/discourse communities of the academy.

Looking back over the whole of my undergraduate and graduate experience, I would say that the most important factors in my own learning were not the classroom interactions but rather my interest in the subject, the extent to which my instructors allowed me to pursue that interest, and the challenges to my own thinking and writing regarding that subject with which they provided me. The most important results were that I learned actively to use written sources to challenge my own thinking and writing and to enter into reconstructive dialogue with the knowledge/discourse communities

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that generated those sources. In my own educational experience, the role which face-to-face interactions with peers played in such learning was minimal.

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My Experience as a Teacher

As I said near the beginning of this essay, peer response is a major component in the writing program where I learned to teach. In structuring peer response groups, one of the first things I learned is that, in the absence of teacher supervision, students need advanced preparation and clear guidelines -- not simply to keep them on task but more importantly to help them know what sorts of things to look for and how to respond to them. By my second semester as a writing instructor, I had learned to frame questions on peer response sheets in ways that required substantive responses -- primarily by asking that responders make concrete citations and suggestions (e.g., "Cite at least one passage where the author could have used more detailed support." "Invent some hypothetical support of your own to illustrate what you mean").

Even more important than preparation and guidelines, however, were the assignments themselves. In my first semester teaching writing, I gave assignments which asked students to write about and generalize from personal experience. This "experiential approach"[8]

worked fine for the first essay; students could generally find something that both compelled themselves and evoked interest in others. But I was unhappy with the limited content and interaction with other viewpoints that such assignments elicited from students. What these assignments essentially did, I began to realize, was to send students in search of something to write about for the sake of meeting course requirements. So I started to develop assignments which from the start compelled students by challenging them to interact with alternative ways of seeing and talking about experience, especially the larger, more complex interpretive frameworks of academic knowledge/discourse communities.

With these assignments, student motivation increased, as did the quality of student writing. Students were motivated by the challenge of negotiating among competing interpretive frameworks, as well as their own success in handling those challenges. The only problem was that the peer response groups seemed to be increasingly ineffective. The level of knowledge construction and discursive exchange at which students were now operating demanded responses and challenges which the students could not generally provide each another without assistance. They started to rely more and more heavily on my written comments because they didn't know how to offer substantive comments themselves. And we all knew this was happening.

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A solution came from my observations of a senior colleague's course which employed teacher-facilitated peer groups. Instead of adding my written comments to the comments which student peers had written and discussed in class, I started facilitating, one at a time, small groups of four to six students in pre-arranged meetings. We substituted each of these meetings for two regular class meetings and my written comments. The trade-off was favorable on all counts. In the groups we covered five papers in seventy-five minutes (fifteen minutes per paper), and accomplished more than peer response and my written comments did put together.

The key was that I offered as little as possible in the way of suggestions or direct comments myself. Instead I asked questions which allowed students to comment in constructive ways which they couldn't quite conceive on their own. What made these questions different than the ones on peer response sheets was that they were paper-specific -- they dealt directly with the content and interpretive frameworks involved in the papers themselves. Thus, instead of responding to the questions "Where could the author better support her main argument?" or "Can you suggest an alternative interpretation she might have overlooked?" students could answer directly such questions as "What, according to Connie, is the connection between the fundamentalist stance on the issues of sex education and abortion?" "What do you think she is trying to say?" "Okay, but why

is it unfair to deny the right to an abortion to someone whom you have also denied sex education?" and "What would a pro-life advocate say?"

Another advantage I found to teacher-facilitated peer groups is that I could direct these response-eliciting questions to particular students on the basis of the kinds of contributions I knew they could make. Thus, a student with an opposing, or simply different, viewpoint could provide a challenge or explanation at a timely moment (in the above example, for instance, we could hear an actual pro-life stance). Or a more abstract thinker might be able to articulate where she saw a line of thought heading that the author might have missed. Or, conversely, I could ask a more concrete thinker if he understood a particular line of abstract thought, just where it might need clarifying, and what sorts of clarification he might suggest. And of course there was always the simple fact that I could, by these interventions, help outspoken students learn to listen, and quiet students to speak up, while still respecting their different learning styles.

The actual outcome of these meetings was never planned, and students remained the primary makers and negotiators of knowledge. But through my eliciting and modeling of content- and context-specific questions, students were learning to make and negotiate knowledge at a level beyond their normal discourse. They were learning not only how to ask questions of others in face-to-face situations, but also

how to develop their own lines of questioning in their own academically-situated writing. And they were getting to see the same principles of argument, support, development, and so on, worked out in different rhetorical contexts.

I continued to use non-facilitated groups in our regular class meetings. These were not, however, peer response groups but groups where I asked students to attend to such small tasks as generating supporting paragraphs for undeveloped ideas, summarizing in their own words the main point of a short piece of academic writing, or coming up with and generating support for objections to a controversial passage. A basic requirement, however, was always that students generate their own individual responses first. My reason for doing this was not only to make sure everybody participated and had something to contribute but also that they all took the time to reflect individually on the problem I had set.

