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**From paradigm to K Mart: An alternative approach to teaching  
students with severe mental retardation**

**Shaw, Dennis George, Ed.D.**

**The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1992**

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FROM PARADIGM TO K MART: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO  
TEACHING STUDENTS WITH SEVERE MENTAL RETARDATION

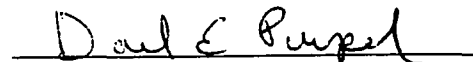
by

Dennis George Shaw

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Approved by



Dissertation Adviser

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dissertation Advisor David E. Pappalardo

Committee Members James M. Coleman

Jo Alice Peadar

W. H. Higin

3-6-92  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

3-6-92  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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I am particularly indebted to my committee members, Dr. David Purpel, Dr. Svi Shapiro, Dr. Jo Alice Leeds, and Ms. Anne Deloria. Dr. Shapiro challenged me to consider how my experiences in education reflect the larger social context. Dr. Leeds and Ms. Deloria taught me about the nature of the creative process, and in doing so, helped me to reclaim my identity as a creator. Dr. David Purpel, the chairman of my committee, has demanded that I focus on a vision of a more just and compassionate world order and has patiently guided me as I have attempted to nurture this consciousness in my life. Dr. Purpel has consistently reminded me to consider the spiritual nature of my students lives and our relationships. To these brilliant people I express my sincere gratitude.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the loving memory of John Smith.



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SHAW, DENNIS GEORGE, Ed.D. From Paradigm to K Mart: an Alternative Approach to Teaching Students with Severe Mental Retardation. (1992) Directed by Dr. David E. Purpel. 137 pp.

This dissertation documents a public school special education teacher's efforts to create an alternative method to teach language and functional skills to teenagers with severe mental retardation. Over a 3 year period, the students were taught to sequence photographs of school and community experiences into simple photo-based personal stories which were "told" to their families and friends. In addition to the acquisition of language, the work stresses the importance of personal narratives and the short story form for the formation of interpersonal relationships, the creation of meaning, the establishment of limits and boundaries, the development of affect and empathy, and personal empowerment. The paper concludes with examples of the students' stories and interpretations of their developmental effects.

Influences that directly contributed to the development of this method of teaching include new educational and service delivery models for handicapped people, and readings on the new scientific paradigm (best represented by the work of Albert Einstein), liberation theology, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, characteristics of human oppression, and the nature of the creative process. The author contrasts his method to common public school special education practices which are significantly influenced by behaviorism (Skinner) and beliefs and values stemming from classical Newtonian science and the Industrial Revolution.

## INTRODUCTION

How shall I comprehend the life that is in me and around me? To do so stories were constructed, and told, and remembered, and handed down over time, over the generations (Coles 1989, 189).

I have taught children with significant levels of mental retardation since 1978. During this time I have had many experiences, met numerous people, and have been exposed to a wide variety of ideas that have significantly changed my understanding of and approaches to teaching these students. While I can not over estimate the values and influences of graduate school and professional study, I recognize the daily interactions with my students as the primary and most consistent source of my professional and personal growth.

My first position with mentally handicapped children was funded through a mental health clinic. I accepted the job after completing a master's degree in child development. Influenced by both the nature of the site and the emphasis of my master's program, I approached the very young children on my case load from a clinical-medical perspective. My clients were diagnosed with standardized tests of intelligence and social functioning, and success was defined by their acquisition of normal levels of functioning. Services were usually delivered in the children's homes in one hour sessions, once each week. Despite my diligent efforts, too often the primary outcome of my work was the documentation of a child's developmental decline. In frustration, I transferred from this position to a developmental day care center operated by

the same mental health clinic. I reasoned that the failure of my intervention in the home based program was due to inadequate time with the clients and low levels of parental functioning and motivation. At the developmental center I had access to the children six hours a day, five days per week. Indeed, the majority of the children at the center did make significant developmental gains but very few were ever able to outgrow their mental retardation labels.

By the time I accepted a position with another developmental center in a different county, I had earned a teaching certificate in mental retardation and learning disabilities and accepted the fact that the vast majority of the young children I taught would never be cognitively or developmentally normal. My teaching strategies changed to reflect this awareness by adopting an approach that I believed would be more compatible with the students' potentials and abilities. Armed with behavioral theory (Skinner), I wrote educational goals that stressed management and compliance. The children in my classrooms learned how to behave. And as long as these students remained in the developmental center, this strategy worked well. However, when students transferred into public schools, they were unable to cope with norm referenced behavioral expectations. Thus I came to realize that if my students were to succeed, they would have to remain for the rest of their lives in segregated settings designed specifically for the handicapped.

With a high degree of professional frustration, I entered the Ed.D. program in Curriculum and Educational Foundations in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Through this program, I encountered many new and exciting concepts and began to relate disconnected experiences and ideas. I learned that most school curricula are unexamined expressions of dominant social values and these values often

stem from rigid, conflictual, and oppressive systems of belief. I began to recognize the expressions of these negative values in my school and even in my classroom. I was required to examine my own beliefs, determine if they were consistent with my behavior, and initiate change. Encountering theories of human development that were compatible with descriptions of the creative process, I began to link the development of cognition, language, and power, and recognize the necessity of conflict for growth. I began to perceive the ultimate goals of education in terms of relating and connecting personal and corporate experiences. I began to value these connections and relationships as the primary source of meaning. I learned that one of the primary ways humans create, understand, and nurture connections and relationships is through the hearing and telling of personal stories. The greatest challenge of my doctoral education was integrating these concepts into my professional life.

I now teach teenagers with severe levels of mental retardation in a public school. As a result of their mental handicaps, these students have extremely limited communication abilities and consequently have not been able to tell or understand stories. I believe that this deficit is the most debilitating and isolating aspect of their condition. Through this dissertation, I want to explore the implications of not being able to tell or understand personal narratives, and suggest possible ways in which this dilemma can be addressed. This effort will focus on the essential human needs for personal stories, and what happens to those who learn to hear and tell stories, even if in very limited ways, after too many years of chaotic, meaningless silence. It will be a story of creating connections, building relationships, and making meaning in one special education classroom.

This dissertation will be divided into five general sections. The first will enable the reader to understand who the severely mentally retarded are from several perspectives. The second section will provide a description and critique of common educational practices for the severely mentally retarded. The third section will examine and critique an alternative curriculum that I developed with other teachers at McIver School in Greensboro, N. C. The fourth section will explore the new scientific paradigm, which has emerged from the work of Einstein, and the Biblical metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle. The visions suggested by these will then be related to Piaget's cognitive developmental theory and my decision to teach students with severe mental retardation how to "tell" personal stories. Finally, the fifth chapter will describe the methodology that I employed in the classroom and the significance of these efforts.

## CHAPTER I

### WHO ARE THE SEVERELY MENTALLY RETARDED?

#### OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER I

Chapter 1 will introduce the reader to severely mentally retarded people. It will begin with a history of mental retardation followed by definitions and characteristics of severe mental retardation. I will then present case studies of 2 students in order to provide further insights into the severely retarded population. These case studies will illustrate many aspects of their lives including family structures, medical histories and health problems, physical handicaps, general social skills and experiences, educational backgrounds, self help abilities, etc.

#### SECTION 1

##### HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In order to understand who the mentally retarded are, it is necessary to know about their past. Their story is a long history of political, social, and cultural oppression. The history of mentally retarded people has been divided by Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne into nine eras. These include (1) antiquity to 1700, (2) emergence as a field, from 1700 to 1860, (3) disillusionment from 1860 to 1890, (4) backlash from 1890 to 1925, (5) gradual movement from 1925 to 1950, (6) reawakening from 1950 to 1960, (7) limelight from 1960 to



1970, (8) litigious times from 1970 to 1980, and (9) action and reaction from 1980 to the present.

#### ANTIQUITY TO 1700

Prior to 1700, the mentally retarded constituted a tiny minority of the population because the mildly mentally retarded blended with the illiterate majority and the more significantly impaired died as a result of secondary health problems. The few severely involved individuals who did live were turned into buffoons, court jesters, or were perceived of as demons or capable of divine revelation. During the European Renaissance, perhaps as a reflection of rising humanism, basic housing and subsistence were provided for retarded individuals in monasteries. Early American retarded were cared for by their families or were placed in almshouses or workhouses.

#### EMERGENCE AS A FIELD

Within the historical context of revolution, the field of mental retardation was founded. From 1700 through 1860, humanism flourished. Writers like Locke and Rousseau asserted that individuals had rights to freedom and the development of personal potential. In this climate, the physician, Jean Marc Itard, tried to rehabilitate a feral child who was captured near Aveyon, France in 1799. Itard hoped to transform the boy, whom he named Victor, from a savage to a state of civilized behavior. After five years of systematic intervention, Itard decided he had failed, and concluded his work with the child. Despite this, significant interest had been generated in Itard's efforts and others began to work with severely impaired individuals. Johann Guggenbuhl (1816-1863) established the first residential-treatment facility for mentally retarded people in

Abendberg, Switzerland. Prior to its decline, Abendberg was visited by many prominent people. In the 1840s in America, Dorothea Dix became the first advocate for mentally retarded people. She made the Massachusetts legislature aware of the plight of the mentally retarded in almshouses, workhouses, and asylums. In 1848, Dix's efforts came to fruition when Samuel Howe was awarded \$2,500 per year to establish the first public program for mentally retarded people at Boston's Perkins Institution for the Blind. The same year, Hervey Wilbur opened the first private facility for mentally retarded people in his home in Barre, Massachusetts.

#### DISILLUSIONMENT

The next era cited by Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne is called the Period of Disillusionment and stretches from 1860 to 1890. The high hopes of finding cures for mental retardation, which had characterized the previous period, were not realized. In the United States, values reflecting the rise of urbanization and industrialization became dominant. Mentally retarded individuals who had previously been able to fit into agrarian society were usually unable to acquire skills necessary for survival in urban, industrialized centers. In these areas, correlations were being drawn by conservative politicians and community leaders between poverty, crime, disease, and mental retardation. This led to the building of isolated institutions, and the moving of mentally handicapped individuals out of communities.

#### BACKLASH

The Period of Backlash, which extended from 1890 through 1925, produced the rise of interest in eugenics based on the works of Darwin, Galton, and

Mendel. The emphasis of this movement was on the elimination of the "feeble minded" through selective breeding. In 1911, the American Breeders Association was formed, and advocated for the segregation and sterilization of the mentally retarded. Popular publications like Dugsdale's 1911 book, The Jukes, a Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity, and Goddard's The Kallikak Family, which was published in 1912, emphasized a genetic basis for mental retardation. Between 1907 and 1927, 23 states enacted laws that permitted involuntary sterilization of mentally retarded people. In 1927, the United States Supreme Court upheld these laws through the infamous Buck versus Bell case. Also during this period, large waves of immigration occurred from Eastern and Southern Europe. Many of these immigrants were perceived as "feeble minded" which led to the 1925 Immigration Restriction Act. This law limited the immigration of Jews, Italians, Russians, and Hungarians to the United States until 1965.

Another significant trend of the Backlash period was the development of intelligence testing. Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon developed the first IQ test in 1905. This test led to the labeling in 1910 of the mildly mentally retarded as "morons". Goddard translated Simon and Binet's work from French into English in 1916, and Lewis Terman of Stanford University refined the translated scales and renamed them the Stanford-Binet. During recruitment for World War I, men were tested with these new scales and many more "morons" were discovered than were previously thought to exist. This led to a period of alarm based on the assumptions that there were too many mentally retarded people, that the disorder was inherited, and would lead to significant increases in poverty, crime, disease, and the eventual down fall of society.

## GRADUAL MOVEMENT

The Gradual Movement, according to Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne, spanned the quarter century between 1925 and 1950. During this period, the pressure to address the needs of World War I veterans helped to create a new public sentiment. Gradually services for veterans were extended to others in the population including the mentally retarded. The Great Depression of the 1930s also made people more aware of the extent of human needs. In 1922, Elizabeth Farrell established the International Council for the Education of Exceptional Children, which is now known as the Council on Exceptional Children. As other causes of mental retardation were discovered and the methodological flaws of previous studies were exposed, the over emphasis on heredity as the cause of mental retardation faded. In 1930, Herbert Hoover convened the first White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. This effort led to a dramatic increase in new and better studies on the causes of mental retardation. Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal led to significant changes that eventually reflected positively on the mentally retarded. These included a societal attitude supportive of public welfare and an affirmation of the society's responsibility to those in need. During World War II, significant numbers of men were again tested and found to be mentally retarded. Although these individuals were rejected from military service, many were employed in war time emergency industry. Additional significant factors that influenced the Period of Gradual Change included the discovery in 1934 that the cause of Phenylketonuria (PKU), a disorder causing mental retardation, was metabolic, and the disorder could be reversed by diet. This finding brought many medical researchers into the field of mental retardation research.

The Vineland Social Maturity Scales were published in 1935 by Edgar Doll and provided another means of determining functioning levels besides intelligence tests. Additionally, David Wechsler published the "Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children" in 1949. These events significantly furthered the accuracy of intelligence testing of children. Finally, by the end of this era, the scientific community was embroiled in the nature versus nurture controversy.

## REAWAKENING

Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne labeled the decade from 1950 to 1960 Reawakening. This period began with the formation of numerous parents' groups and the establishment of the National Association for Retarded Citizens. By 1952, 46 of the 48 states were providing public education for mildly mentally retarded students. Public Law 83-926 was passed in 1954 providing federal funds for mental retardation research, and in 1958, Public Law 85-926 was enacted providing federal funds for the education of special education teachers.

## LIMELIGHT

During the decade of the "Limelight", 1960 to 1970, national attention was focused on the mentally retarded primarily through the efforts of President John F. Kennedy, who had a mentally retarded sister. Kennedy established the President's Panel on Mental Retardation under the direction of Leonard Mayo and in 1962, this panel published "A Proposed Program for National Action to Combat Mental Retardation". This plan stressed research on the causes, care, and rehabilitation of mental retardation. The program documented the need for

significant spending in the areas of maternal and infant care for the poor, education, vocational training, and increased social and clinical services. It also stressed the needs for civil rights legislation and community care for the mentally retarded. It called for increased spending for higher education special education programs, public education, and the development of comprehensive state and local community services for the mentally retarded in all domains across age levels. In 1963, the Mental Retardation Facilities and Mental Health Construction Act provided federal money for the construction of research centers. Public Law 89-10, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, was passed in 1965 and then amended in 1966 to create the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped as a subcomponent of the Federal Office of Education. President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty established Head Start during this period. Head Start was the first national program to deal directly with environmental causes of retardation.

In 1969, Wolf Wolfensberger introduced to the United States the Scandinavian Principle of Normalization. This principle stressed community based services, and was defined as, "making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of every day life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream society" (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 23).

## LITIGIOUS TIMES

The decade of the 1970s is called Litigious Times by Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne, and was the period of the greatest gains for mentally retarded people. The courts became the forum through which civil rights were secured. In 1971, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens successfully

challenged the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, establishing the right to a free, appropriate education for all of Pennsylvania's mentally retarded school aged residents. Also in 1971, the court case of Mills versus the Board of Education of the District of Columbia extended the rights of a free, appropriate education to all children with developmental disabilities in Washington, D. C. Through Wyatt versus Stickney, a 1971 court case in Alabama, Partlow State School and Hospital residents won the right to appropriate treatment. Prior to this case, they received only custodial care.

Significant legislation passed during this decade included the 1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act, Public Law 93-112, which established a bill of rights for disabled people. This law stated that "the handicapped of America should have access to education and jobs, and should not be denied anything that any other citizen is entitled to or already receives" (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 25). The most important piece of legislation of this decade was the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Public Law 94-142, which was passed in 1975, providing the following major provisions:

- 1) Every handicapped child between the ages of 3 and 21 is entitled to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.
- 2) Due process is ensured to protect the rights of students and their parents.
- 3) Students are entitled to special and related services which are determined as necessary.
- 4) Every student will have a written individualized educational program (IEP) that parents and school personnel agree upon.
- 5) First priority is given to students previously excluded from educational services and second priority to those whose programs were inappropriate.
- 6) No eligible child is to be rejected from receiving services (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 26).

Finally, in 1978, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act was passed. This law defined developmental disabilities and provided funds for services.

#### ACTION AND REACTION

The last decade, 1980 to 1990, has been labeled by Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne as a period of Action and Reaction. The courts are increasingly finding for the defendants in civil rights cases, and the majority of new legislation is non-progressive. Public Law 98-199, which was passed in 1983, secured Public Law 94-142 as previously written, provided modest increases in funding for services, and established the need for transition plans for disabled students moving from schools to community life. In 1986, Public Law 99-457 amended the Education for All Handicapped Children Act to include younger children. Based on this legislation, preschool programs have been established for disabled 3 to 5 year olds, and state grant programs are being established for infants and toddlers, ages birth to 2 years. Significant court cases of the last decade include the 1982 Board of Education versus Rowley which established that states do not have to provide more than minimal levels of services deemed appropriate for handicapped children.