The key to such activities, however, lay not so much in the collaboration as in the task. It had to be something which challenged students to interact with and negotiate between alternative interpretive frameworks. The collaboration, it seemed to me, met most of the students' need for social interaction, and even provided a limited kind of practice in negotiating alternative ways of seeing and talking. The main practice, however, went on internally and in writing. Students shared this writing, and the groups gave them more impetus

to write than merely writing for a teacher would have. But the key was that the assignments had to be good ones -- ones which challenged students to reconstruct their normal ways of thinking and writing. While the groups sometimes enhanced these challenges, by providing an array of interpretations, the challenges needed to come from the assignments themselves.

Even with good assignments, I found that collaborative learning was not for everyone. Some students were simply too "independent," as opposed to those who were basically "collaborative." I use these terms, incidentally, in the narrow sense -- to refer to the amount of interpersonal interaction students sought in learning situations -- for there is no denying that we are all collaborative learners in the broad sense of social constructors of knowledge. The question is how much do the two senses have to do with one another?

My experience as a teacher suggests one possible answer: It depends on students' individual learning preferences and their intellectual maturity. Let me make perfectly that I see these as quite distinct factors in student learning. Mature learners can be either independent or collaborative, just as immature learners can also be independent or collaborative. By "intellectual maturity," incidentally, I mean the quality of a person's intellectual and discourse habits, which are partly a function of biological development but are primarily a function of the quality of a person's total learning environment -- both

formal and informal. The index of maturity, it seems to me, is the extent to which students can create and take advantage of their own learning opportunities, as opposed to having to depend on someone else to do these things for them. Collaborative groups are one kind of planned learning environment.

I found that collaborative learning was, at times, inappropriate for all four types of students in this informal taxonomy, but particularly for immature collaborators and mature independents. Immature collaborators working together tended towards superficial agreement, and generally needed to practice complex negotiations with alternative viewpoints on their own. They were also in greater need of the more substantive challenges which a teacher versed in the concerns of the relevant knowledge/discourse communities could provide. Mature independents, on the other hand, like mature collaborators, already knew how to collaborate, but they did so internally. For whatever reasons, they tended to function better alone. The benefits of direct collaboration -- e.g., the diversity of viewpoints experienced, the immediate feedback provided, the feeling of commitment to the group, etcetera -- weren't as important for them, and could even be distracting. Such was my learning experience, and I recognized and respected these feelings in many of my students.

There were, on the other hand, those students who clearly benefitted from direct collaboration. Mature collaborators, for

instance, clearly found group work stimulating, though they didn't depend on it to the exclusion of careful independent thinking and writing. And immature independents clearly needed the exposure to alternative viewpoints, which face-to-face contact provided, to help them break out of their otherwise narrow intellectual and discursive tendencies. In both cases, however, the "need" for independent writing and thinking was always present, as was the "need" for a task or assignment which made connections between students' present tendencies and the knowledge/discourse communities of the academy. While collaborative group work usually helped to motivate students, increased their participation, and made the exposure to alternative viewpoints more direct, it was never, to my mind, "necessary" to college learning, though it was extremely helpful.

Philosophical Reservations

A close reading of the literature on collaborative learning reveals that what most distinguishes it from merely working in groups is that it entails the active negotiation of alternative ways of interpreting and talking about experience, precisely the characteristic which I have emphasized so far. What gives collaborative learning this distinction, its advocates stress, is its dependence on a task which demands that students arrive at some type of consensus, whether it be actual

agreement or an agreement to disagree. The task, in other words, must require students to negotiate among their own alternative ways of seeing and talking in an effort to construct this consensus.[9] Proponents of collaborative learning claim that in thus negotiating between alternative interpretive and linguistic frameworks, students not only learn that knowledge is socially constructed, but they also learn how socially to construct it, as well as to take more responsibility for doing so. These outcomes are achieved, ostensibly, through the combination of the collaborative group setting and a task requiring negotiation.

While proponents of collaborative learning thus acknowledge that group work is not a sufficient condition of learning to engage in the social construction of knowledge, they often argue that it is a necessary condition. In "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind',"[10] Kenneth Bruffee, the main spokesperson for collaborative learning, offers a lengthy rationalization for this necessity. Bruffee draws heavily on the work of Thomas Kuhn and Richard Rorty, both outspoken advocates of the widely accepted notion that knowledge is a social artifact constructed through a process of socially justifying belief. But the social justification of belief obviously requires no such thing as people working in face-to-face collaborative groups, and there is nothing in either Kuhn or Rorty to suggest otherwise. A community of people with shared ways of

construing and talking about experience is obviously necessary, but the process rarely goes on in the form of person-to-person exchanges.

Bruffee acknowledges this fact when he writes that "the particular thing I write every time" is not necessarily "something I have talked over with other people first, although I may well often do just that."[11] Yet he goes on to argue that, as teachers, "our task must involve engaging students in conversation among themselves at as many points in both the writing and the reading process as possible."[12] He expresses much the same idea again in "Writing and Reading as Collaborative or Social Acts,"[13] when he insists that "collaborative learning, which is the institutionalized counterpart of the social or collaborative nature of knowledge and thought, is not merely a helpful pedagogical technique incidental to writing. It is essential to writing."[14] What leads Bruffee to make these remarkable and seemingly unwarranted claims?

Much of the answer, unfortunately, lies in his equivocal use of the term "collaborative learning." On the one hand, he uses it to refer to the various pedagogical techniques normally associated with the term: peer editing, coauthoring, peer tutoring, etc. In this usage, "collaboration" denotes face-to-face exchanges between people who elicit each others' direct input. In its other usage, "collaborative learning" is used to refer to the general philosophical principle that all knowledge is socially constructed. Here "collaboration" denotes the

fact that knowledge is inescapably social in its functions and origins, as well as in the ways that we generate, test, and revise it.

Drawing on the work of Lev Vygotsky,[15] Bruffee essentially argues that the connection between the two usages resides in the fact that thought is internalized conversation. In other words, according to Bruffee, we learn to think -- that is, to carry on the internal dialogue known as thought -- by first learning to converse -- that is, to elicit, receive, coordinate, accommodate, and respond to the diverse viewpoints of others. The implication, for Bruffee, is that, in order for college students to learn to think like, say, historians, they have to talk like them first. He assumes, in other words, that for college students to understand what it is to participate in a particular knowledge community, they must have face-to-face interactions with their peers within the context of that community's concerns.

There are two problems with this assumption. The first is that the relationship between language and thought is hardly as linear as Bruffee assumes. To maintain, as Bruffee does, that we learn to think in ways we have learned to talk hardly states the case fairly. For it is just as true that we learn to talk in ways we have learned to think, as Vygotsky himself holds. Bruffee maintains that Vygotsky "has shown that reflective thought is public or social conversation internalized."[16] In fact, however, Vygotsky asserts that from the beginning language and thought stand in a dialectical relationship to each other.

A child's thought, precisely because it is born as a dim,
amorphous whole, must find expression in a single word.
As his thought becomes more differentiated, the child is
less apt to express it in single words but constructs a
composite whole. Conversely, progress in speech to the
differentiated whole of a sentence helps the child's
thoughts to progress from a homogeneous whole to well-
defined parts. Thought and word are not cut from one
pattern. In a sense, there are more differences than
likenesses between them.[17]

For Vygotsky, growth in thought clears a path by which language
grows in complexity; at the same time, growth in language supplies
structures by which thought becomes more conscious and deliberate.

Furthermore, while Vygotsky does assert that the young child's
intellectual development culminates in the convergence of thought
and language in verbal thought[18] -- a process which depends upon
children having linguistic interactions with others
-- by far the larger portion of his work is devoted to explaining the
ways in which inner speech then gradually distinguishes itself from
conversation, through the natural experiment of egocentric speech.
This emphasis in Vygotsky on the differentiation of speech for oneself
and speech for others brings us to the second problem with Bruffee's
assertion that peer collaboration is essential to college learning, and
that is that he fails to specify the bearing which the need for
conversation in children's intellectual development has on college
learning. For all intents and purposes, when Bruffee claims that
conversation between peers is a necessary part of the entry into
academic discourse, he is assuming that the initial process by which

children learn to think linguistically and the process by which young

adults enter an academic discourse community are structurally and

functionally the same.

Bruffee finds the connection in Vygotsky's notion of the "zone

of proximal development": "the distance between the actual

developmental level as determined by independent problem solving

and the level of potential development as determined through problem

solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable

peers."[19] For Vygotsky, the significance of the zone of proximal

development is that since development always lags behind learning --

the latter providing the external structures by which the former can

advance -- "the only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of

development."[20] Bruffee, on the other hand, construes the zone of

proximal development as evidence that students need to work

collaboratively amongst themselves as part of their induction into new

knowledge communities. "We learn," writes Bruffee, "by reaching

beyond what we can already do into a 'zone of proximal

development.' Whatever the next thing we have to learn ... we learn it

best in the society of, and with the help of, our peers."[21]

There are, again, several problems with such an inference. For

one thing, the "collaboration" which Vygotsky cites as fostering

development is that which occurs not so much between a child and

her peers but between the child and an adult or more capable peers.

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The implication here would thus seem to be that children learn to think in ways they have learned to talk not so much with their peers as with people who are more knowledgeable.

There are, however, two passages in which Vygotsky refers to children learning through peer collaboration specifically. In the first instance, he notes that, in certain experiments, what subjects "could do only under guidance, in collaboration, and in groups at the age of three-to-five years they could do independently when they reached the age of five-to-seven years."[22] It is doubtful, however, if he meant to imply by this that peer collaboration is itself a means of formal learning, especially in light of his continued emphasis on "external knowledge" and "scientific concepts" as the instruments of development in learning. In the other instance, he comments that "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers."[23] Here Vygotsky, like Piaget, clearly means that children develop cognitively through peer interaction. But the passage occurs in the context of his discussion of the ways in which children internalize social speech as an instrument of thought, not the ways they later differentiate inner speech from social speech through the experiment of egocentric speech, nor the way adults learn the discourse conventions of academic knowledge communities.