Research, educational, and service trends established during the last decade include an increase in community based instruction and services, the establishment of the regular education initiative (which is a federal initiative focusing on educating all mildly handicapped children in regular classroom settings), debates over the withholding of biomedical treatment for the severely-profoundly handicapped, and an increased awareness of the correlations between mental retardation and poverty. Ironically, this last trend



has been accompanied by a significant rise in the level of poverty in the United States. According to the 1988 Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life, 23% of all American preschoolers belonged to families with incomes below the poverty level (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 172).

The number of children enrolled in special education programs peaked in 1980 at approximately 1,250,000. By 1990, this number had dropped to approximately 650,000. Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne attribute this decline to more conservative diagnostic and labeling procedures and the results of early intervention. They further summarize the events of the last decade which relate to handicapped people through the following:

We must be careful that social and public attitudes toward exceptional people do not change drastically in a negative direction. Cutbacks and restrictions may be the result of economic problems or political shifts. If a positive national policy supportive of people with special needs is not carefully maintained, our society will be guilty of social neglect, and people who need help will not receive it (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 30).

It is apparent that the mentally retarded have been the victims of oppression and neglect through out history, and have had basic civil rights in the United States for a very short time. It is also apparent, especially through the last decade, that the struggle to establish their value in the society is far from over.

## SECTION 2

### DEFINITIONS OF MENTAL RETARDATION

**Mental retardation refers to significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period (Grossman1983, 11).**

This definition is offered by the American Association on Mental Retardation and is compatible with the other two primary classification schemes provided by the World Health Organization's International Classification of Diseases, Clinical Modification (ICD-9 CM) and the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III). The phrase significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning is understood as an intelligence quotient of 70 or below on standardized measures of intelligence.

This upper limited is intended as a guideline; it could be extended upward through IQ 75 or more, depending on the reliability of the intelligence test used. This particularly applies in schools and similar settings if behavior is impaired and clinically determined to be due to deficits in reasoning and judgement. Deficits in adaptive behavior are defined as significant limitations in an individual's effectiveness in meeting the standards of maturation, learning, personal independence, and/or social responsibility that are expected for his or her age level and cultural group, as determined by clinical assessment and usually, standardized scales. Developmental period is defined as the period of time between conception and the 18th birthday (Grossman1983,11).

This definition of mental retardation provides a very wide spectrum of membership and includes people who can function independently to people who are totally dependent. Consequently, this range is subdivided into four

categories by the American Association on Mental Retardation: mild, moderate, severe and profound. These categories facilitate communication and research, and are usually prerequisites for funding services. The procedures used to determine the level of retardation that exists include 1) the recognition that a problem exists (i.e. delay in developmental milestones), 2) a determination that adaptive behavior deficits exist, 3) a determination of general intellectual functioning via a standardized test of intelligence, and 4) an assignment to determine functioning level based on the intelligence score. The IQ range for mild mental retardation is 50-55 to approximately 70. The moderately mentally retarded have IQs that range from 35-40 to 50-55. Severely mentally retarded people have IQs between 20-25 to 35-40, and the profoundly mentally retarded have IQs below 20 or 25. In addition, mentally retarded people can be divided into two overlapping groups, the clinical types and those who often appear retarded only during the school years. The clinical types constitute approximately 25 percent of the total population and usually demonstrate some central nervous system pathology, have IQs in the moderate range or below and have associated handicaps or stigmata. Frequently the clinical types can be diagnosed from birth or early childhood. The non-clinical types comprise the majority of the mentally retarded population and appear to be neurologically intact. They usually do not show readily detectable physical signs or clinical laboratory evidence associated with retardation, and function in the mild range. This group is concentrated in the lower socioeconomic segments of society (Grossman 1983, 70).

This dissertation will focus on individuals who are functioning within the severe range and identified as having the clinical type of mental retardation. While there are many differing characteristics associated with severe

retardation, many of these individuals share common health problems. These include ear, respiratory and urinary tract infections, immunological deficits, genetic disorders, sleeping disorders, and feeding/eating disorders with associated dental decay, nutritional anemia, and obesity. Physical and sensory handicaps including hearing deficiencies, cerebral palsy, and epilepsy are also prevalent in the severe population. All severely mentally retarded people exhibit communication problems which are directly related to their low levels of cognitive functioning as well as frequent articulatory defects. Severely mentally retarded people are also at significant risk for the development of emotional and behavioral disorders. They evidence a high prevalence of varied maladaptive and deviant behaviors and psychiatric disorders including short attention spans, hyperactivity, aggression, dysphoria, stereotyped repetitive motions, pica, and poor peer relationships

At his or her highest level of functioning, a severely mentally retarded person could demonstrate the following skills. In the area of independent functioning, he/she could feed self with a spoon and/or fork but have occasional spills, and put on clothing although help could be needed with buttons, zippers, buckles and shoe tying. Typically, he/she would also need help bathing and toileting. Physically, the typical severely retarded individual will eventually be able to hop or skip, climb stairs with alternating feet, ride a tricycle, climb on playground equipment, play dance games, and throw a ball. In the area of communication, a severely retarded person may have a speaking vocabulary of 300 to 400 words and/or gestures or signs, understand simple verbal communications including directions and questions, and recognize common advertising and environmental signs (e.g. fast food restaurants, department and food stores, men and women rest room labels, etc.). However,

it would be very rare for a severely retarded individual to learn to read prose with comprehension. In the area of social development, a severely retarded person frequently participates in directed group activities, games, and expressive arts. In the area of vocational skills, the typical severely retarded individual may be sent on simple errands, make simple purchases with coaching and prompting, prepare simple foods, help with simple household tasks and do simple repetitive assembly work (Grossman 1983, Appendix A).

### SECTION 3

#### CASE STUDIES OF TWO SEVERELY MENTALLY RETARDED TEENAGERS

While definitions and general characteristics of severe mental retardation may orient the reader, it is necessary to focus on specific individuals in order to really understand this special population. Consequently, I will present two case studies of severely mentally retarded teenagers. The studies are based on two individuals in my current classroom, but their names and insignificant characteristics have been changed to protect their privacy.

#### TONY

Tony, a 15 year old white male, was diagnosed at birth with Down Syndrome. This clinical type of retardation is the single most common cause of moderate to severe mental retardation, constituting about 10 percent of this population. Tony functions in the severe range. The syndrome is caused by a genetic imbalance, the presence of an extra set of genes of the number 21 chromosome (Patton, Berine-Smith and Payne 1990, 139-141).

Tony has many physical characteristics that are common to other Down Syndrome people. These include hypotonic muscle tone (floppy and loose-

jointed), small head circumference and skull size, underdeveloped sinuses, and a small nose with a flat, wide bridge. His eyes slant upward (slanting palpebral fissures) and have small skin folds at the corners (inner epicanthal folds), and his ears are small and square shaped. Tony's mouth is smaller than normal which makes his tongue appear larger than normal. Because of his poor muscle tone, his tongue intermittently protrudes, and he frequently drools. Tony has a history of gum inflammation and recession, and his teeth are small. His neck is short and broad, his skin is remarkably dry with a tendency to chap, and his hair is sparse, fine and straight. Tony's hands are small and square shaped, and he has short fingers. His fifth finger is especially short, curves inward, and has only one crease instead of the usual two. He also has a single crease across his palm instead of the usual two. His feet have extra space between the first and second toes, and there is a crease that runs between them and onto the soles of his feet. Tony is short (4 feet, 8 inches) and stocky (128 pounds), and his arms and legs are short in relationship to his trunk. Tony's weight is closely monitored as he tends toward obesity. His genitalia and secondary sex characteristics are underdeveloped for his age.

Tony lives with his mother, step father, and has a 20 year old brother who attends college in another state. His parents are professionals, and they reside in an upper middle class suburb. In addition to attending a special school and post-school day care for mentally retarded students, Tony accompanies his family to church and participates in specialized activities sponsored by the city parks and recreation department. At least one weekend each month, Tony is in respite care at a community mental health facility while his parents travel.

Tony's medical history includes chronic ear and respiratory infections, and decreased thyroid functioning. He did not walk unassisted until age 5 years. He has moderate hearing losses in both ears, and a severe articulation disorder. He has also been diagnosed as having an attentional deficit, and a severe behavior disorder. According to his most recent evaluations, Tony has an IQ of 30 with a corresponding developmental age of 2 years, 1 month. His adaptive behavior evaluation indicated that he is functioning below the .10 % level, or in other words, at least 99.9% of the national population functions at a higher level. Recent speech and language testing provided scores that indicate that Tony's comprehension of language is at a 2 year, 11 month developmental age, and his expressive abilities are at a 1 year, 9 month level.

Despite these scores and labels, there is much that Tony can do. He eats independently with a fork and spoon, although his food must be pre-cut. He can appropriately use a napkin with reminders and drinks unassisted from a cup or with a straw. He has been toilet trained for over a year and needs only minimal help with toileting procedures. With assistance, he can help clean up the classroom by dusting, picking up trash, holding the dust pan, and putting away supplies and equipment in prearranged storage. He'll assist in the preparation of simple foods, and can open packages, pour, spread, scoop, and stir with minimal physical assistance.

With appropriate environmental conditions and frequent reminders, Tony can calm himself and refrain from stereotypic behaviors, i.e. loud and inappropriate vocalizations, hyperextension, arm flapping, and non-directed hyperactivity. When his schedule is posted in photograph form and is rehearsed prior to implementation, Tony can differentiate between work and leisure. However, he continues to need significant prompting to remain on task

and work at an appropriate rate. Each week Tony has a variety of sensory based experiences in art, music, and dance. He also enjoys simple picture books which reflect his experiences, watches music based videos, and listens to favorite records and tapes. Tony travels with assistance on public buses to plays, grocery stores, department stores, shopping malls, parks, libraries, restaurants, and other community facilities. Other favorite community activities include water play at indoor pools, visits to friends' homes, and walks in the neighborhood. His social life also includes school based parties and celebrations. In the summer, Tony attends a special education summer school and day camp.

Generally, Tony seems to be a happy person. He is very friendly, affectionate, clearly demonstrates his likes and dislikes, and seems to appreciate his skills. He appropriately expresses emotions and reacts appropriately to the emotional expression of others. He follows rules and practices good manners with reminders, prompting, and assistance, and asks for help when needed. He is also able to take turns and share with minimal prompting.

Despite the significant developmental progress that Tony has made over the past several years, he will always need significant levels of assistance, and will never be able to function independently. He has no functional concepts of time, written symbols or quantities (1:1 correspondence or more and less). He has difficulty forming generalizations, categorizing, and prioritizing. He has minimal adaptive skills, can not plan, and consequently, can solve only the simplest problems. He exhibits limited abilities to distinguish colors, shapes, and sizes, and demonstrates minimal use of prepositions and adjectives. In addition to these cognitive deficits, Tony has minimal awareness of



environmental dangers (e.g. traffic, poisons, crime, exploitation, water, fire, etc.). He is unable to perform personal hygiene skills or dress without help, and has difficulty defining public versus private spaces.

### SARAH

Sarah, a 17 year old black female, was born six weeks premature with a birth weight of 3 pounds, 2 ounces. She remained in the hospital for over six weeks. During this period, apnea (temporary cessation of breathing) occurred five times. At age three months, Sarah began to have seizures, and developmental delays were apparent by age 8 months. At one year of age, she was diagnosed as having mild cerebral palsy and a seizure disorder. At age three years, Sarah was labeled moderately to severely mentally retarded.

Cerebral palsy is a term that refers to a large group of disorders characterized by a disorganization of motor control which results from damage to the brain at birth or in early childhood. These brain abnormalities can stem from numerous sources including malformations, rare hereditary degenerative central nervous system diseases, acquired post-natal abnormalities of a traumatic or infectious nature, and brain injury during the birth process. Oxygen deprivation before and during the birth process is frequently involved. The severity of the signs and symptoms of disruption in movement are correlated to the site and extent of the brain damage. While neurological lesions, which cause cerebral palsy, are generally not progressive, the expression of the disorder changes with maturation. During early infancy, when behavior is dominated by lower central nervous system structures, symptoms may not readily be apparent. As the higher central nervous system centers are activated, disorganization becomes more apparent, and the child

develops increased muscle tone in the form of spasticity, rigidity, or involuntary movements. The transient reflexes, which are normal in young babies, remain with the cerebral palsied child, and the lack of integration of reflexive behavior results in abnormal postural responses. Other handicaps associated with cerebral palsy include deficits in vision, hearing, speech, proprioception (concerned with the movement and positioning of the body in space), and mental retardation. Approximately 50% of people with cerebral palsy have IQs below 70. Seizure, emotional, and behavioral disorders are also frequently associated with cerebral palsy (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 223).

While Sarah's vision and hearing seem to be within normal limits, she does have petit mal and grand mal seizures which are partially controlled by medication. She has also been diagnosed as having speech and behavior disorders. Her last psychological assessment indicated she was functioning with an IQ below 30. This low score was compatible with her adaptive behavior assessment, and consequently she was diagnosed as functioning in the severe range of mental retardation.

Physically, Sarah is a very normal appearing and attractive young woman. She lives with her widowed mother and two teenaged sisters in a working class neighborhood near the school. Two other siblings are married and live in other cities. Her mother has a high school education and is employed in a textile mill. Family and school activities provide Sarah with her only social experiences.

Sarah was enrolled in a state funded developmental day care center at age 3 years. With regular physical therapy, she walked independently and fed herself at age 4 years, and was toilet trained at age 6 years. At age 12 years, Sarah was diagnosed as multi-handicapped and enrolled in a class for

behaviorally disordered students. This action was based on a three year history of uncontrolled aggression. She was described as manipulative, noncompliant, and combative, and her records contain many episodes of hitting, grabbing, scratching, pinching, kicking, and biting both peers and adults. Inappropriate sexual touching and violent temper tantrums were also documented. By her 16th year, the majority of Sarah's aggressive behaviors were being managed by a strict and consistent behavior modification program. She was then transferred to her current placement, a class for students with severe levels of mental retardation. For several months following this change, violent behaviors were again exhibited.

At the time of her last placement, Sarah's receptive language tests placed her at a 30 month level of comprehension. Her expressive level was 24 months and her speech consisted primarily of one or two word phrases, which were frequently slurred and often unintelligible. Echolalia, articulation errors, perseveration, and inappropriate speech (swearing, name-calling) were also noted. In addition, Sarah has a very short attention span, is highly distractible, and vacillates between hyperactivity and severe drowsiness. This last characteristic may be a side effect of her seizure medications.

Despite her scores, labels, and continuing behavioral problems, Sarah is making significant progress. She eats pre-cut food with a fork and spoon independently and can drink from a glass or with a straw. Her toileting is completely independent, and she can dress herself with the exception of tying shoes and determining if clothing is right side out. With consistent encouragement and some physical assistance, she will dust, sweep, and put away supplies and equipment in prearranged storage. She also assists with simple food preparation by opening packages, pouring, spreading, and stirring.

If Sarah will not comply with classroom rules (which are posted in picture form) after one warning, she is removed from the classroom and socially isolated (but not restrained) for up to 15 minutes. The consistent use of this negative reinforcer has once again eliminated most of her aggression and many of her other inappropriate social behaviors. When her schedule is posted in photograph form and is rehearsed prior to implementation, Sarah can differentiate between work and leisure activities and make smooth transitions between activities. She still requires significant structure and assistance to attend to most assigned tasks, and the rate of her work is extremely slow.

Each week, Sarah participates in numerous sensory based experiences including dance, music, and art. She especially enjoys water coloring and creates lovely non-objective paintings. She also enjoys simple picture books and photo albums that reflect her experiences. Sarah watches music based videos and loves recorded music - especially rock 'n roll. She travels with her class on the city bus, and can with careful supervision shop, go to plays, parks, libraries, restaurants, swimming pools, and other community facilities. Despite her cerebral palsy, she can (with supervision) roller skate and ride a bicycle!

Sarah appears happier than when she was first arrived at her current classroom. She has become very affectionate and playful, and is demonstrating her likes and dislikes in appropriate ways. She clearly states her desire for friends, and is able to share, take turns, and respect the property rights of others with minimal prompting.

However, like Tony, Sarah will never be able to function independently. She has no functional sense of time, written symbols or quantities. She is unable to generalize, prioritize, or categorize. Without the ability to plan, Sarah

can not problem solve or anticipate trouble. She, like Tony, has minimal awareness of environmental dangers and of public versus private space.