This latter point brings us to a second difficulty with Bruffee's inferences (1) that the ways children learn to think linguistically are the same as the ways college students learn academic discourse, and (2) that the zone of proximal development signifies the necessity of peer collaboration in college learning. Namely, there is a difference between how a child collaborates and how a young adult does. A very young child who has not yet learned to differentiate inner speech from social speech has only two avenues of recourse in solving difficult problems requiring verbal thought. One is to elicit overt help in the form of either physical or oral assistance. The other is to talk the problem through out loud using egocentric speech. The young adult, on the other hand, by virtue of having already internalized the ability to collaborate, does not need to do so overtly. "Once these [developmental] processes are internalized," writes Vygotsky, "they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement."[24] Moreover, in those cases when a college student or any adult does "think out loud," he is not employing undifferentiated egocentric speech but attempting to establish a text on which further thought can build.

This brings us to the third problem with Bruffee's inference. The more difficult the situation which calls forth reflection, the more we resort not to social speech, as Bruffee seems to think, but to inner speech. Vygotsky cites the example of how a young girl, in figuring

out how to get at some candy on a high shelf, talks through her solution out loud.[25] According to Bruffee, "What is evidently happening in this example is that the child is using social speech (as opposed to 'egocentric' speech) instrumentally to help get something done."[26] But according to Vygotsky, it is precisely "egocentric speech" which the child uses in this situation. "Our experimental results indicate," writes Vygotsky, "that the function of egocentric speech is ... [that] it helps in overcoming difficulties; it is speech for oneself, intimately and usefully connected with the child's thinking... In the end, it becomes inner speech."[27]

Vygotsky's research into the structure and function of inner speech (which is invisible and impervious to empirical observation) is based entirely on the assumption that egocentric speech (which we can observe) is its precursor. Hence, even if Bruffee were correct that the ways in which children convert social speech into inner speech are functionally the same as the ways in which young adults learn the speech conventions of academic discourse communities, it would only go to show that college students negotiate difficult challenges not through conversation but through inner speech, or "internal collaboration." In other words, the more complex the subject matter, the more intricate its structures, and the more it intersects, converges, and diverges with other interpretive schemes, the more vital it becomes to work out those complexities in thought. If

anything, then, Vygotsky's analysis would seem to suggest that adults learn academic discourse primarily through inner speech and not social speech, simply because of the sheer complexity of the task of negotiating between one's own interpretive and linguistic frameworks and those of the academy. The more difficult the negotiation, the more imperative the need for inner speech.

Bruffee, however, seems to think collaborative group work can teach extremely complex processes of interpretive negotiation:

> We all see things differently. Group discussion helps each of us see in just what way our own views differ from others' and also perhaps why. Once we see these differences we can choose to change our views or try to convince others to change theirs. In the process, we negotiate toward a consensus of judgment which reflects a tempered, adequately informed, well-thought out conception of the issue in question.[28]

Surely he overstates the role of collaborative groups in accomplishing these things. While face-to-face interactions certainly **can** help us see how and why our views differ from those of others, the more complex the differences, the greater is the need for inner speech, which is private and individual. Furthermore, the negotiation of "a tempered, adequately informed, well-thought out conception" is surely the product not of group discussion but of careful independent deliberation. Such deliberation is, of course, collaborative in the broad sense that it occurs and gets tested within the context of shared human concerns and ways of interpreting experience. But collaboration of this sort occurs primarily in reading and writing, not

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group discussion. And students learn to collaborate in such a manner in precisely the same way, by reading, writing, and thinking about the shared concerns of larger communities outside the classroom.

Oral speech about shared problems does have certain advantages. It is faster, more efficient, more spontaneous, and requires less explicit contextualizing; it is good for generating ideas, eliciting and judging gut reactions, and considering possibilities. Its disadvantages are the same ones that lead to the beginnings of inner speech in egocentric speech in the first place. It is superficial, impermanent, and unable to handle much complexity; it is bad for developing, weighing, and testing ideas, considering implications, and negotiating satisfactory and more stable reconstructions.

What concerns me about Bruffee's enthusiastic appraisal of collaborative learning is not that peer collaboration can't help students learn academic discourse (by providing them with a context in which they can receive concrete and immediate, if limited, feedback on the social implications of their thinking and writing). What bothers me is the disproportionate amount of attention he gives to extolling the principle that knowledge is something people construct socially at the expense of specifying how and why they do it. Although he cautions many times that merely putting students together in groups does not constitute a learning environment, he nevertheless puts an unwarranted amount of faith in the power of groups to create just

such an environment. At least two things get shortchanged in the process. One is an account of the **ways** in which people actually learn to justify belief socially. The other is an account of **why** they do so. I'll begin with the second.

According to Bruffee, collaborative learning is supported theoretically by social constructionism. In fact, however, where social constructionists stress the importance of sociolinguistic context in defining the rhetorical situation and providing the stimulus to write,[29] Bruffee tends to focus more narrowly on the peer group and the individual as the sources of invention.

> [C]ollaborative learning can help with "invention." In the process of "working up" a topic for an essay, students should learn how to use each other effectively as sounding boards for ideas, as resources for information, and as prods to further elaboration and explanation.[30]

It's not that students shouldn't do these things; they should. But Bruffee makes it sound as though it is the peer group which motivates and guides the writing process, and not the shared concerns and norms of the larger discourse communities of the academy.

At other times he indicates that invention is a process of students generating "ideas out of personal experience, perceiving issues implicit in those experiences, and generalizing on those issues."[31]

> [E]ssays are normally written from the inside out. Writers begin by thinking about what they want to say and how to defend or explain their views. Only then do they consider how to introduce their views to a reader and

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how to draw what they have to said to a satisfactory close.[32]

In this scheme, the influence of the larger academic community only comes in at the end of the process, when "teachers evaluate [students'] work ..., comparing it with professional standards and the work other students have done, both currently and in the past."[33] Little account is given of the ways in which sociolinguistic context not only motivates composing but provides it norms, procedures, and content from the first. Bruffee says little more on this subject than that the task with which the teacher provides students should allow for more than one answer and require students to come to some kind of consensus.

As a result, **how** students learn to deliberate and converse about the shared concerns of academic communities also gets shortchanged. Bruffee makes it sound as though students conversing in autonomous groups about academic concerns will thereby learn academic discourse, ostensibly by modeling the process of socially justifying belief with each other. In fact, however, collaborative learning models the social construction of knowledge on a very concrete level. The ways in which knowledge is actually socially constructed go much deeper. And the only way for students to learn those processes is not through unfacilitated peer group discussions, but through reading, writing, and thinking about the concerns of those communities. Where the emphasis on peer collaboration falls most

short, then, is that it makes no particular provision for the need of students **as individuals** to negotiate their own complex entries into unfamiliar discourse communities for **themselves**. Bruffee claims that peer collaboration gives students practice in negotiating alternative interpretive frameworks, but the real practice is that which goes on between student and discourse community, in the form of critical reading, thinking, and writing.

What would teachers need to do to promote such reflective activity that structuring peer groups to negotiate solutions to assigned tasks does not do? The answer is that they would provide more deliberate control of the interplay of doubt and belief in students' reading, writing, thinking, and conversing. They would do this not by simply engineering situations where student peers are likely to negotiate among themselves, then leaving that process to follow its own course. They would do it rather by attending to the specific, personal interactions which individual students have with both their peers and the knowledge/discourse communities of the academy.

To expect that collaborative groups, no matter how carefully prepared and structured, will generate the kind of reflective thinking and discourse we want students to learn is to ignore the only genuine authority we as teachers have. That authority comes not from our possession of knowledge conceived as a non-negotiable commodity which we transmit to students. Rather it comes, just as Bruffee says,

from our being representatives of the knowledge/discourse communities which students aspire to join. But our authority also comes from another source: our knowledge of the processes by which students -- working together and alone -- negotiate their way into those communities.

What teachers can do that students themselves can't is recognize points in the process that call for specific interventions. Such interventions do not strip students of responsibility for their own learning, as Bruffee seems to think they inevitably must (except, ironically, when it comes time to evaluate students' work). Rather, they help make students **more** responsible than they would be if left strictly to their own devices. Teachers, by virtue of their experience with and study of the learning processes of students, particularly in their own areas of expertise, are in a much better position than are students themselves to recognize when students should be allowed to continue along a particular course unhindered, when they need to be encouraged, when they should be presented with challenges, and, especially, which challenges to present.

The danger is always present that teachers will try to prevent students from making "mistakes," which in the long run teaches students to rely too heavily on authority, discouraging the very habits of rational inquiry and discourse we are striving to foster. But the danger of miseducative experiences is even more present in

unfacilitated collaborative groups, where students influence each

other with far less knowledge of the bearing their interactions have on

the intellectual and discursive habits we seek to foster in the long run.

Teaching, as Bruffee says, is not the simple transmitting of

subject matter. But the negative consequences that accrue from

teachers approaching their work as if it were should not lead us to

dispense too much with the guidance teachers can provide. Such is

the theme of what is one of John Dewey's most concise educational

statements, Experience and Education,[34] which he wrote in 1938,

following his experience with the excessively student-centered

schools of the 1920's. Dewey takes so-called "progressive" education

to task for defining itself on the basis of its criticisms of traditional

schooling rather than in terms of its own constructive theory of how

personal experience interacts with subject matter to produce learning.

Especially pertinent to this discussion are Dewey's repeated

reminders that educational freedom should not be equated with a

lessening of teacher control:

> Because the older education imposed the knowledge,
> methods, and the rules of conduct of the mature person
> upon the young, it does not follow, except upon the
> basis of the extreme Either-Or philosophy, that the
> knowledge and skill of the mature person has no directive
> value for the experience of the immature. On the
> contrary, basing education upon personal experience may
> mean more multiplied and more intimate contacts
> between the mature and the immature than ever existed
> in the traditional school, and consequently more, rather
> than less, guidance by others.[35]

Bruffee and other advocates of collaborative learning[36] argue

the need for teacher guidance in the structuring of groups and

activities, but they generally rule out the teacher's role as a facilitator

of group interactions, insisting that "collaboration advances best when

groups are pretty much left to the students themselves."[37] Where

the teacher does offer guidance, they say, is as a "synthesizer,"

"referee,"[38] or "arbiter of last resort" at the end of the group

process.[39] They tend to downplay this function, however, offering

no specific guidelines as to how the teacher should fulfill it.