CHAPTER II

PUBLIC EDUCATION PROGRAMS FOR THE

SEVERELY MENTALLY RETARDED

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER II

Through this chapter, I will describe the educational experiences of the majority of severely mentally retarded people. I will begin with an examination of the concept of handicapism. This phenomenon will be defined and illustrated. Current social, vocational, and educational efforts to control and isolate this population in segregated schools, sheltered vocational workshops, and residential institutions will also be explored. Finally, I will discuss the primary theoretical orientation used to develop curricula for the severely mentally retarded. The majority of curricula for this population are grounded on behavior theory (Skinner). Examples from a behavioral curriculum will illustrate a critique of the behavioral perspective. I will present behaviorism as a dehumanizing system of oppression reliant on external control and the denial of internal realities and personal creativity. I will rely on works of Rollo May and Paulo Freire to support this critique.

## SECTION 1

### HANDICAPISM AND THE DEVALUING OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED

The mentally handicapped are among the most devalued groups in society. In his 1985 article, "An Overview of Social Role Valorization and Some Reflections of Elderly Mentally Retarded Persons", Wolf Wolfensberger ranked the mentally handicapped second on society's most devalued list (Patton, Smith-Beirne, and Payne 1990, 36-37). Only the mentally disordered evoked more negative responses than the mentally retarded. According to Wolfensberger, mentally retarded are most often perceived as menaces, sick, sub-human, child-like, or holy innocents. Even individuals that seek to help the mentally retarded, frequently victimize them through inappropriate charity and pity. Wolfensberger points out that how a person is perceived affects how that person will be treated. He further contends that the majority of mentally retarded people are badly treated.

Since so many people with mental retardation are devalued, the concept of handicapism, a phenomenon similar to racism, sexism, and ageism, is relevant. Handicapism is based on mistaken beliefs, prejudices, and pejorative actions on the part of individuals or society. Handicapism is defined by Bogdan and Bilden as a "set of assumptions and practices that promote the differential and unequal treatment of people because of apparent or assumed physical, mental, or behavioral differences" (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 38). Handicapism, with its resulting stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination is so prevalent in our society that it is even reflected in public education programs designed specifically for the mentally handicapped.

I believe that there are at least two common ways in which handicapism is practiced in programs for the mentally retarded. The first is through continued segregation of the mentally handicapped in separate schools and vocational workshops, and the second is through the use of curricula based on behavioral theory.

#### SEGREGATION OF THE MENTALLY RETARDED IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

As I read the current special education literature and reflect on my experiences, I become increasingly aware of how antiquated segregated special education programs are. The international trend is clearly to educate students with handicaps with non-disabled peers in neighborhood schools. While this trend is supported by research, its roots are deeper than empirical studies. This movement is grounded in the belief that people with handicaps should be cared for, educated, and participate in the mainstream of society. Despite this movement, the practice of segregating students with handicaps in separate schools and vocational workshops continues. I have been teaching in segregated programs for students with significant levels of mental retardation for over 13 years.

As argued by Andrea McDonnell and Michael Hardman in their article, "The Desegregation of America's Special Schools: Strategies for Change", the segregated approach, while recognizing that students with mental retardation should be educated at public expense, emphasizes that special students should be sheltered from society and that society should be protected from them. The most common professed purpose of public education deals with preparing students for the future. Learning to problem solve and make appropriate choices are prerequisites for self sufficiency, career development,



and community participation. These skills are seldom developed in segregated schools despite the fact that each special education student is required to have an individualized educational plan (IEP). Instead, the emphasis is on training students to perform specific tasks which will be used in other segregated environments, i.e. sheltered workshops, and adult day care activity centers. This practice, as examined in Pamela Gent and Mary Beth Mulhauser's article, "Public Integration of Students with Handicaps: Where It's Been, Where It's Going and How It's Getting There", is based on the belief that students with mental retardation can not or do not need to make choices and problem solve. Others will do this for them. The assumption is that people with significant handicaps should be managed and trained to function in compliance with programmatic expectations. Once this is accomplished, their education is complete. Their futures become a repetition of their pasts and the development of unique potentials are ignored in favor of preparation for placement in existing, segregated programs. Individualized education is meaningless unless students are perceived as unique individuals with differing needs and futures.

When a mentally retarded student is appropriately integrated into a neighborhood school, the probability is greater that he/she will live the rest of his/her life in an integrated community with numerous options for support and participation. Consequently, the individualized educational plan (IEP) must focus on the acquisition of functional skills with current and future applicability for community living instead of programmatic compliance. In addition, when the regular classroom teacher is required to develop and implement an individualized education program for the special student (with the support of a special educator), he/she is exposed to an orientation which can transfer to the

education of non-disabled students. Thus, the barriers between special and regular education are eliminated and the most positive aspect of special education, individualization, is realized and incorporated into the regular classroom.

According to Lou Brown and associates of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the most negative aspect of the segregated system is that it inhibits the development of relationships between students with handicaps and their non-disabled peers. When this occurs, both groups suffer. If a significantly mentally retarded student attends an integrated school, he/she is surrounded by positive models, peer tutors, companions, and friends that can provide support and friendship before, during, and after school. The lives of non-disabled students are also enhanced in the integrated educational setting. There is no better way to teach those without disabilities empathy, nurturing, tolerance, and responsibility than to have them attend schools that include a natural proportion of students with significant handicaps. There is no better way for students without disabilities to discover the abilities and charms of students with handicaps than to have them grow up together.

Over the years, as I have taken students from segregated schools into communities, I have become aware of the many things that mentally retarded students must learn if they are going to be successfully integrated. They must learn that goods and services cost money and to respect the property rights of others. They must cope with traffic, follow basic social conventions, cooperate with their non-disabled companions, dress appropriately, etc. But the single most important ability that must be developed if severely mentally retarded people are going to succeed in integrated environments is the ability to communicate with others. This ability to communicate must extend beyond the

augmentative systems that are frequently taught in segregated schools. Communication based on sign language can only be understood within very limited contexts. Severely mentally retarded individuals with significant speech and language handicaps must learn systems that will communicate in integrated communities where the majority will not have special augmentative language training.

## SECTION 2

### BEHAVIORISM AND THE SEVERELY MENTALLY HANDICAPPED

In addition to the segregation of mentally retarded people, handicapism is expressed in the public schools through the common use of behaviorally based curricula for mentally handicapped students. For this reason, it is important to provide a description of this theory of development and learning. This section will define behaviorism, provide an example from a behaviorally based curriculum for mentally retarded students and critique this orientation as a major barrier to the development of creativity and personal liberation.

### WHAT IS BEHAVIORISM?

Behavioral or stimulus-response theory was developed in the 1950's by B. F. Skinner of Harvard University. At the root of the behavioral orientation is the belief that development is the accumulative effects of learning and learning is limited to the accumulation of behaviors that are determined by environmental conditions. Essentially, behaviorists believe that learning consists of associations or connections made between stimuli and responses. A stimulus is understood as an event that causes a change in behavior. There are overt

or external stimuli, which can be observed, and covert or internal stimuli, which are not open to direct observation. Responses are reactions to stimuli. They can also be overt or covert. In either case, a stimulus, by definition, occasions a response.

The associations or connections between a stimulus and response is where one may exercise control through the use of reinforcers or punishment. Reinforcers are events that affect the probability that a particular response will be repeated. A positive reinforcer or accelerator is a positive event that increases the probability that a specific behavior will occur again or accelerate. A negative reinforcer is the termination of a negative event which leads to the probability that a specific behavior will be repeated. Punishment or decelerators are negative events which decrease the probability that a behavior will be repeated. The choice of reinforcers will be determined by what motivates as well as provides feedback to the individual student. Initially, reinforcers are given immediately following behaviors so that the student will link the behavior to the reinforcer. Once the link is established between the stimulus and response, the reinforcement schedules vary to assure retention of the learning. The size and frequency of the reinforcer is also important. If the learner becomes satiated with the reinforcer, he or she will not work (Rohwer, Ammons, and Crammer 1974, 91).

Since behaviorists believe that learning occurs based on the after effects or consequences of a response, a child will retain a response only if he or she is reinforced. This process is called operant conditioning. When the same response is conditioned by several similar responses without additional training, the process is called generalization. When this process occurs because of additional training, the process is referred to as the principle of

transfer. Horizontal transfers occur when the skills learned for one task are used for a similar task. Vertical transfers occur when the learned behavior is used as a necessary prerequisite for new, more complex learning.

Behaviorally based special education curricula consist of hierarchically arranged behavioral goals. The educational goals must be observable, definable, and measurable since behaviorists believe personal reflections are too subjective and consequently prevent clear communication. While contemporary behaviorists no longer dismiss the existence of the internal realm, this realm is understood as the accumulation and interactions of past learning. The goals elicited at the lower levels serve as the basis for learning similar (horizontal) skills or higher (vertical) level skills. Consequently, development is incremental, cumulative and specific. In order to teach complex behaviors, two shaping techniques are employed. The first, successive approximations, breaks a behavior into small components which are taught one at a time. The second technique, chaining, occurs when the student is reinforced for connecting the learned components of a behavior. Physical, gestural, verbal, and visual prompts are also used to stimulate memory and facilitate communication. As the student accomplishes the behavior at an independent level, these cues or prompts are gradually faded. There are generally six steps in shaping a student's behavior. They are: 1) getting to know the student and determining the current or operant level of functioning in relationship to the desired behavioral outcome, 2) determining what is reinforcing to the student., 3) establishing and maintaining attention, 4) bringing the student under control, i.e. getting him/her to follow directions (this includes the various levels of prompting), 5) shaping the individual steps or pieces of a behavior through the use of successive approximations, and

6) shaping complex sequences of behavior through chaining. The basic goal of training students through the use of behavioral techniques is to accelerate appropriate or desirable behaviors and decelerate inappropriate or undesirable behaviors. The teacher is frequently the individual who determines what are desirable or undesirable behaviors based on current environmental expectations and projections of the student's future placements.

#### AN EXAMPLE OF A BEHAVIORALLY BASED LESSON PLAN BASED ON A CURRICULUM FOR MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

The following lesson is taken from Luke S. Watson's 1973 curriculum, Child Behavior Modification: a Manual for Teachers, Nurses, and Parents. The measurable objective of the lesson is to teach the child to independently put on a pullover shirt, and employs the successive approximation technique.

The first step in training is to get to know the student and determine what necessary prerequisite and related skills the student has. This level is called the current or operant level of functioning. Can the student take off his/her shirt? Does the student understand what part of his/her body the shirt covers? Does the student understand that shirts are to be worn? Without these prerequisites strengths, the stated objective would in most cases be inappropriate.

Assuming that the prerequisite skills were present, the teacher would then determine what was reinforcing to the student. Choices of reinforcers could range from edible treats to special play breaks to attractive toys to physical and verbal praise. The choice of the reinforcer must not only motivate the student, it should provide feedback reflecting the level of the student's success.

Once an appropriate reinforcer was chosen, the teacher would determine how to best get and maintain the student's attention. In some cases this could be facilitated by teaching in environments with few extraneous stimuli. Occasionally, the teacher may even be required to physically posture a student in such a way that eye contact is facilitated and maintained.

Once attention is established and maintained, the teacher must control the student by getting him/her to follow directions. These directions can be communicated in several ways including physical, gestural, visual and verbal prompts. As the student learned the behavior, the prompts would be gradually faded.

The next step of training involves the use of the successive approximation technique. This technique divides the components of pulling off a shirt into small, teachable parts. The number of parts would be determined by the student's operant level of functioning and his/her ability to attend and follow directions. Typically, the task might be taught in five steps with a backward training order.

At the beginning of the lesson the shirt would be completely on the child. Next, the teacher would move the hem up the body trunk and prompt the child to pull the hem of the shirt from about the rib cage down to the normal waist position. The student would then be reinforced with a "Good boy!" (or girl) said with a large smile and lots of enthusiasm, plus a tangible, i.e. food, toy, or play break. Upon completion of this step, the student would be directed to put his/her right arm into the right sleeve of the shirt while holding and pulling down on the shirt material just below the right sleeve. Prompts at this step may include physical assistance with pulling the hem to the waist level. When this step was accomplished, the student would be reinforced. The next step would

involve having the student getting his left arm into the left sleeve and pulling the hem to his/her waist. Again, various prompts, including physical assistance, could be required. Upon accomplishment, the student would be reinforced. The next step would concentrate on having the student pull the shirt over his/her head. Physical assistance would probably still be needed during the initial training to get his/her arms into the right and then left sleeves but this help would be faded as appropriate. When the student's shirt hem got to his/her waist, he/she would be reinforced. The training sequence would be complete when the student could take the shirt by the hem, pull it over his/her head, put left then right arms into the sleeves and pull the shirt hem to the normal waist position. When this step was completed, the student would be reinforced.

Initially, the student may require maximal levels of physical assistance to succeed, but as the mastery level improved, the physical prompting would be decreased to moderate to minimal assistance levels. Eventually, the physical help would be replaced by combinations of visual and/or gestural and/or verbal prompting. These too would range from maximal to moderate to minimal levels of prompting based on progression toward independent functioning. Note that the primary reinforcer is only delivered after the last step in the attempted sequence although praise may motivate the student throughout the process. Training progresses at the child's own pace and if the progress is too slow, the task can be broken down into even smaller components. The chaining technique would be used after each individual step had been mastered by reinforcing the successful combination of steps.

If the student did not cooperate during the training, it would be appropriate to use either a negative reinforcer or punishment. For example, if the student



would not attend or follow directions, the teacher would ignore or scold or even restrain the student. The teacher's intervention would be interpreted as a negative reinforcer if the student learned that he/she could stop the negative response by returning to expected behavior. The teacher's intervention would be interpreted as punishment if the focus was on responding to the inappropriate student behavior instead of completing the task.

#### A CRITIQUE OF THE BEHAVIORAL APPROACH TO THE EDUCATION OF SEVERELY MENTALLY HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

I am a witness to the fact that behaviorism is a very effective approach to training severely mentally handicapped people. For over a decade, as a teacher of the mentally retarded, I have used this approach to control, eliminate, and stimulate the behaviors of my students. However, through my doctoral studies I have been exposed to two significant themes that are in direct contradiction to a behavioral approach to education. These themes focus on the nature of the creative process and the interdependent relationships between human liberation and the realization of human potential. To support this critique of the use of the behavioral approach in special education, I will focus on the ideas of Rollo May as presented in his book, The Courage to Create, and Paulo Freire in his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. First I will focus on the disharmony between the creative process and behaviorism.

#### THE CREATIVE PROCESS AND BEHAVIORISM

Severely handicapped children are not usually considered creative. When compared to "normal" children, the severely mentally handicapped are

described as being extremely dependent and not capable of learning or producing much. If creativity is understood as an aesthetic process by which "artful" productions are made, then it is very difficult to perceive the severely mentally handicapped as being creative.

Through his book, The Courage to Create, Rollo May presents another way of understanding creativity which includes the possible inclusion of the severely mentally handicapped as creative people. However, May's understanding of the creative process is not compatible with the majority of educational curricula for mentally handicapped people because they are based on behavioral theory. In The Courage to Create, Rollo May defines creativity as a process of self actualization through which something new is brought into being. By this, he certainly does not understand creativity as the making of "artful" productions.

Whenever we define creativity, we must make the distinction between its pseudo forms, on the one hand - that is creativity as a superficial aestheticism. And, on the other, its authentic form - that is, the process of bringing something new into being (May 1975, 37).

This definition of creativity not only permits the inclusion of scientists, mathematicians, artists, dancers, writers, and musicians, but all people who are actively engaged in process of realizing their human potentials. "This creativity is the most basic manifestation of a man or woman fulfilling his or her own being in the world" (May 1975, 38).

May insists that activities that serve to relax a person or provide escape from stress do not qualify as creative acts. This is because the creative process

requires an intense encounter between the person and his or her world. He understands world as meaning the significant relationships that occur between an individual and his/her reality. The emphasis is placed on interdependence, and the interrelatedness of the two.

I do not mean the world as environments or as the "sum total" of things; nor do I refer at all to objects about a subject. World is a pattern of meaningful relations in which a person exists and in the design of which he or she participates. It has object reality, to be sure, but it is not simply that. World is interrelated with the person at every moment. A continual dialectic process goes on between world and self and self and world; one implies the other, and neither can be understood if we omit the other (May 1975, 51).

The creative encounter expresses a wholeness of experience that unites the creator with his/her reality. Characteristics of the creative encounter include intense levels of absorption and engagement that involve the whole person. Creativity does not flow from just increased self consciousness, but from what May terms the "unconscious". It springs from the subconscious, preconscious or below conscious awareness.