Most troublesome, however, is that they say virtually nothing at

all about the teacher's interactions with individual students or the

students' interactions with the academic discourse communities in

which their learning is situated. That learning will occur as a result of

group interactions is simply taken for granted. In the process, how

and why students are motivated to negotiate their way into unfamiliar

knowledge/discourse communities gets left out of account, as does

the teacher's role in facilitating that process. The danger is all too

great that teachers, overconfident about the intrinsic educative power

of collaborative peer groups, will, quite simply, stop teaching, leaving

the formation of students' habits of academic inquiry and discourse to

accident.

1.   The Collaborative Learning Action Community of the American Association of Higher Education defines collaborative learning as follows:

> Collaborative education is a pedagogical style which emphasizes cooperative efforts among students, faculty, and administrators. Rooted in the belief that knowledge is inherently social in nature, it stresses common inquiry as the basic learning process.

See Jean Sheridan, Ann C. Byrne, and Kathryn Quina, "Collaborative Learning: Notes From the Field," College Teaching, 37 (1989): 49-53.

2.   For a concise description of some or the major techniques, see Sheridan, Byrne, and Quina, "Collaborative Learning."

3.   Peter Elbow, "Methodological Doubting and Believing: Contraries in Inquiry," Embracing Contraries (Oxford: New York, 1986), pp. 254-300.

4.   Jerry Farber, The Student as Nigger: Essays and Stories (North Hollywood: Contact Books, 1969).

5.   Kenneth Bruffee, "The Way Out," College English, 33 (1972): 457-70.

6.   See, e.g., John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct, 1922. New York: Modern Library, 1930, which is in many respects a behavioristic account of the development of morality and reflective thinking.

7.   The famous debate between the two occurred in Carl Rogers and B. F. Skinner, "Some Issues Concerning the Control of Human Behavior," Science, 124 (1956): 1057-1066.

8.   See Stephen Judy, "The Experiential Approach: Inner Worlds to Outer Worlds," in Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland, eds. Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English), pp. 37-51.

9.   Harvey S. Weiner, "Collaborative Learning in the Classroom," College English, 48 (1986): 54; cf. Kenneth A. Bruffee, A Short Course in Writing, 3rd ed. (Boston: Little, 1985), p. 45.

10. Kenneth A. Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind,'" College English, 46 (1984): 635-652.

11. Bruffee, "Conversation," p. 641.

12. Bruffee, "Conversation," p. 642.

13. Kenneth A. Bruffee, "Writing and Reading as Collaborative or Social Acts," in J.N. Hays, P.A. Roth, J.R. Ramsey, and R.D. Foulke, eds., The Writer's Mind: Writing as a Mode of Thinking (Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1983), pp. 159-169.

14. Bruffee, "Writing and Reading," p. 165.

15. Lev S. Vygotsky, Thought and Language, trans., Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Boston: MIT Press, 1962); Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes, eds., Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

16. Bruffee, "Conversation," p. 639.

17. Vygotsky, Thought, p. 126.

18. Vygotsky, Thought, pp. 51, 57; Mind, p. 24.

19. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 86.

20. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 89.

21. Bruffee, A Short Course, p. 105.

22. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 87.

23. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 90.

24. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 90.

25. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 25.

26. Bruffee, "Writing and Reading," p. 161.

27. Vygotsky, Mind, p. 133.

28. Bruffee, A Short Course, p. 111.

29. See, e.g., Patricia Bizzell, "Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know about Writing," PRE/TEXT, 3 (1982): 191-207.

30. Bruffee, <u>A Short Course</u>, p. 106.

31. Bruffee, <u>A Short Course</u>, p. xvi.

32. Bruffee, <u>A Short Course</u>, p. xiii).

33. Kenneth A. Bruffee, "The Art of Collaborative Learning: Making the Most of Knowledgeable Peers," <u>Change</u>, March/April (1987): 46.

34. John Dewey, <u>Experience and Education</u>, 1938 (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1963).

35. Dewey, <u>Experience and Education</u>, p. 21.

36. See, e.g., Weiner, "Collaborative Learning."

37. Weiner, "Collaborative Learning," p. 58.

38. Weiner, "Collaborative Learning," pp. 58-59.

39. Bruffee, <u>A Short Course</u>, p. 112.

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COMMON THEMES AND KEY PRINCIPLES
OF AN INTERACTIVE EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTION

In reviewing the six previous chapters, no simple pattern emerges, no unambiguous representation which holds true for all the topics discussed. What does emerge is a story of apparent oppositions tending towards resolution in an interactive conception that is itself surprisingly consistent. Before outlining the broad features of that conception, it is worth noting some of the shared patterns by which that conception emerges.