... creativity goes on in varying degrees of intensity on levels not directly under the control of conscious willing. Hence the heightened awareness we are speaking does not at all mean increased self-consciousness. It is rather correlated with abandon and absorption, and it involves a heightening of awareness in the whole personality (May 1975, 46).

Yet while creativity can not consciously be willed, May contends that a person must desire and be committed to the creative encounter. Another elemental characteristic of the creative process deals with conflict. The creative

act is the "offspring" of a significant struggle between a person's conscious thoughts and a perspective or orientation of the "unconscious". The resolution of this significant conflict not only gives "birth" to a creative form, it creates significant emotional responses. Feelings of joy and gratitude are usually associated with the "birth of new life". But feelings of anxiety and guilt also accompany the "birth" of a creative form because the resolution of conflict, which generates the creative form, causes the "death" of old ways of understanding and establishing structures.

Whenever there is a breakthrough of a significant idea in science or a significant new form in art, the new idea will destroy what a lot of people believe is essential to the survival of their intellectual and spiritual world. This is the sense of guilt in the genuine creative work. As Picasso remarked, "Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction." This breakthrough carries with it also an element of anxiety. For it has not only broken down my previous hypothesis, it shook my self-world relationship (May 1975, 63).

The necessity of limits is another essential element of the creative process. The limits that life imposes: time, energy, resources, health, physical and mental capacities, etc., are needed for the creative process. May contends that without these limits, we would not have to struggle. Consciousness is actually created out of the awareness of our limits, especially the awareness that we will die.

Human consciousness is the distinguishing feature of our existence; without limitations we would never develop it. Consciousness is the awareness that emerges out of the dialectic tension between possibilities and limitations (May 1975, 136).

May believes that one of the greatest threats to the creative process is the external control of people which is characteristic of contemporary life.

Mechanization, uniformity, predictability, and orderliness are all enemies of the necessary encounter between the individual's unconscious and his/her world.

What I am saying is that the danger always exists that our technology will serve as a buffer between us and nature, a block between us the deeper dimensions of our own experience. Tools and techniques should be an extension of consciousness, but they can just as easily be a protection from consciousness (May 1975, 76).

Ultimately creativity is the process of trying to create meaning out of our encounters with the world. We as humans are not engaged in just knowing the world but are interacting with the world to reform or recreate it and at the same time ourselves.

This passion for form is a way to find and constitute meaning in life. And this is what genuine creativity is. Creativity is involved in our every experience as we try to make meaning in ourself-world relationship (May 1975, 61).

There are no correlations between May's thoughts on the creative process and stimulus-response theory or behaviorism. New behaviors or accomplished stimulus-response goals stem from and are added to previous behaviors. This in no way implies the creation of a new being or unique self actualization. Since behaviorists define the internal life as the accumulation of past external deposits the concept of the "unconscious" is disregarded. For May there is no source for the creative process without the "unconscious"

realm. Without an "unconscious" realm, there can be no internal-external dialectic struggle, let alone thinking. For May, thinking and self-creating are inseparable.

May believes that the emphasis that behaviorists place on external behavior is a carry-over from Puritanism. It is an issue of control. We must be able to "see" behaviors so we can determine if they comply with external, societal standards of morality.

Practically all of us as children have heard: Behave yourself! Behave! Behave! The relationship between moralistic puritanism and this preoccupation with behavior is by no means entirely fictitious or accidental. Is not our emphasis on behavior a carry-over of our "inherent strain of Puritanism" as Reavey suggests may be the case in Russia? I am, of course, entirely aware of the argument that we have to study behavior because that's the only thing that can be studied with any kind of objectivity. But this could well be - and I propose it is - a parochial prejudice raised to the level of scientific principle. If we accept it as presupposition, does it not lead to the greatest mistake of all, from the point of view of this chapter - namely, a denial by fiat of the significance of irrational, subjective activity by subsuming it under the guise of its external results (May 1975, 83)?

May sees behaviorism as the enemy of the creative process. Its source of power is external control which denies personal choice and freedom.

Human freedom involves our capacity to pause between stimulus and response and, in that pause, to choose the one response toward which we wish to throw our weight. The capacity to create ourselves, based on this freedom, is inseparable from consciousness or self-awareness (May 1975, 117).

## BEHAVIORISM AND OPPRESSION

In his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire presents his philosophy and methodology of an educational system that serves as a subversive force. This system not only empowers illiterates through the acquisition of literacy skills, it leads to new understandings of self, society, and the ways in which society functions to oppress individuals. Through reflection and action, the peasants realize a state of "praxis" which leads to the liberation of individuals and the possibility of a more just society. Freire's philosophy and methodology have not only application to the illiterate of the Third World, but for oppressed people everywhere who suffer under systems of dehumanizing domination.

As a teacher of mentally retarded students, Pedagogy of the Oppressed has stimulated me to reflect on ways in which these students may be oppressed. The book has also lead me to consider how I am, as a member of a powerful educational system, both a perpetuator and victim of oppression. In order to apply Freire's work directly to severely mentally retarded people, one must establish a correspondence between the realities and characteristics of this population and the Third World oppressed. To the extent that both populations have been dehumanized by societally sanctioned violence, injustice, oppression, and exploitation, there is a correspondence. Significantly mentally retarded people have been victimized throughout the centuries as has been documented in Chapter 1. However, mentally handicapped people, by definition, lack the mental capacities to function independently. Freire's methodology is based on the assumption that the Third World oppressed, once educated, can create new realities. "To achieve this praxis, however, it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and in their ability to

reason" (Freire 1987, 53). Another basic assumption of Freire's work is that the oppressed must take direct responsibility for the own liberation.

The conviction of the oppressed that they must fight for their liberation is not a gift bestowed by the revolutionary leadership, but the result of their own "conscientizacao" (Freire 1987, 54).

Because of severe mental deficiencies, mentally retarded people are not able to understand social, political, and economic oppression, let alone take reasoned action to create more just institutions. Consequently, I must reject the direct application of Freire's methodology to these people.

However, Freire's work is applicable to the people who are directly responsible for the care and education of the severely mentally retarded. I believe that special education teachers in public schools, unknowingly, assume the roles of both the oppressed and the oppressor. They assume these roles when they accept and implement dehumanizing curricula which are based on behaviorism.

Freire's description of the oppressive banking system of education has many parallels with the stimulus-response or behavioral approach to education. Freire defines the banking system of education through the following quote:

Education then becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing deposits (Freire 1987, 58).



Similarities between the banking and behavioral systems of education are numerous. Both negate a dialectic relationship between teacher and student. The teacher teaches and the students are taught. This position assumes that the teacher knows everything and the student knows nothing of value. Both systems also emphasize the importance of the use of power by the teacher over the students. Through the use of rewards and punishments, the teacher disciplines and stimulates desired behaviors. These behaviors are predetermined, objectified, and measurable.

Both the banking and behavioral systems are based on program contents or goals that are set without consultation with students. The students must adapt to an imposed educational agenda. In both systems the students respond to the actions of the teacher and are unable to initiate interactions. Freedom for the student is denied in both systems, and through the use of strict controls, students are dehumanized and become objects of manipulation. Students' potentials are defined by the system's desires.

The results of both banking and behavioral educational systems serve not the student but the institution and sponsoring society which expect compliant, manageable, and predictable conformity.

It is not surprising that the banking concept of education regards men as adaptable, manageable beings. The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (Freire 1987, 60).

Control base educational systems, based on banking and behavioral methodologies, not only dehumanize students, but serve to oppress teachers.

By denying that education is a teacher-student interactive process, both the teacher and student are unable to create new realities and thus are denied their human potentials.

Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of becoming fully human (Freire 1987, 28).

Special education teachers who are required to teach from behavioral curricula, are further oppressed. These curricula not only dictate what the students are to learn but prescribe in minute detail each step the teacher must follow toward goal accomplishment. This process denies the teacher's creativity, intelligence, talent, and value.

It is quite unsettling for me as a teacher of severely mentally retarded students to consider myself as oppressed and as an oppressor. The primary motivation that directed me into special education (which will be elaborated in Chapter 4) was a desire to foster the potentials of mentally retarded children. But through experience, education, and reflection, I have become aware that my original humanistic and spiritual principles have been subordinated to the goals of the educational institution and the sponsoring society. These goals deal more with creating mentally handicapped people who will comply with institutional expectations, and produce work, if only in a token sense. The goals of compliance and production contrast sharply with the goals of self actualization through creativity, and the realization of human potential through liberation. A record of data collection reflecting compliance and production contrasts sharply with stories of self emergence. This awareness has made a

difference for me and consequently for my students. I have created an alternative to a behaviorally based curriculum for severely mentally retarded students. The purpose of this dissertation is to record why and how this was done.

CHAPTER III  
THE McIVER CURRICULUM

SECTION 1  
THE CREATION OF THE McIVER CURRICULUM

In August of 1987, I joined the faculty of McIver School in Greensboro, N. C. McIver is a separate, special education, public school which serves students with significant degrees of mental retardation. The majority of the students function within the moderate and severe levels and frequently have other physical and emotional handicaps. In February of 1988, I asked five other teachers, Mrs. Mary Clark, Mrs. Joyce Galloway, Miss Jill McSwain, Dr. Pauline Loeffler, and Ms. Terri Simmons, to help me create a curriculum for the school. I took this initiative in an attempt to address what I considered obvious deficits and problems. These included the teaching of non-functional skills, and the absence of a comprehensive curriculum, an educational philosophy, a community integration focus, and a means to assess students in non-competitive ways. The McIver Curriculum represents a grass-roots effort to address issues within our school that can be linked to the oppression of students with mental retardation. Chapter 3 will describe and critique our efforts.

McIver traces its roots back to the charity supported Greensboro Special School for Trainable Mentally Retarded Children which was established in 1954. While tremendous growth and change occurred in the school's 36 year

history, a formal school-wide curriculum had never existed. Consequently, the introduction of the this curriculum represents an extremely important milestone in the school's evolution. The curriculum also represents a grass-roots effort of teachers to create an educational experience that relates to the real lives of students. In that sense, it is designed to teach functional skills that are needed for community based living.

#### THE McIVER CURRICULUM PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy for The McIver Curriculum was developed from the input of the entire faculty and provides the basic framework upon which the curriculum was constructed. It begins with a statement that affirms the individual and social value of mentally retarded people. This initial affirmation sets the tone of the entire work. "The birth of every child is a unique gift to the world ... a gift of personal and corporate hope and promise" (The McIver Curriculum 1990, 4). This statement not only rejects attitudes of pity that are characteristic of handicapism, it stresses the relatedness of all people. The philosophy continues by stating, "Individuals by nature are born with varying degrees of imperfection and the state of total dependence characteristic of infancy can with nurturance develop into a process of interdependence" (The McIver Curriculum 1990, 4). This statement stresses the belief that all people must rely on one another; that which makes the mentally retarded different from non-retarded people are degrees of interdependence, not states of dependence versus independence.

Each person is a unique, indivisible blend of heredity and environment. While there are still children born with significant limitations, their environments can be manipulated, molded and changed to improve their quality of life (The Mclver Curriculum 1990, 4).

This statement from the philosophy serves as a response to the "nature versus nurture" controversy. These special education teachers were very aware of barriers imposed by heredity, but decided that these limits must not serve as an excuse to deny human potential. All people have limits. Again, the difference between the mentally retarded and the non-retarded people is interpreted in this statement as a question of degree.

The faculty's commitment to teaching mentally retarded students functional skills that would foster successful integration into the larger community is addressed in the following statement:

People are social creatures and require varying degrees of interaction with others to grow and maintain health. Consequently, the educational curriculum should emphasize the acquisition of skills that will significantly enhance the development and maintenance of satisfying interpersonal relationships and harmonious community integration and participation. A primary goal of the educational institution should be to facilitate the just interactions of individuals within their communities (The Mclver Curriculum 1990, 4).

From the perspective of the Mclver faculty, it is obvious that education should be more than the "3 Rs". Because of their significant mental deficiencies, many mentally retarded people are unable to learn how to read, write, or calculate with numerical symbols. The Mclver faculty believes that the school's philosophy needs to reflect an expanded notion of the purpose of education and further define what is meant by just interactions within

communities. Hence, the following statements:

- 1) The educational process for students should encourage optimal independent functioning, physical, and mental health. Consequently, the curriculum should emphasize learning in the areas of self care, human sexuality, and life patterns that foster holistic health and physical education.
- 2) The family serves as the primary source of care for most people. Efforts should be made to support current and future families, whether traditional or non-traditional units, including the teaching of domestic skills, i.e. cooking, cleaning, home economics, and interpersonal communication. The planning and implementation of a student's education should include primary family members, so that both families and schools can be more responsive to educational needs and processes.
- 3) All people have basic needs including food, shelter, clothing, and the use of tools. Efforts should be made to insure that each person, to the maximum extent possible, has the opportunity to acquire these necessities for him or herself and family. Related to these needs, people should have a right to pursue meaningful, productive vocations. Education should significantly help prepare the student for this important aspect of life.
- 4) One of the most unique aspects of being human is the ability to gather, to interpret, to store, to share, and to relate knowledge from previous and current experiences. This ability is the basis for predictions and the foundation of future learning. Each person should have the right to participate in this learning-teaching process to the extent of his or her abilities and interests.
- 5) Most people are born with potential to discover and to create meaning out of their interactions with the world. Significant efforts should be made to develop this potential. Most people are born with the potentials for independent locomotion with a wide repertoire of movement possibilities. Significant efforts should be made to develop these potentials.
- 6) Satisfying creative, leisure, and recreational experiences are paramount for a quality life and self expression. Consequently, a wide spectrum of the arts, humanities, sports organizations, and celebrations should be a primary part of the educational process.
- 7) Positive self-esteem is foundational for mental health and happiness. Consequently, the school should foster the development of positive self regard in its students. This can be accomplished, at least in part, by valuing uniqueness, individuality, and maintaining realistic balances between students' potentials and limits. Success leads to success and is usually enhanced by structure and discipline (The McIver Curriculum 1990, 4-6).

The faculty had long debates over the issue of educational placement for the significantly mentally retarded. These debates were stimulated by numerous examples of students who had been victimized in both segregated and integrated settings. A resolution of these arguments occurred when the concept of the least restrictive environment was understood as a continuum of possibilities. The individual's placement would be determined by his/her special needs ranging from a separate special education school, to a self contained special education classroom in a regular school, to a fully integrated classroom with support services, psychological, occupational, physical and language therapies, etc., being offer either in or out of the classroom. This resolution is reflected in The Mclver Curriculum philosophy through the following statements:

Students should be placed in the environments that will facilitate participation and acceptance in the total school community. This community should provide experiences that are as close to the age appropriate cultural norm as possible. For some students, this may be only occur in a special, separate setting which represents their least restrictive environment (1990, 6).

Finally, the faculty addresses the issue of labeling and categorizing mentally retarded students through the following statement:

The practice of labeling students should be limited to identification for special education services. Beyond this, the practice should be eliminated in every situation to avoid limiting expectations. Every student has the right to be treated with respect (The Mclver Curriculum 1990, 6).



### IMPLIMENTATION OF THE McIVER CURRICULUM

It was readily apparent from faculty input that The McIver Curriculum should be directly related to the real lives of students and teach skills that will encourage high levels of independent functioning within communities. Consequently, "Perfect Fred" was created to serve as a model McIver graduate. Fred is described as a 22 year old man with Down Syndrome functioning within the moderate range of mental retardation. Fred lives in a group home with four other men with mental retardation under the guidance of full and part time house coordinators. He works on a commercial cleaning crew and his leisure interests include art, music (tapes, records and participation in a special choir), gardening, yard work, swimming, and hiking. Socially, Fred is very active. He has a special 19 year old female friend who continues to attend McIver School. She and Fred date in small groups and alone, and their relationship includes sexual expression. Additionally, Fred socializes with house mates and members of his church.

Fred's health history includes problems with a congenital heart defect, controlling weight gains, and a significant articulation disorder. His family consists of his mother and 16 year old sister who live in the same community. In summary, Fred is happy, productive person and realizes a high degree of potential in all areas of his life.

The curriculum committee reasoned that by projecting a detailed routine of our fictitious character's life, we could identify the necessary general skills which encouraged such optimal functioning. We also believed that these skills could be organized into general categories which could become educational domains. So we created Fred's life in great detail listing all activities he would be involved in from waking in the morning to sleeping at night. This list of over

500 activities was analyzed and broken down into general underlying skills. These skills were then assigned to eight general categories: domestic, social, vocational, leisure, physical health, mental/emotional health, physical education, and symbol use domains. The lists of general skills under each of the domains were then analyzed and broken down again into three time periods based on the assumptions that there are developmentally and culturally normal times for skills to be learned. These time frames were labeled elementary, middle, and senior high school. These completed lists of developmentally sequenced skills become the basic framework of the curriculum. The acquisition of the skills in a sequential, connected order was viewed as the focus of the teachers' efforts.

Once general skills were assigned to the eight domains, the committee began to analyze component parts of these skills. For example, the general skill of eating, which was assigned to the elementary section of the domestic domain because most children learn to eat at home at a young age, was made up of the subcomponent skills of chewing, swallowing, self-feeding with fingers and then with utensils, drinking from a cup and with a straw, using a napkin, etc. These subcomponents became extensive assessment items in each domain.

It is important to emphasize that these subcomponents of skills are not task analyzed, nor are teaching techniques prescribed. The committee members strongly believed that each teacher should develop his or her own strategies for teaching the subskills. Eventually, each domain will have an extensive addendum of resources, activities, and teaching strategies, but the creation of lesson plans must remain the right and responsibility of the teacher. In this sense, The McIver Curriculum serves as a detailed, interconnected and

sequential map of educational goals (the domain lists) and objectives (the assessment lists). However, the curriculum does not focus on one particular theoretical orientation or teaching techniques.

The McIver Curriculum is not presented as a completed work. This is reflected by its loose leaf notebook format. Revisions, adaptations, and additions are expected and encouraged.

The curriculum stresses the importance of developing basic cognitive concepts and language skills across all domains. It also helps teachers develop functional, individualized educational goals and objectives by providing sequential, developmentally arranged, milestones in each domain. It is designed to assure that the educational experiences of McIver students will have a high degree of continuity and connectedness and be applicable and transferable to other educational placements, including mainstream classrooms.

The McIver Curriculum emphasizes that home and community are natural extensions of the classroom walls in the belief that school lessons must be practiced at home and in the community if these lessons are to transfer to real life. Consequently, the curriculum stresses parent involvement in the development of individualized education plans (IEP), close teacher-parent interactions, and the assignment of home and community work. While most of the goals of the curriculum are not paper and pencil oriented, they are none the less perceived as justifying significant, consistent practice.

Another priority of The McIver Curriculum is to provide a means to systematically assess student's abilities and strengths across all domains. Consequently, the curriculum is arranged and formatted as an assessment scale with spaces provided to quickly record the levels of functioning or

assistance required. The lower levels of the scale document if a student can attend to a task. Higher levels of the scale document the levels of assistance required to function successfully. Assistance levels range from physical to visual to gestural to verbal prompting. At the highest levels of the scale, independent performance and mastery levels are documented.

Each curricular domain, as mentioned above, is divided into 3 general age groups: elementary, ranging from ages 5 through 11 years, middle school, ranging in ages 12 through 15 years, and senior high school, ranging from ages 16 through 21 years. Regardless of students' developmental ages, they are grouped with their chronological peers. This decision is based on the Principle of Normalization which is defined as, "making available to the mentally retarded patterns and conditions of every day life which are as close as possible to the norms and patterns of the mainstream society" (Patton, Beirne-Smith, and Payne 1990, 23).

The elementary section of the domestic domain stresses basic functional skills that are usually acquired in a child's home during the preschool period. The focus is on how to eat appropriately, follow basic emergency procedures, make a simple snack, straighten a room, perform trash chores, set a table, or hand wash dishes. By middle school, the domestic curriculum emphasizes the use of a phone, knowing how to lockup the house, make breakfast, use basic tools, clean the kitchen, appropriately select and care for clothing, make a bed, clean a house, or shop for groceries. By the time a student enters the high school level, he/she is taught how to pack a lunch for school or work, gather important information from the media, prepare a supper, shop for basic personal needs, do simple mending, ironing, and care for a yard. All of these skills are not only highly functional and necessary, but they also provide a

means for the mentally retarded person to develop higher levels of independence and value to his/her family.

The primary goal of the leisure domain is to assure that students develop interesting and rewarding community based recreational skills that can be used during and after school. On the elementary level, students are taught how to calm themselves and how to differentiate between work and play. Other basic elementary requirements include regular multi-sensory experiences in the arts, exposure to a wide variety of environments, daily access to quality illustrated books on a wide variety of themes, and frequent participation in games, sports, social gatherings and community recreation. On the middle school level, the leisure domain stresses the development of personal hobbies, the operation of audio-visual equipment, and the exploration of vacation options. Finally, at the senior high level, the students are expected to select personal leisure activities and utilize community based resources for recreation. While these goals may seem very basic, the McIver faculty knows many mentally handicapped people who were never exposed to recreation and leisure education opportunities. These individuals' post school lives are characterized by extreme boredom.

The mental/emotional health domain of The McIver Curriculum stresses across all age groups, the need for family participation in mental health education. The emphasis is on the development of positive self identities and strong self esteem in mentally retarded people. The faculty believes that the most important skills students learn deal with making wise independent choices and the development of positive interpersonal relationships. We also stress strong self advocacy and appropriate responses to abuse and/or neglect.

The physical education domain of The McIver Curriculum is quite extensive do to the excellent work of Dr. Pauline Loeffler who was director of physical education at McIver School for 13 years. On an elementary level, the students learn about the human body, practice fine motor coordination, fundamental motor skills, and educational gymnastics, solve movement problems, sequence movements and actions, participate in activities to develop physical and motor fitness, practice body mechanics, move to music, make play choices, and learn sports that may become life long interests. In middle school, McIver students continue to learn about the human body. They participate in new games, track and field and gymnastics, activities for health related and motor fitness, educational and recreational dance, and community recreation. Emphasis is also placed on making choices and learning relaxation techniques. At the senior high level, students strive for proficiency in at least two team sports and develop a large repertoire of recreational sports and games.

In the physical health domain of The McIver Curriculum, elementary aged students are taught that cigarettes are unhealthy, that alcohol is not for children, and how to recognize medications and drugs. During middle and senior high school, students participate in alcohol, drug, and tobacco education programs. In the area of preventing illness and related medical issues, elementary students learn how to prevent contagion, recognize remedies for illness, and identify health providers. During middle and senior high levels, students learn the roles and names of health providers, appropriate behaviors in medical environments, and about their personal medications. Eventually, many students learn how to self administer medications and access medical care. Basic safety skills included in The McIver Curriculum are vehicle, fire, water, stair, traffic and walking procedures.

Students also learn about poisons, what to do when lost, and when and how to call 911. Hygiene, grooming, maintaining proper posture and body alignment, basic nutrition, and strategies for weight control are also taught across all levels. Sex education begins at the elementary level as students learn the names of their body parts, the differences between boys and girls, how to dress and toilet, appropriate touching, the concepts of private versus public space, and how to prevent sexual exploitation. In middle and senior high levels, students learn how to cope with issues related to puberty including body changes, erections, nocturnal emissions, masturbation, and menstruation. In senior high school, students are taught about genital sexuality, birth control, and venereal diseases.

In the social domain, elementary students learn to comply with basic behavioral expectations and social rules, use appropriate manners and good conversational skills, define family, buy a cafeteria meal, celebrate holidays, and use public conveyances, i.e. elevators, escalators, etc. During middle school, students learn how to cope with rejection, develop phone skills, use varied modes of public transportation, and buy meals at fast food restaurants. In senior high school, students learn how to cope with losing, define and relate to the larger community, dine at restaurants, and the basic etiquette of dating.

The symbol use and comprehension domain stresses across all levels the teaching of time concepts, and the use of money and numerals. Basic reading and writing are also part of this domain. The focus is on the acquisition of functional skills and, if necessary, adapted means to realize more independent participation in the larger community.

During elementary school, McIver students begin vocational training by learning to follow directions, stay on task, deal with authority, work steadily with

distractions, recognize task completion, be productive, care for tools and materials, work with partners, sort, sequence, and cut. In middle school, they learn the importance of their work, and how to differentiate between leisure and work, perform classroom jobs, punch or sign in, print personal information, and explore possible careers. During high school, emphasis is placed on defining a personal work ethic, establishing job references and interview skills, learning how to call in and give notice, arrange transportation, care for personal belongings and tools, and how to develop a simple resume.

Basic concepts and language development are addressed across all levels and domains. Emphasis is placed on teaching the student to discriminate and create connections and relationships, make decisions and choices, differentiate quantities, and understand and use descriptors.

## SECTION 2

### A CRITIQUE OF THE McIVER CURRICULUM

In his book, Education and Psychology: Plato, Piaget and Scientific Psychology, Kieran Egan presents four basic questions that have primary concern for educators. These are: "What should we teach? How should we teach those things? When should we teach them? What should are end product be like" (1983, 1)? I will use Egan's four questions to organize a critique of the curriculum.

The McIver Curriculum very clearly states what should be taught. These are basic functional skills that will enable people with severe to moderate levels of mental retardation to interact as fully as possible in normalized community settings. Areas of instruction include receptive and expressive language, basic cognitive concepts, domestic living, leisure, mental-emotional



health, physical health, physical education, social skills, symbol use, and vocational training.

The Mclver Curriculum is also very clear about when these skills should be taught. Guided by what is culturally normal, and to a degree, developmentally sequential, skills are divided into three broad age periods: elementary, middle, and senior high school. If students are unable to acquire skills during an expected period, teaching of those specific skills can be discontinued based on the decision of the teacher in consultation with the student's parents.

Termination of a goal occurs on an individualized basis guided by considerations of the importance of the goal coupled with a realistic prognosis for success. The way in which the assessment is arranged permits defining success at varying levels based on the degrees of assistance required. For example, a student may be able to bathe him or herself with minimal physical assistance, or with only verbal, visual, or gestural prompts, at an independent or even transfer level. In this sense, skill accomplishment is measured not only as a matter of when, but to what degree.

The desired outcome of a Mclver education is also clearly stated through the case study of "Perfect Fred". The Mclver faculty desires that its graduates function as fully and independently as possible in the least restrictive environment.

Egan's question, "How should we teach those things?", points out a major problem area with The Mclver Curriculum. In an attempt to respect the professionalism and diversity of the faculty, specific instructions on how to teach skills were not included. Teachers responded quite negatively to curricula that provided minute instructional details. They were frustrated with being perceived as technicians, instead of qualified, creative professionals.

However, with the implementation of the curricula, it has become apparent that many of the instructional techniques being used are incompatible with each other because they are derived from conflicting theoretical orientations. In an attempt to be permissive in the area of technique, and provide for teacher autonomy, the curriculum committee did not make a clear commitment to a theoretical orientation. The committee's significant concerns about professional respect and equal representation, cost the curriculum its foundation. The need to commit to a theoretical orientation when creating a curriculum is essential according to Egan in Education and Psychology: Plato, Piaget, and Scientific Psychology.

Psychology has generated much knowledge that is properly of interest to education. Knowledge by itself is mute, however; it is made articulate by being organized into a theory. A theory is a kind of syntax; as the latter organizes phonemes into meaningful sentences, so the former organizes knowledge into more generally meaningful claims about certain phenomena. Knowledge about the psyche, about learning, development, motivation, or whatever, becomes psychologically articulate when organized by a psychological theory. The same knowledge may become educationally articulate only by being organized within an educational theory. This is not I think, a trivial point. It means that apart from an educational theory no knowledge and no theory has educational implications. Even knowledge about constraints of our nature becomes educationally useful only when it has become incorporated within an educational theory, or an educational theory accommodates to it. This suggests that every consideration relating to education - whether the organization of furniture in the classroom or matters of local policy-making, so far as these are educational rather than socializing matters - must be derived from an educational theory. That is, there can be no such thing in education as distinct lower-level theories - whether of classroom design or instructional or motivational or whatever - but only general, comprehensive educational theories with either implications for things like classroom design and instruction or direct claims about such things and about learning development, motivation, and so on. If one wants to design an educational curriculum, the thing that will tell one how to go about it is an educational theory. One can obviously compose a curriculum made up as a result of "input" from diverse groups of people, as though decisions about

educating were the same as decisions about socializing in a democracy. Only by chance will the products of such a curriculum be educated. Our schools have some clear social objectives, and guided by these can achieve some success in socializing. Their curricula, however, seem to lack the guidance of any systematic and comprehensive educational theory and consequently lack coherent educational objectives. Not only is an educational theory the most practical thing one can have in order to design a curriculum, it is a prerequisite to a curriculum that can reasonably claim to be designed to produce educated people (1983, 122-123).

After reading Egan's words, I was motivated to carefully review the The McIver Curriculum and try to find a salvageable theoretical vein. While the work is clearly based on the Principle of Normalization and Public Law 94-142, with its democratic and humanistic insistence on a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, I was unable to identify a clear theoretical orientation. I suspect that this basic oversight is responsible for the conflicts that are emerging among the faculty as we attempt to implement it. We do not have a grounding in a common, cohesive theoretical framework from which to deduce solutions to our numerous problems.

Another significant problem with The McIver Curriculum deals with its emphasis on predetermined, measurable outcomes of limited aspects of behavior. This orientation does not take into account the interrelatedness and complexities of life's elements. Our insistence on creating perfect mentally handicapped adults, like Fred, precludes the creation of unique beings. In an attempt to provide a systematic educational intervention, we ignored life's complexities and may have unintentionally blinded teachers to unforeseen possibilities. The irony of this criticism is that the curriculum's philosophy directly addresses this issue.

Life by definition implies change. While some changes are predictable, the process of living is full of wonder and surprises. Human development is multi-faceted and interrelated. One area of development cannot be effected without consequences to the total person (The McIver Curriculum 1990, 4).

Egan clearly states this criticism in his book, Educational Development:

The greatest present danger to children's educational development seems to me to be the prevalence and growth of a curriculum which seems intent on suppressing, burying, atrophying children's vivid forms of thinking in local detail and trivia. What life in the world is all about is not primarily the secure surface of daily routines and local custom. Underneath this is a history of titanic struggle. We do no service to children by introducing them only to the secure surface and not letting them see that what they have gone through as individuals, their society and culture has gone through in its own way (1979, 122).

Obviously, The McIver Curriculum serves as a means to teach important skills in an organized, systematic way. Its contribution to mentally handicapped students is significant. Prior to its implementation, the teaching of basic, functional skills that permit increased independence and encourage community participation were at best random. But, as this critique insists, simply teaching skills is not enough. The goals of education should emphasize exploration, discovery, and invention. The educational curriculum should be grounded in a theoretical orientation that enables students to create personal meaning out of complex and often conflictual real life experiences. It should stimulate the development of interpersonal relationships and role formations in families, schools, and communities. Above all else, it should encourage the process of self creation. The fourth chapter of this dissertation documents my attempt to incorporate these elements into the core of my teaching by

committing to a specific paradigm and a compatible theoretical orientation.

CHAPTER IV  
IN SEARCH OF AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO TEACH  
THE SEVERELY MENTALLY RETARDED

A BRIEF REVIEW OF CHAPTERS I, II, AND III

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I provide a brief historical overview of mental retardation from antiquity to the present. This review establishes that people with mental retardation have been persecuted and oppressed throughout the ages. The first chapter also includes current clinical definitions and characteristics of mentally retarded people, and the ways in which they are classified. Additionally, case studies of two severely mentally retarded students are provided. These studies serve to clarify the clinical perspective, and make the reader aware of how individuals with severe mental retardation are perceived in the public schools.

The second chapter is a detailed discussion of how mentally retarded people are educated in many public schools. Issues of segregation, handicapism are defined, and behaviorism, the primary theoretical orientation of the majority of special education curricula, is defined, illustrated, and critiqued. This critique contends that behaviorism prohibits creativity, and continues the long legacy of oppression documented in chapter 1.

Chapter 3 details how I directed five faculty members at McIver School in the creation of a curriculum and educational assessment. We began this work with an awareness of the history of mentally retarded people, an understanding

of current defining and classification systems and practices, and a commitment to address issues of segregation, handicapism, and other forms of oppression within our school. This effort was motivated by a sincere desire to improve the quality of our students' lives. The work generates from a collective philosophy, and serves as a sequential plan to teach highly functional skills over a 16 year span that will facilitate community participation, and a means of assessing students' progress in a non-competitive way. The third chapter concludes with a critique of our work which focuses on our inability to commit to a specific theoretical approach.

#### OVERVIEW OF CHAPTER 4

For almost 15 years I have been teaching and caring for children with mental retardation. Throughout this career I have struggled to create educational experiences that will stimulate my students' learning and development so that they can more fully participate in their communities. My involvement in the creation of The McIver Curriculum is a primary example of this commitment. And, to a limited extent, my efforts have been successful. Numerous students have developed basic self help and communication skills, learned how to interact cooperatively with others, and acquired simple vocational and recreational abilities. Yet, I am conscious that from the perspective of the larger culture, this development is not enough. No matter how many objectives are met, no matter how many words are added to their vocabularies, my students, without exception, continue to be mentally retarded - and this means that their acceptance as equal citizens will continue to be qualified. I believe that this frustration can be more clearly expressed by sharing a personal experience.