Common Themes

All the chapters deal with issues that either explicitly or implicitly involve dichotomous educational conceptions. While the dichotomies themselves vary, they all seem to stem from an initial demarcation of otherwise interacting components, followed by various attempts to bring the severed components back together. Clearly, chapters three, four, and five -- those on critical thinking, genderized ethics, and college writing -- all address specific oppositions directly. By contrast, the first, second, and sixth chapters -- the ones on

student involvement in learning, national cultural literacy, and collaborative learning -- involve implicit dichotomies.

In chapter one, for example, the NIE Study Group starts from the premise that students' interests and subject matter are intrinsically opposed. Their suggestion that external standards be used to secure student involvement is an attempt to bring these two allegedly opposing forces together -- by supplanting one with the other. Similarly, in chapter two, although he insists that there is no necessary opposition between an extensive curriculum of shared cultural knowledge and an intensive curriculum adapted to student interests, Hirsch ultimately puts his faith in the transmission of a prearranged extensive curriculum. In chapter six, proponents of collaborative learning assume essentially the same opposition. But in advocating that students be allowed to negotiate their own knowledge and standards without the constraints imposed by a teacher in authority, they go in the other direction from Hirsch and the Study Group.

Taken as a whole, the dichotomies themselves seem to fall along two axes. One axis is the apparent dichotomy between the form of learning and the contexts in which it occurs. The other axis is the apparent dichotomy between student development and the transmission of subject matter. The two axes are not the same. The general skills approach to critical thinking, the justice approach to

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moral education, the cognitive process approach to college writing, and the content-neutral curriculum criticized by Hirsch all emphasize student learning over subject matter. But instead of emphasizing the interests and backgrounds of individual students, as romantics tend to do, the above conceptions are formal and general. Conversely, the subject-specific approach to critical thinking and the social constructionist approach to college writing both emphasize teaching subject matter within specific learning contexts. On the other hand, collaborative learning and the caring approach to moral education both combine a romantic, subjectivist conception of spontaneous student development with a contextual model of learning. While Hirsch and the Study Group take a traditional cultural transmission approach that utilizes formal presentation and the imposition of external standards.

In short, the preceding chapters suggest something like a four-quadrant framework for categorizing educational approaches. Formalists sometimes direct their attention to subject matter and sometimes to student cognition. Similarly, contextualists sometimes concentrate on the conditions which promote student development and sometimes on those which sensitize students to existing knowledge and discourse communities. The four quadrants are thus roughly essentialism, cognitivism, romanticism, and reconstructionism (I list them in the order of their approximate political affiliation -- from right to left -- though of course there are anomalies: Kohlberg, for

example, is clearly of the moderate left, while McPeck is of the moderate right). My intention here is not to draw any hard and fast categories, but simply to frame a possible way of sorting out educational dichotomies, and to note that it is sometimes unclear who is objecting to what or what alternative conception they are advancing. Hirsch is a prime example, for in criticizing one type of formalism he only endorses another. Bruffee offers a different example, for although he claims to ascribe to social constructionism he is clearly more romantic.

In any case, certain themes are common to some issues, and others to others. The tension between attending to securing student involvement and transmitting subject matter is most evident in the first, second, and sixth chapters, as discussed earlier. The tension between formalism and contextualism, on the other hand, is most evident in the critical thinking, moral education, and college writing literatures, and goes something like this.

Kohlberg, Flower, and the advocates of general thinking skills all believe in the fruitfulness of trying to discern those mental processes which transcend context. Gilligan, Bizzell and Berlin, and McPeck, on the other hand, all attack such formalism on the grounds that form and context cannot be thus dissociated. But in so doing, they all advance a contextual relativism which leaves unexplained how people are able to negotiate their way between otherwise discrete

contexts. For Gilligan, this manifests as the irreconcilability of justice and caring. For Bizzell and Berlin, as a sociolinguistic determinism which leaves no room for original thought. And for McPeck, as a logical atomism that leaves no room for multi-logical thinking. Formalists fare little better, however, since models that divorce reasoning from context fail to capture the undeniable context-specificity of thought; for all their complexity, the models of Kohlberg, Flower, and general skills advocates alike are descriptively somewhat sterile and prescriptively weak.

In all three literatures, theorists from both camps have called for a reconciliation of formalism and contextualism, although they have each tended to remain somewhat entrenched in their respective positions. The way out which I have argued here lies in the notion that thinking, moral reasoning, and writing are neither general nor context-specific processes but intercontextual ones which entail the reconstructive transfer, transformation, and integration of what would otherwise remain discrete interpretations of experience. This means that critical thinking is not something we either transfer or do only in specific contexts; it is itself transfer -- the constructing of more integrated and comprehensive knowledge systems. Similarly, moral reasoning isn't something that either follows a universal form or is constrained by specific contexts; it is a reconstructive dialogue that makes connections between previously separate value systems,

creating a more shared understanding. Again, writing is not the

application of general cognitive processes or the following of

predetermined lines of thought and discourse; it is an intercontextual

dialogue that tends towards the same comprehensiveness mentioned

in the previous two examples.