I began my career in a rural North Carolina county by providing therapies for mentally retarded babies and teaching their parents how to care for them. During this period, I had the privilege of serving a wonder-*full* baby and his family. Jimmy was born with a translocation of the second chromosome, and had at least 36 identifiable birth defects plus mental retardation. Despite his multiple deformities, he brought incredible joy into the lives of his mother, brother, and sister, and the professionals that helped to extend his fragile life. When he died at 9 months of meningitis and pneumonia, I was asked by his mother to speak at his funeral service. I struggled a long time over the meaning of Jimmy's life before I could compose a suitable eulogy. So many questions emerged out of my anger and grief. What value could such a severely handicapped baby have? Was he not just another burden on a tremendously overburdened family and an inadequate medical and social service system? How could I justify the sorrow and pain his birth had precipitated? How could we as a society absorb the tremendous cost of caring and educating children with such great needs? How could I celebrate a life of constant dependency? How could I pursue a career caring for children with so little promise? Eventually this torrent of questioning doubt subsided, and emotionally and intuitively I knew that there was great meaning in Jimmy's life. I was also certain that his severe handicaps did not diminish the completeness of his humanity. But until very recently, I have been unable to satisfactorily respond to the harsh but logical questions that his death raised. I have known that the meaning of his life was somehow involved with a web of intricately woven relationships, but all that I could say was, "You had to know him".

Gradually, as I have continued my education and struggled with my frustration, I have realized that the questions that I asked at Jimmy's death do



not have personally acceptable answers under the dominant values of our current culture. The vision that these cultural values attest to is one of independence, competition, success, and even survival of the fittest. Obviously, this vision is one that can not value mentally retarded people, and perceive of them as completely human. For this to happen, the dominant societal vision must change. Chapter 4 deals with the nature of this change, and with a number of theoretical and conceptual orientations that have contributed to my response to the basic issues of meaning.

## SECTION 1 IN SEARCH OF A NEW PARADIGM

As documented in chapter 1, mentally retarded people have suffered persecution and oppression throughout the ages. This legacy has been recognized in the United States in recent years, and to an extent, addressed through federal and state legislation and litigation. The effects of handicapism and the segregation of the mentally retarded has been extensively documented. The elimination of these destructive orientations and practices are being grappled with at all levels of educational and vocational programming. As discussed in chapter 2, the Principle of Normalization and mainstreaming initiatives have had far reaching effects. Many mentally retarded people are now being educated in inclusionary programs in neighborhood schools, and integrated into community based work and recreational settings. While segregation is still a pervasive reality, inclusionary community based programming reflects national and international trends.

However, current accomplishments have made advocates even more keenly aware of how deeply rooted the sources of oppression are, and have

lead to examinations of basic institutional paradigms. These examinations are leading many special educators to question and eventually reject traditional methods and techniques as a consequence of extensive discourses on basic moral, social, and cultural issues. There is an increasing awareness that traditional special educational practices discourage self reflection and professional dialogue about the fundamental needs of students or their value and meaning in the complex interdependencies of contemporary life. Some teachers of exceptional children are now focusing on changing lives by attempting to change the society in which these students live instead of giving students a set of school skills.

William Rhodes and Mary Sue Rennells, of the University of Southern Florida (*in Paul and Epanchin*), posit that twentieth century American education is broadly based on a paradigm anchored in classic Newtonian science, and the Industrial Revolution. Since the majority of special education programs are direct outgrowths of conventional education models, they are also included under this paradigm. Efforts to include special students in the educational mainstream have even strengthened these ties. The primary themes of classic Newtonian science and the Industrial Revolution, mechanistic control, prediction, sequentiality, linearity, and additivity, can be directly related to classical traditions of modern science. Mary Poplin lists the twelve following characteristics as basic assumptions of all models based on this scientific vision.

1. Learning and behavioral problems are a discrete phenomenon rather than an explanation of a phenomenon.
2. Each model ultimately places the responsibility for cause and/or the cure for diagnosed problems directly on the student.

3. Each model proposes a diagnosis, the goal of which is to document specific deficits.
4. Each model attempts to segment learning and affect into parts.
5. Teaching techniques proposed under each model assume that instruction is often most effective when it is tightly controlled, leaving the learner predominantly passive.
6. The proposed diagnosis for each model forms the essence of the intervention.
7. Instruction in each model is deficit driven.
8. Teaching and learning are viewed in each model as unidirectional; that is, the teacher knows what is to be learned and the student is to learn it.
9. Each model assumes a right and wrong posture about the teaching and learning process.
10. Each model exclusively promotes school goals rather than life goals.
11. Each model supports the segregation of students into different categories.
12. Steps and sequences are valued within the delivery system itself (in Paul and Epanchin 1991, 276-277).

When severely mentally retarded students are educated under models based on these characteristics, they can not escape failure and resulting oppression because this scientific orientation is compatible with the cultural values of competition, individualization, and independence. Severely mentally retarded people, by definition, can not function independently and successfully compete in the general society. This orientation also robs mentally retarded students of meaning and spontaneity because it views them as passive, reactive, easily manipulated, and controllable.

An alternative to the classical scientific paradigm stems, at least in part, from a scientific revolution that is best represented by the work of Albert Einstein. This new scientific paradigm has led to the notion that what is learned is significantly related to the nature of the learner. In other words, what the person perceives is to a great extent dependent on his/her projections. Thus from this perspective, students are active participators, and not simply

observers of reality. What the individual learns changes both the world and the individual because the realities of the external and internal realms are a unified whole. Even object, time, space, and causality can not be perceived independent of the perceiver. "Object, time, space, and causality are orienting concepts relative to who and where an individual is. These concepts are not concrete conditions externally placed in the environment" (Paul and Epanchin 1991, 173). Breaking down reality into little bits and pieces leads to fragmented thinking and runs counter to the new vision. An alternate emphasis is on holistic thinking and the connectedness of all life. This difference is reflected in Mary Poplin's efforts to develop an alternative paradigm based on some of the ideas of the new science and a holistic orientation toward education. She lists 14 tenets of such a paradigm for education for all students, handicapped or otherwise.

1. New experiences are integrated into the whole spiral of knowledge so that the new pieces of knowledge, the new meanings, are much larger than the sum of their parts.
2. Two or more learning experiences transform one another and transform the structure of present knowledge. Thus, learning is not merely additive, it is transformative.
3. The learner is always learning, and the process of self regulation, not reinforcement theory, determines best when, what, and how things are learned.
4. Instruction is best derived from student interest and talent and not from deficits or curriculum materials.
5. The assessment of student development, interests, and involvement is more important to teachers than student performance on reductionist subskills and subprocesses.
6. Good teaching is interactive rather than unidirectional.
7. Real-life activities form better educational experiences than synthetically contrived ones.
8. Errors are necessary, and should not be penalized.
9. Goals of instruction should be more life related (e.g., literacy and cooperative learning) than school related (e.g., reading basals, worksheets, and textbooks).

10. Reflection, creation of questions, and construction of personal interpretations are more critical than "correct", "accurate", "right" answers to prepared questions.
11. Problems in learning are the result of interactions of personalities, interests, development, expectations, and previous experiences.
12. Learning involves a process of going from whole to part to whole with accurate forms (parts) being secondary to the whole.
13. Form follows purpose (function) and meaning, and premature instruction in accurate forms will inhibit fluency.
14. Passion, trust, and interest are paramount - subjectivity surrounds learning, and cognitive processes are only one part of the picture (in Paul and Epanchin 1991, 287-88).

Mary Poplin contends that designing special education programs on principles of this paradigm would revolutionize the way in which schools perceive of people with disabilities. Educational efforts linked to the traditional paradigm posit that knowledge is put into the child, and so the mentally retarded child is perceived as a tiny container, and thus the extent of his/her education will be very limited. The new paradigm claims that all people construct knowledge about the world so consequently, learning is only limited by the ways and to the extent that the individual interacts with the world.

In the classical paradigm, education is segmented, and so most special education programs teach social, emotional, vocational, leisure, domestic, and language skills as separate entities. The new paradigm contends that these disciplines are inseparable and should overlap in a comprehensive, holistic curriculum. In addition, schools under the old paradigm are perceived as separate agencies, apart from the community. The new paradigm views the school as a coordinating vehicle with the purpose of fostering the total community's efforts on behalf of all children. This premise conceptually eliminates the necessity of segregating disabled people.

Competition and success are paramount characteristics of existing cultural norms, and these are supported by the old classical scientific paradigm. Achievement is measured by competitive grades and standardized scores. Again, under this vision, mentally retarded people, by definition will fail. From the perspective of the new paradigm, one can deduce that achievement involves the developmental transformation of all children. These transformations will be quite individualized and unique.

The traditional paradigm is factually oriented. Consequently, educational efforts under this paradigm place primary emphasis on what to teach. Frequently, special educators adopt diluted regular education curricula. Consequently, 17 year old mentally retarded students continue to struggle to learn to read basal readers and comprehend simple addition. Educational practices grounded in the new paradigm emphasize teaching all children how to learn. These skills can be applied to an endless variety of needs, abilities, and interests, and eliminate the distinctions between regular and special education.

The new paradigm stresses the essential importance of the creative process because each individual creates his/her own reality out of the interactions between the internal and external realms. The primary purpose of all education grounded in the new vision, including special education, is to stimulate the child's mental processes so that this constructive, interactive process is facilitated.

The kind of self-world reality that the child constructs out of her mind depends on how well developed her mental processes are. Education is the means by which the child's mental processes are developed and elaborated. If the child's mental processes are narrow and blighted, the

world she constructs will also be narrow and blighted and vice versa (Paul and Epanchin 1991, 282).

Under the old paradigm and the compatible theoretical orientation of behaviorism, mentally retarded students are systematically taught that they are powerless, and live in a world of alienation and disconnection. This contention is clearly illustrated by numerous common special education practices including requiring students to learn behavioral objectives that are constructed by adults outside the classroom that neither know nor teach children. Even the requirements for the development of individualized education plans (IEPs) insist that teachers predict the unpredictable, measure the unmeasurable, and fragment the child's life into disconnected parts.

Application of the new paradigm to educational efforts, whether in regular or special education, directly addresses issues of oppression because this vision eliminates the idea that meaning is separate, external and fixed. In the light of the new paradigm, all people, including those with mental retardation, create meaning out of the active, holistic interactions between the individual and the world. The value of the individual, no matter how disabled, is not fixed by static external standards.

The references that I use to support the development of this section attribute the origins of the old and new paradigms to pre- and post-twentieth century scientific frameworks respectively. However, my first exposure to the essential meaning of my experiences with these contrasting visions came through the writings of Jewish and Christian theologians. Comparisons of the old and new scientific paradigms with compatible spiritual metaphors expands

the dimensions of these contrasting visions. This effort permits the inclusion of issues of meaning, compassion, and justice. Therefore, the next section will explore these paradigms within the larger framework of spiritual realities stemming from ancient religious traditions.

## SECTION 2

### PERCEIVING OF THE NEW PARADIGM AS A DANCING CIRCLE

In his book, *A Spirituality Named Compassion and the Healing of the Global Village, Humpty Dumpty and Us*, Matthew Fox discusses two contrasting themes from the Judeo-Christian tradition that closely parallel the contrasting paradigms generated from the classical versus the new world views. The metaphor of Jacob's Ladder, originating in the twenty-eighth chapter of Genesis, is compatible with the traditional paradigm. According to Fox, this metaphor dominates Christianity, and is responsible for perpetuating an isolating spirituality that leaves the believer-practitioner dangling somewhere between the earth and heaven. Fox describes this vision of the spiritual as patriarchal, hierarchical, competitive, elitist, fragmented, and alienating.

In contrast, Fox offers the metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle. This vision of spirituality, found in the eighteenth chapter of Genesis, is compatible with the new paradigm. It is described as compassionate, nurturing, inclusive, creative, interdependent, interactive, transformational, flexible, and cooperative.

My religious training is grounded in the Jacob's Ladder tradition of Christianity. As an adult, I became aware of how personally oppressive this tradition is, and consequently tried to distance myself from Christianity. While I have not focused much attention on issues of the meta-physical during the last several years, I do have a sense that my teaching is grounded in the spiritual.



By this, I do not mean that I perceive of my profession as religious. Rather I have a clearer sense that what I am involved with is genuinely spiritual. The alternative Judeo-Christian tradition, illustrated by the metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle, not only re-ignites my personal interest in spirituality, it invites me to reconsider the spiritual nature of my students' lives and our relationships. Prior to pondering the implications of Sarah's Dancing Circle for mentally retarded people, I perceived Christianity as just one more oppressive institution. The only rungs on Jacob's ladder available to people with mental retardation reflect beliefs in either divine punishment or holy innocence. In contrast, there is room for all people in Sarah's Dancing Circle.

You may have observed, as I have, that there is little room for handicapped on a ladder that demands that all be ladder climbers in a game of survival of the fittest. The ladder motif, then, is restrictive and the circle motif is welcoming and compassionate. The restrictive character of the ladder (limited as it is to a few survivors or winners) makes for an automatic elitism. The ladder implies survival of the fittest and is proud of it. A circle, on the other hand, can welcome those who in some category of living may not be so fit. The handicapped, for instance, or the aged or the so-called mentally retarded, (Fox 1979, 48).

The primary theme of my spiritual beliefs and values focus on "connectedness". That is, the connectedness of everyone and everything to everyone and everything else that has been, is, and will be. This thought is expressed clearly by Teilhard de Chardin in an early essay entitled "Comic Life":

... and I allowed my consciousness to sweep back to the farthest limit of my body, to ascertain whether I might not extend outside myself. I stepped down into the most hidden depths of my being, lamp in hand and ears

alert, to discover whether, in the deepest recesses of the blackness within me, I might not see the glint of the waters of the current that flows on, whether I might not hear the murmur of their mysterious waters that rise from the uttermost depths and will burst forth no man knows where. With terror and intoxicating emotion, I realized that my poor trifling existence was one with the immensity of all that is and all that is still in process of becoming (In McFague 1988, 4).

At the core of this spirituality is the assumption that if life is valued, then each individual life must be valued. Since the one is inextricably related to the whole, the whole cannot be valued without the valuing of the individual - all individuals. Also inherent in this belief is the notion that one does not enter into relationships but instead finds oneself in relationship as a matter of existence or being. This thought is expanded in Sallie McFague's book, Models of God, Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age.

To take this perspective does not mean granting consciousness to amoebas, let alone rocks, but it is to relativize the differences that have in the past been viewed as absolutes. It is to adopt the view toward the world so well captured in Martin Buber's famous distinction between I-Thou and I-it. It is the difference between an aesthetic and a utilitarian perspective, between one that appreciates the other (all others) and one that merely uses the other. An aesthetic sensibility toward the cosmos is one that values what is unselfishly, with a sense of delight in others for their own sakes. Such appreciation and delight are a necessary step in turning from an anthropocentric to an ecological sensibility. Thus, in the evolutionary, mutualistic model, all entities are united symbiotically and internally in levels of interdependence but are also separated as centers of action and response, each valuable in its own "beingness", however minimal or momentary that may appear to us (1988, 11).

So, the next logical question that occurs to me is, if my spiritual vision is one of cosmic interconnections and relatedness, how do I nurture this consciousness in my life? How do I experience this sacred unity within my very

isolated and disconnected secular world? Matthew Fox witnesses to the belief that through compassion, the vision of cosmic unity is empowered and transformed into reality. On the dedication page of his book, A Spirituality Named Compassion . . ., Fox includes this quote from Thomas Merton:

The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another (1979, title page).

Fox, in the same work, elaborates on this idea.

Personalism, or the caring of one person for another, may be an instance of compassion and may truly lead to development of compassion, but compassion is far fuller than personalism. This is not only because compassion leads to justice-making and therefore to the recreation of society's structures but also because compassion is about energy we give and take from all creatures, not just from human beings. After all, Martin Buber explained that I-Thou is not only an experience between people but among people and trees, people and animals, people and music and painting and other arts, and people and God (1979, 17).

In A Spirituality Named Compassion. . ., Fox presents compassion not as a sentiment but a way of life. He calls it the world's richest energy source that continues to go largely untapped, unexplored, and even unwanted. By compassion, Fox does not mean a preoccupation with pity or pain. Instead, he defines compassion as meaning, "to share solidarity with" (1979, 3). This would imply that the compassionate individual would not only share another's sorrow and pain, but would also join in their joy and celebration. Compassion is about feeling kinship with others, making justice, and doing works of mercy.

Fox further contends that love and compassion are one only as long as love is not separated from justice

. . . the paternalistic sense of compassion is foreign to both Old Testament and New . . . Biblical compassion is not condescension; it is unreserved commitment to the weak, poor, and the oppressed. It acknowledges their rights; it is identical to an absolute sense of justice (1979, 13).

Fox teaches that true compassion is not private, ego-centered, or narcissistic but public. "Privatized compassion then becomes a titillating affair of self-indulgence in the pain of others" (1979, 15). When people are victims of such compassion, they become objects, not subjects, and too frequently the emotions aroused in the giver become more important than the emotions felt by the individual in need. Compassion that is truly directed outward is synonymous with transcendence.

Fox contends that compassion is not just knowing about the suffering of others but entering into and sharing that pain. In this sense, compassion is not about ascetic detachments or abstract contemplation, but about passion and caring. However, this does not imply that compassion is anti-intellectual. On the contrary, the compassionate person seeks to know and to understand the inter-connections of all things. Ultimately, compassion represents a way of living one's life. It is a spirituality based on the idea that the creation, in all of its many forms, really matters. "It is treating all creation as holy and divine . . . which is what it is" (Fox 1979, 30).

### SECTION 3

#### IN SEARCH OF A COMPATIBLE THEORY OF INSTRUCTION

As discussed in section 1 of this chapter, it is essential that educators be able to identify and articulate characteristics and values of a primary construction or paradigm of reality. Without an awareness of and a commitment to a meaningful vision, one's efforts become either non-directed and confusing, or controlled and manipulated. But giving voice to the characteristics of a particular conceptual paradigm is only the beginning. If educators intend to create rational expressions of paradigmatic values, then they must be guided by compatible theoretical learning and instructional orientations. It is necessary to establish a relationship between the conceptual and the empirical or paradigms and theories. This idea is expressed in Kieran Egan's book, Primary Understanding.

That education is full of conceptual and empirical problems seems self evident. By and large the former have tended to be the domain of philosophers of education and the latter the domain of psychologists of education. The research of these two groups should complement each other, the former providing the conceptual clarity that permits the latter to conduct more precise empirical investigations (1988,165).

Heeding Egan's advice, I have discovered that Piaget's work can serve as a theory of instruction which is compatible with the new paradigm and the metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle. In section 3, I will briefly describe this theory, and then provide reasons for choosing it.

## A DESCRIPTION OF PIAGET'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

Piaget's hierarchical approach has four stages or periods which I will briefly summarize. The first, the sensory motor period, can be characterized as action and sensory based. At this stage, cognition consists of representations or schemes of things that can be acted upon. For the "normal" child, this period covers approximately the first two years of life. (The severely mentally retarded children in my classroom were functioning at various levels within this stage at the beginning of my intervention). The second stage, the preoperational period, typically begins around two years of age, and gradually ends around seven years. (My primary goal for most of the severely mentally retarded students in my classroom has been that they reach at least the early phases of this second stage). The preoperational child's primary achievement is the ability to make one thing stand for or signify another thing. This is the period when symbolic play and language emerge. The third stage, the period of concrete operations, gradually emerges around age seven years. (Acquisition of this stage is beyond the developmental possibilities of severely mentally retarded people). A primary characteristic of this period is the child's ability to consider several aspects of a concrete situation simultaneously, and see the relationships between them. The abilities to read, write, and do arithmetic usually emerge during this stage. The fourth and final stage is the period of formal operations, which emerges around age twelve years. Characteristics of this stage are the abilities to apply logic to more than concrete experiences, and the capacity to reason about possibilities beyond actual realities. (This stage is beyond the developmental capacities of mentally retarded people).

Cognitive developmental theory is hierarchical because a child must develop through the stages in their set order. However, the rate of growth

varies so the theory can be used with mentally handicapped individuals. This notion is reinforced by Kieran Egan in Education and Psychology.

A curriculum respectful of the theory will recognize poor learners only as being at an earlier stage in the developmental process, and will restrict remediation to finding an individual's stage and trying to work up through the stages from there (1983, 99).

Cognitive developmental theory does not perceive development as an accumulation of stages, though past learning is important. Instead the child constructs a new way of thinking and his/her own "theory" of reality through the interactions of his/her innate capacities with environmental experiences. The process that moves the child from one stage to another, equilibration, is responsible for intellectual development. This evolves out of the child's own activity as he/she attempts to maintain a balance between the intake and transfer of experiences (assimilation) and existing mental structures or rules (accommodation). A state of disequilibrium occurs when an experience does not fit into existing mental structures or systems of rules. In order to reestablish a balance, the child gradually creates a new mental structure and consequently a new way of understanding the world emerges. Thus the child develops into the next cognitive stage. These ideas are succinctly summarized in the following quote from Education and Psychology.

Piaget himself claims to be describing something necessarily true about the developmental process, something determined by our nature. He distinguishes often between what may be learned by teaching and "what the child learns by himself, what none can teach him and what he must discover alone". This latter learning unfolds spontaneously with normal interaction with the environment over time, he claims; the search for

equilibrium in changing circumstances ensures the developing, elaborating, diffusing, generalizing of schemata with constant assimilation and accommodation in a regular pattern (1983, 62).

Piaget believed that the primary purposes of education are self actualization, learning, and development, as opposed to intellectual or cognitive training, the acquisition of specific skills, or the "banking" of facts. This is supported by the following quote:

Piaget has been most enthusiastically adopted by groups of people in education who ally themselves with general notions such as the following: "The ideal of education is not to teach the maximum, to maximize the results, but above all to learn to learn to learn to develop, and to learn to continue to develop after leaving school", or, "if the aim of intellectual training is to form the intelligence rather than to stock the memory, and to produce intellectual explorers rather than mere erudition, then traditional education is manifestly guilty of a grave deficiency" (Egan 1983, 87).

#### REASONS FOR CHOOSING COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL THEORY

There are numerous reasons why I based my model for teaching mentally retarded students how to tell their personal stories on Piaget's cognitive developmental theory. The primary reason is this theory is compatible with both the new paradigm and the metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle. An overview of this compatibility is provided by Mary Poplin (in Paul and Epanchin). She identifies Piaget as the primary activator of structuralist philosophy and constructionist theory. She defines philosophic structuralism as a method to collect, organize, perceive, and interpret phenomenon. Constructionism, on the the other hand, describes how learning constructs new knowledge through the processes of both self-regulation and transformation.



Poplin provides the following lists which enumerate the primary characteristics of each.

#### STRUCTURALIST VALUES

1. The whole of the learned experience is greater than the sum of its parts.
2. The interaction of the learned experience transforms both the individual's spiral (whole) and single experience (part).
3. The learner's spiral of knowledge is self-regulating and self-perserving.

#### CONSTRUCTIVIST BELIEFS

4. All people are learners, always actively searching for and constructing new meanings, always learning.
5. The best predictor of what and how someone will learn is what she already knows.
6. The development of accurate forms follows the emergence of function and meaning.
7. Learning often proceeds from whole to part to whole.
8. Errors are critical to learning.
9. Learners learn best from experiences about which they are interested and involved.
10. Learners learn best from people they trust.
11. Experiences connected to the learner's present knowledge and interest are learned best.
12. Integrity is a primary characteristic of the human (learner's) mind (in Paul and Epanchin 1991, 277-278).

Creativity is an essential theme that is found throughout the new scientific paradigm, Sarah's Dancing Circle motif, and cognitive developmental theory. As aforementioned in chapter 2, Rollo May, in The Courage to Create, defines creativity as a process of self actualization through which something new is brought into being.

Whenever we define creativity, we must make the distinction between its pseudo forms, on the one hand - that is creativity as a superficial aesthetics. And, on the other, its authentic form - that is, the process of bringing something new into being (1975, 37).

This definition of creativity permits not only the inclusion of scientists, mathematicians, artists, dancers, writers, and musicians, but all people. Even severely mentally retarded individuals who are actively engaged in the process of realizing their human potentials can be considered creative. May insists that, "This creativity is the most basic manifestation of a man or woman fulfilling his or her own being in the world" (1975, 38).

Cognitive developmental theory is clearly based on the creation of "something new". Piaget believed that the child constructs new mental structures, as opposed to just accumulating past learning. According to Piaget, the child actively creates a new way of thinking, and his/her own "theory" of reality through the interactions of his/her innate capacities with environmental experiences. Piaget claimed, "The goal of education is not to increase the amount of knowledge, but to create the possibilities for the child to invent and discover" (in Egan 1983, 105).

Other compatible and elemental characteristics of the new scientific paradigm, Sarah's Dancing Circle, and Piaget's work are the necessity of action and interaction. Ultimately, all of these constructs deal with the process of creating meaning out of our encounters with the world. We as humans are not engaged in just knowing the world, but are interacting with the world to reform or recreate it and, at the same time, ourselves.

This passion for form is a way to find and constitute meaning in life. And this is what genuine creativity is. Creativity is thus involved in our every experience as we try to make meaning in ourself-world relationships (May 1975, 161).

Piaget held that the process that moves the child from one state to another, equilibration, is responsible for intellectual development. This evolves out of the child's own activity as he/she attempts to maintain a balance between the intake and transfer of experiences (assimilation) and existing mental structures or rules (accommodation). It is through these interactions that a state of disequilibrium is realized when an experience does not fit into existing mental structures or systems of rules. In order to reestablish a balance, the child gradually creates a new mental structure, and a new way of understanding the world emerges. Thus actions and interactions serve as the theory's source of power, and the means by which the child develops into the next cognitive stage. This assertion is supported by the following quote from Psychology and Education:

The most prominent implication for education practice commonly derived from Piaget's developmental theory is that for learning to take place, children must be active. According to the theory, it is by children's actions on their environment that disequilibrium is introduced, which then forces accommodation of the schemata, leading to ever more complex and adequate structures. It is children's actions and interactions in their social environments which lead to these accommodations that enable children to escape from the prison of their own viewpoints (Egan 1983, 88).

Development and learning do not generate from those activities which serve to relax a person, or provide escape from stress. The creative encounter, which stimulates growth, requires an intense interaction between the creator and his/her world. Creative expressions stem from the significant relationships that occur between an individual and his/her reality. The emphasis must be placed on the interdependence or the interrelatedness of the two. The creative

encounter expresses a wholeness of experience that unites the creator with his/her reality. This idea is clearly stated by Rollo May in the following quote:

I do not mean the world as environments or as the "sum total" of the things; nor do I refer at all to objects about a subject. World is a pattern of meaningful relationships in which a person exists and in the design of which he or she participates. It has object reality, to be sure, but it is not simply that. World is interrelated with the person at every moment. A continual dialectical process goes on between the world and self and self and world; one implies the other, and neither can be understood if we omit the other (1975, 51).

Another basic way in which cognitive developmental theory is compatible with the new scientific paradigm and Sarah's Dancing Circle motif deals with the necessity of limits. Piaget believed that educational intervention could not begin beyond the student's cognitive functioning level.

One of the most important claims made in Piaget's theory, and of special significance for educators, is that learning is constrained by development. Piaget concludes that "teaching children concepts that they have not attained in the spontaneous development . . . is completely hopeless" (Egan 1983, 76).

Limits that life imposes (time, energy, resources, health, physical and mental capacities, etc.), are essential. Without limits, consciousness would not develop, and humans would not have to struggle. This proposition is stated in The Courage to Create.

Human consciousness is the distinguishing feature of our existence; without limitations we would never develop it. Consciousness is the

awareness that emerges out of the dialectic tension between possibilities and limitations (May 1975, 136).

Another elemental characteristic of cognitive developmental theory which is compatible with the new paradigm is the necessity of internal conflicts. The term disequilibrium is defined as an uncomfortable state of imbalance that motivates assimilation and consequently growth. The existence of these internal struggles usually produce significant emotional responses. The resolution of these conflicts not only gives "birth" to a creative form, it too produces significant emotional responses. Feelings of joy and gratitude are usually associated with the "birth of new life". But feelings of anxiety and guilt also accompany the "birth" of the creative form because the resolution of the conflict which generates the creative form, causes the "death" of old ways of understanding and established structures.

Whenever there is a breakthrough of a significant idea in science or a significant new form in art, the new idea will destroy what a lot of people believe is essential to the survival of their intellectual and spiritual world. This is the sense of guilt in the genuine creative work. As Picasso remarked, "Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction." The breakthrough carries with it also an element of anxiety. For it has not only broken down my previous hypothesis, it shook my self-world relationship (May 1975, 63).

As the concepts of cognitive developmental theory, the new paradigm, and the metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle merge in the realm of the subconscious, the student's interactions with the world require intense levels of

absorption and engagement that involve the whole person. Anyone who has watched a young child play will likely agree with the following quote:

. . . creativity goes on in varying degrees of intensity on levels not directly under the control of conscious willing. Hence the heightened awareness we are speaking of does not at all mean increased self-consciousness. It is rather correlated with abandon and absorption, and it involves a heightening of awareness in the whole personality (May 1975, 46).

Cognitive developmental theory, the new scientific paradigm, and Sarah's Dancing Circle represent dynamic living processes as opposed to the mechanistic orientations of behavioral theory and the classical scientific paradigm.

Finally, I chose cognitive developmental theory as my theoretical orientation for the very pragmatic reason that it has enough societal support to be acceptable in the public schools.

#### MOVING FROM PARADIGM TO THEORY TO A MODEL OF INSTRUCTION

Together, these ideas can radically change the way we perceive of the purpose of education, and specifically, special education. While these constructs and theories provide exciting images of alternatives to the oppressive paradigm of the past, they do not specify specific means by which the characteristics of the new paradigm can find concrete expression in the society or schools. Since the public schools are still deeply committed to the hierarchical goals of competition, individual success, and independence, what possible vehicle will facilitate the expression of the values of the new paradigm

and Sarah's Dancing Circle, or affirm that the purpose of education is to learn to learn? Where does one start? Sam Keen, in his book, To A Dancing God, makes the following suggestion:

Our starting point must be individual biography and history. If I am to discover the holy, it must be in *my* biography and not the history of Israel. If there is a principle which gives unity and meaning to history it must be something I touch, feel, and experience. Our starting point must be radical . . . Is there anything on the native ground of my own experience - my biography, my history - which testifies to the reality of the holy? Since the word "holy" in this question is, itself, problematic, we may further translate it into functional terms: Is there anything in my experience which gives it unity, depth, density, dignity, meaning and value - which makes graceful freedom possible (1970, 99)?

Keen is suggesting we start with our personal stories. Section 4 of this chapter will explain why I chose to follow Sam Keen's advice. It will discuss why I decided to use personal narratives as the primary method to express the values of the new scientific paradigm and Sarah's Dancing Circle in my classroom.

#### SECTION 4

##### PERSONAL NARRATIVES, A VEHICLE TO EXPRESS THE NEW PARADIGM

Each of us have an accumulation of unique and personal stories that represent our lives. When we share these stories with another, we permit that person to know us more fully. But personal story telling constitutes a risk because the hearer, through learning about us, gains power over us. So the sharing of personal stories is an act of courage and trust that can lead to deep relatedness. In this sense, personal narratives are gifts of self to another that

directly deny the isolation and alienation that are characteristic of contemporary life. Personal narratives are also, in many ways, gifts to ourselves because they are a powerful means to self discovery and formation. They serve as a way of hearing our hidden inner feelings, passions, conflicts, fears, confusions, and pain. They provide the insights which can interpret action and lead to personal freedom and growth through change. They contain the power to nurture and heal self.

Personal story telling can serve as an act of rebellion. In a culture where production is highly valued, personal introspection can be seen as a waste of time and energy. this point is emphasized in Kay Leigh Hagan's book, Internal Affairs.

The dominant culture of society does not encourage the knowledge of self because it cultivates creativity, independence, and defiance of authority. Instead, attempts to develop self-awareness meet with charges of being self centered, selfish, obsessive, or indulgent (Hagan 1988, 4).

Hagan contends that personal narratives can lead to true intimacy with another. She defines intimacy as "the condition of knowing and being known at a level of our essential selves" (1988, 1). However, before we can honestly disclose who we really are to another, we must know the essential self. Hagan believes this personal knowing occurs through the awareness of those stories which are created through the process of daily living over time. By knowing, understanding, accepting, and valuing our personal stories we can choose to risk intimacy by sharing them and what we learn from them.



The condition of knowing and being known at the level of our essential selves offers the possibility for connection, with one another and with ourselves. Without intimacy, we remain isolated, shut down, numb, and estranged from life. Knowing the self - gently and respectfully learning who we are, what we want, how we feel, what we feel, what we think - allows us to bring that knowledge and experience of loving intimacy to our relationships with others. In our self intimacy, we have the opportunity to create the kind of relationship we most desire. We can treat ourselves the way we want to be treated (Hagan 1988, 8).