In all three cases, then, it is not so much form or context which

is the educational concern as it is the habits of thinking, valuing, and

conversing that students develop. Such habits are fostered not by

attending to cognitive form or social context alone, but by creating

indeterminate and socially compelling situations which elicit students'

uncertainty about what to believe or do -- the interaction of cognition

and context.

In the hypothesis of this dissertation, I postulated three

conditions of an educative situation. These conditions were doubt,

dialogue, and commitment. Looking back over the previous chapters,

it seems that cognitive formalists tend to concentrate on the condition

of doubt, and contextualists on the condition of dialogue. But neither

doubt nor dialogue guarantees that students will be engaged.

Engagement requires commitment, and that would seem to occur only

where students experience an uncertainty that matters. It is not

enough, in other words, that they be merely uncertain. Nor is enough

that the uncertainty matters to someone else. It must matter to

students themselves. But commitment does not stand alone either, as

commitment without doubt leads to neither reflection nor dialogue, but to prejudice and dogmatism. Again, my intention here is not to advance this framework as complete or exclusive. It is simply to suggest a set of criteria that educators might find helpful, and that might help us understand under what conditions learning occurs and what to do when it doesn't.

Key Principles

The following ten principles strike me as characteristic of the interactive conception of higher learning which has emerged in these pages. They also serve to provide an overview of higher learning as I am led to conceive it at the present time.

(1) Learning is best understood as neither an absorbing from without nor an unfolding from within but as the interaction of people's structuring tendencies with the people and things around them. It is a constructive process, in which people make sense of their experience through the mutual accommodation of prior interpretive frameworks and the data of present experience.

(2) We grow intellectually and socially through a process of ongoing revision of our knowledge and beliefs, primarily by constructing integrating connections between otherwise discrete interpretations of experience, including the experience of others.

(3) Teaching, then, is not so much a matter of transmitting subject matter or developing skills as it is of creating conditions which compel students to seek integrating connections.

(4) The primary condition for eliciting this search is to provide such challenges to students' habitual ways of thinking as will compel them to construct a superior and common understanding.

(5) In order that students might develop the ability to share their understanding and purposes with others, the context of learning must be social; it must involve the shared concerns and purposes of some community.

(6) The paramount, though not the only, aim of education is to instill in students the active disposition to reconstruct and integrate their understanding of experience, including the experience of others. This is the educational aim to which acquired skills and knowledge are means.

(7) As the best means humanity has developed for making sense of and controlling experience, the subject areas indicate the direction of growth as well as its means.

(8) But to grasp the subject areas as means, students need to learn them in the context of solving difficulties which they perceive -- that is, in the process of reconstructing and integrating their own and other people's understanding of experience -- and not as products to be recited on demand.

(9) Genuine learning of this sort necessarily entails a mutual accommodation of subject matter and student cognition; in other words, both students and subject matter are transformed in the process. Students take genuine ownership of subject matter only when they are led somehow to construct it for themselves as part of their own active knowledge and belief systems.

(10) Demonstrations of such integrating transformations towards the resolution of some social concern are the best evidence of learning at the college level. For example, colleges could require as a condition of graduation that all students complete a thesis or project which integrates knowledge and procedures from more than one discipline towards the solution of a viable social concern. A precondition for students' being able to undertake such projects would be that they first take more responsibility for constructing their own, faculty-approved courses of study.

Closing Thoughts

At the present time, I know of only a handful of colleges whose programs seem consistent with these principles. They are Antioch University in Ohio; Hampshire College in Massachusetts; Marlboro College in Vermont; and Reed College in Oregon; though I'm sure there are many others with which I'm unfamiliar. Many colleges and

universities also offer independent, interdisciplinary majors which are along much the same lines, such as our own Bachelor's Degree with Individual Concentration (BDIC) here at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The objection naturally arises that the reason there are only a handful of such programs is that there are only a handful of students who have the personal initiative to undertake such self-directed study. In this era of public cries for excellence and higher expectations, I am surprised that few commentators on the educational scene advance the expectation that students should take more responsibility in directing their own learning. (Ernest Boyer is one of the exceptions.) Part of the problem would seem to be that students have sometimes been given freedom without responsibility, and have predictably faltered. But such would seem to be a case of low expectations rather than high.

On the other hand, most high school graduates probably aren't ready for the sort of program I'm recommending. What this suggests to me is not some intrinsic inability to think for themselves or to negotiate knowledge and purposes with others, but rather that they have not had an education which fosters independence of thought and democratic habits of participation. Perhaps if more colleges set such expectations, more high schools (and more elementary schools) would do what they could to prepare students to meet them. But such a

transformation would require at the very least the dissemination of an interactive conception of learning that is far more articulate and accessible than that presented here. In the meantime I, for one, watch with great interest the continuing experiments of those colleges, universities, independent majors, and courses that seek to realize the democratic vision of knowledge and purpose in educational policy and teaching practice.

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