Our memories reveal how we feel about ourselves and others. They expose our values, fears, inspirations, and needs. Again, the sharing of memories can lead to intimacy and personal story telling is a way of recalling or remembering them.

Hagan believes there are three significant aspects to memory: selectivity, symbolism, and repetition. We reach into our memories and select not only specific recollections but recreate them from our subjective perspectives. They become unintended personalized symbols. As these symbols surface each time we retell our personal stories, we can more completely understand ourselves and others.

In his book, The Call of Stories, Teaching and the Moral Imagination, Robert Coles presents the idea that memories are nothing more than personal stories, aspects of experience that are recreated in the mind . . . "a recollected moment in which someone has tasted of life, a moment forceful enough, charged enough, to survive many other moments" (1989, 183).

For both Coles and Hagan, memory is constantly being recreated and revised as our experiences and their understandings change the way we perceive life. Memories are highly personalized versions of the truth that influence all of our decision making. To become familiar with our memories,

with their selectivity, biases, embellishments, and symbolism, we must tell our own stories.

Rita Nakashima Brock writes in her book, Journeys by Heart, A Christology of Erotic Power, that personal stories serve as a tool for self healing. Healing occurs as we remember our past and recognize our relational interdependence. As a person tells his/her story he/she hears his/her own liberating speech. The person is freed from the suffering inherent in human isolation.

Memory that emerges from the heart of ourselves binds us to the suffering of others and provides us with the routes of empowerment and self acceptance (1988, 23).

Even when a person participates in formal psychoanalysis, personal stories are the basis of the healing process. Psychiatrist Robert Coles writes in The Call of the Stories . . . that too often psychiatrists relate to patients in terms of theories and corresponding symptoms. He points out that the patients quickly learn what is expected of them under this system of structured interaction and their responses fit the physician's expectations.

. . . our patients all too often come to us with preconceived notions of what matters, what doesn't matter, what should be stressed, what should be overlooked, just as we come with our own lines of inquiry. . . patients shape their accounts accordingly, even as we shape what we have heard into our own version of someone's troubles, the "presenting problem" (1989, 14).

Coles understands this approach as a means of dehumanizing the patient. It is taking general, objective abstractions and forcing individuals to fit into theoretical molds. Coles believes that true healing can occur when the psychiatrist remembers the personal, subjective, relational, and narrative nature of analysis.

*The people who come to us bring us their stories. They hope they will tell them well enough so that we understand the truth of their lives. They hope we know how to interpret their stories correctly. We have to remember that what we hear is their story (1989, 7).*

Through personal narration, the individual can begin to recognize and identify the sources of the internal voices that make up our internal conversations or dialogues. These differing voices originate from many sources: family, friends, the media, religion, school, etc. Hagan distinguishes between these voices by creating two general categories or originating sources. She categorizes one type as "imposed" voices which originate through social conditioning. The other voices are termed "intrinsic" and originate from the essential self. Intrinsic voices represent the intuitive, the spiritual, and basic human desires. Personal narratives help us to identify and determine the sources of conflicting internal voices, and help us make decisions regarding which ones to follow.

*By increasing your self knowledge, listening to internal voices and becoming familiar with patterns, you can take a more active part in developing behavior that supports a value system of you own choosing, rather than reacting to your past or reflecting old conditioning that may or may not reflect your current beliefs and goals (Hagan 1988, 59).*

Through telling about our lives, we can begin to perceive the patterns, cycles, and habits of our lives. We can direct the ways in which we expend our conscious and unconscious energies. A more complete awareness of the whole self can lead to decision making and act as a catalyst for change. Once we can discern how we want to change our lives, we can set new goals and develop strategies for realizing them. In this sense, personal narratives can serve as a means for personal transformation. This idea is summarized by Robert Coles:

I explained that we all had accumulated stories in our lives, that each of us had a history of such stories, that no one's stories are quite like anyone else's, and that we could, after a fashion, become our own appreciative and comprehending critics by learning to pull together the various incidents in our lives in such a way that they do, in fact, become an old-fashioned story (1989, 11).

There are many ways in which personal narratives form the self. They break down barriers of external authority, serve as avenues to intimacy, recreate memory, heal internal suffering, and serve as a basis for personal change and growth. Yet, in still another significant way, personal narratives relate us to our past. The themes of our lives are common themes which are present in the oral traditions, literature, rituals, and myths that have come to us through the ages. These stories speak of common human issues and concerns that are as relevant today as they were in the past.

. . . going back, way back, to the earliest of times, when men and women and children looked at one another, at the land, at the sky, at rivers and oceans, at mountains and deserts, at animals and plants, and wondered, as it is in our nature to do: what is all this that I hear and see and find

unfolding before me? How shall I comprehend the life that is in me and around me? To do so stories were constructed - and told, and remembered, and handed down over time, over generations. Some stories - of persons, of places, of events - were called factual. Some stories, were called "imaginative" or "fictional": in them, words were assembled in such a way that the readers were treated to a narration of events and introduced to individuals whose words and deeds - well, struck home, or, as some of my students with studied understatement have put it, made an impression that lasts "longer than a few hours" (Coles 1989, 189).

This thematic connectedness between those who came before and our lives today, creates a communion that provides an assurance that behind our individualistic struggles and chaos, there is purpose and meaning in our lives. Personally relating to the stories of the ages provides hope and personal and collective direction and healing. This idea is included in Journeys by Heart... "Such memory also makes us hungry for collective memory, for the stories of our own people, and the truth of the life of the human species" (Brock 1988, 23).

Perhaps the most wonderful aspect of personal story telling is that we, the story tellers, get to hear our own stories and in doing so, we affirm our autonomy, our unique being. In this sense, personal story telling can be a celebration of our lives.

The next chapter will describe the model and methods I used to express the new paradigm and the metaphor of Sarah's Dancing Circle in my classroom. It will demonstrate how, guided by the principle of Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, I taught students with severe mental retardation to "tell" personal narratives.

CHAPTER V  
TEACHING STUDENTS WITH SEVERE MENTAL RETARDATION  
HOW TO TELL PERSONAL NARRATIVES

SECTION 1  
THE MODEL AND METHOD

For 8 years I taught preschool aged children whose handicapping conditions included mild to profound mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, behavior disorders, spina bifida, and mild to severe communication disorders. During the 1987-88 school year, I taught teenagers with moderate mental retardation, behavior disorders, and moderate communication deficits. Over this 9 year period, I taught at least a 125 handicapped students whose ages ranged from infancy to 17 years. Consequently, in the fall of 1988, I felt adequately prepared to accept the challenge of teaching 5 severely mentally retarded teenagers who had severe to profound communication deficits. I learned that these students had much to teach me.

Like their previous teachers, I focused on teaching basic self help skills including independent toileting, eating, and dressing. I stressed the development of positive social interactions, and tried to extinguish inappropriate behaviors like hurting classmates and taking others' property. A great deal of my energy was expended creating schedules, structures, and routines that would insure safety and set realistic limits while encouraging exploration. Consequently, I set up a wide variety of sensory based

experiences, and based language lessons on models I used with preschool students. These focused on juvenile themes: farm, zoo, and circus animals, community helpers, holidays, seasons, etc. I reasoned that this approach would be appropriate since my students' language skills ranged between those typical for average 9 to 18 month olds. In the fall of 1988, the highest functioning student had an expressive spoken vocabulary under 50 words, and a functional sign language vocabulary of fewer than 10 signs. Gradually, I introduced new vocabulary words with toy representations, commercially prepared photographs, manual signs, and spoken or sung words. For example, to teach the targeted vocabulary word "elephant", I had students play with a 12 inch rubber replica, practice the manual sign for the beast, point to elephants in picture books and posters, sing about swinging trunks and tails, and struggle to articulate the 3 syllable word. If we were fortunate, the lesson coincided with the coming of the circus or a field trip to the zoo, so my students could actually see, though not touch the creature. By summer vacation, I was exhausted, and my students were obviously bored. Most of them had been working on the same basic vocabulary for over 10 years with minimal successes. This became painfully apparent when one mother, realizing that her son would miss a field trip to the fire station because of a dental appointment, accurately quipped, "I guess it really doesn't matter, he's been to the fire station at least once every year for at least the past 10 years".

During the summer of 1989, I prepared for my Ed.D. comprehensive examination by reading extensively on topics including the creative process, the Principle of Normalization, oppression of the Third World poor, developmental cognitive and behavioral theories, religious and spiritual metaphors, and the formation of personal narratives. The summer's reading

and study helped me to conceptualize many of the reasons I was feeling so frustrated with my teaching. After reading Freire, I began to think of my students as oppressed, and recognize the school and the sponsoring society as the oppressors. Rollo May's influence enabled me to voice primary deficits of behaviorism; it prohibits creativity and objectifies educators and students. Sally McFague's writing helped me to conceive of the spiritual nature of my relationships with students. Readings on Piaget, provided a theoretical orientation, that if applied appropriately, would enable me and others to perceive of my students' development as *successful* expressions of their educational endeavors. Influenced by these topics and the Principle of Normalization, I began the 1989-90 school year with a commitment to change my language program. I decided to teach vocabularies that would be functional within my students' home and community environments and reflect their chronological instead of developmental ages. In order to compile an appropriate vocabulary list, I arranged class trips to the students' homes and neighborhoods. Prior to these visits, I asked parents to submit lists of vocabulary words that would facilitate communication at home and in the community. During our visits, I photographed the things that these words represented in order to have appropriate teaching materials. Readings on Piaget's cognitive developmental theory stressed the importance of beginning my efforts at the students' current developmental levels. So, I continued the same teaching sequence, beginning with the concrete and moving to the more abstract. Sensory-motor based experiences with actual objects were followed by numerous exposures to 3 dimensional miniature replicas (toys), photographs and drawings, signs, and spoken and sung words. The emphasis was on a total communication approach. In addition, I replaced juvenile



children's picture books with age appropriate picture books and sequenced photographs of our school and community experiences. By summer vacation, 1990, four of the five students had developed sign and/or verbal vocabularies of at least 500 words, were producing 2 and 3 word phrases, and demonstrating significantly improved language comprehension.

During the fall semester of 1990, I started to require that my students sequence the photographs of our adventures in pocket sized photo albums. Even though they needed various levels of assistance in order to succeed, they were obviously delighted with the resulting stories, and wanted to take them home. So, I wrote an accompanying text for each story, and we made photographed-based narrative books. Then we photo-copied one for each student, which they took home at the rate of one per week. Their parents' responses to these stories were very encouraging. I received numerous phone calls and notes indicating that the students were becoming much more communicative, demanding, and interactive. In addition to encouragement, the parents also had numerous questions. So, I began including homework assignments with the stories. These were designed to stimulate parent-child language interactions, provide additional background information, and document progress. The parents asked the written homework questions, while their children looked at copies of the sequenced photographs. The parents then indicated on the homework sheets the levels of responses. Students could answer by pointing (with or without prompts), sign, speak, or use combinations of these communicative modalities. The homework was then returned to school. Several of the students' parents indicated that they wanted additional stories sent home each week, but the cost of film, developing, and time constraints made this prohibitive. As an alternative, I photo-copied our

daily schedules, which were also in photograph form, and sent one home each day. These provided at least an outline of the day's activities from which the student's generated their own stories, and the parents formulated their own questions. Often, I included short individualized notes on these photo-copied schedules which significantly improved school-home communications.

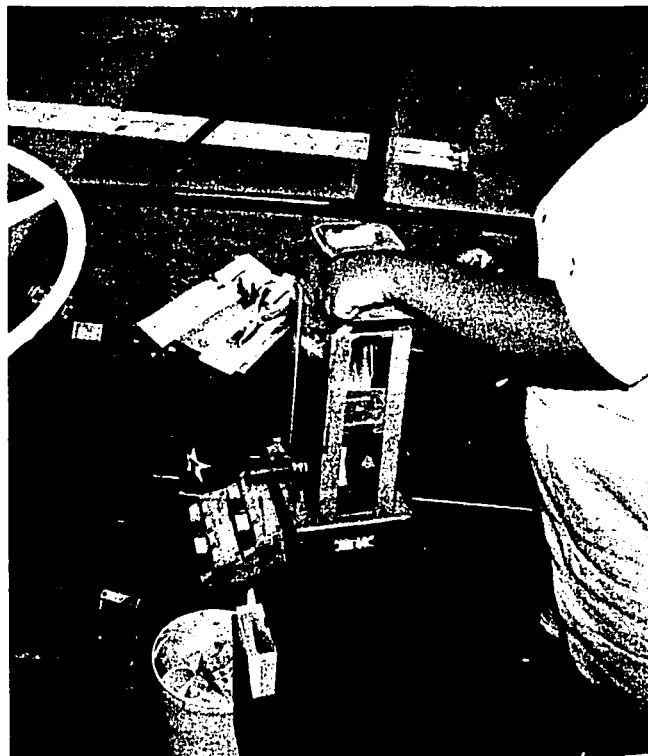
By April, 1991, four of my students had created over 30 stories based on their school experiences. Five of these stories and a copy of a typical day's photograph-based schedule will conclude this section. I have received permission from the students and their parents to include their photographs in this dissertation, but I omit any references to children's names to insure their privacy.

The results and significances of my model and methodology will be discussed in section 2.

### A CITY BUS TRIP TO THE MALL

We went on a city bus to the mall. We had to wait at the bus stop.





We put our money in the box.

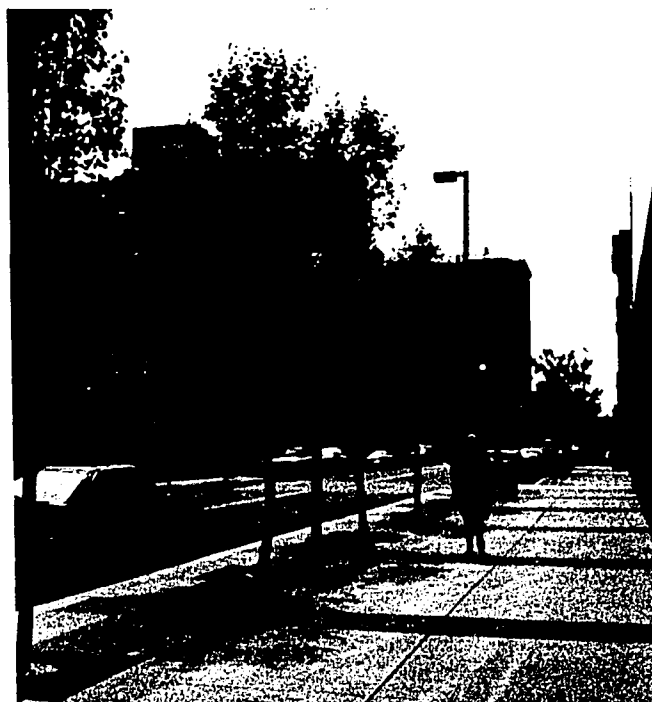


We sat down.



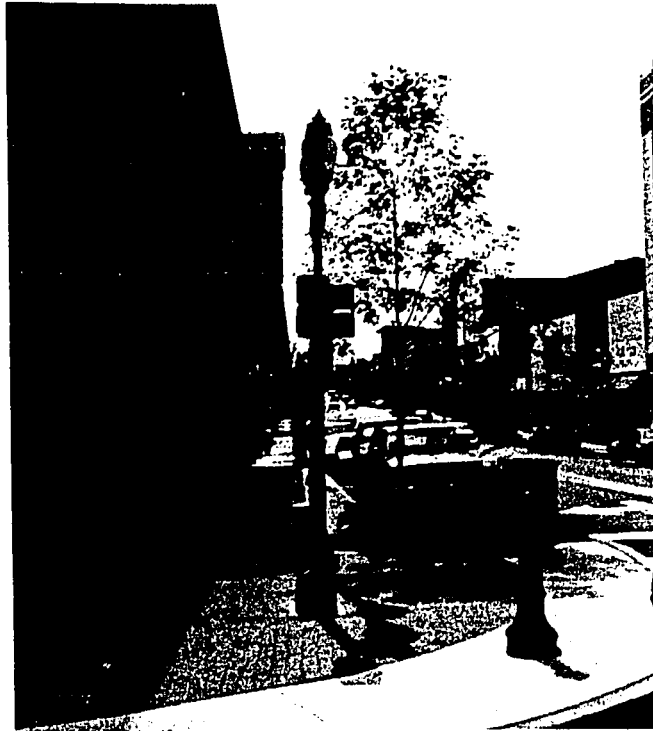
Will we get to the mall?

Yes! Here we are.



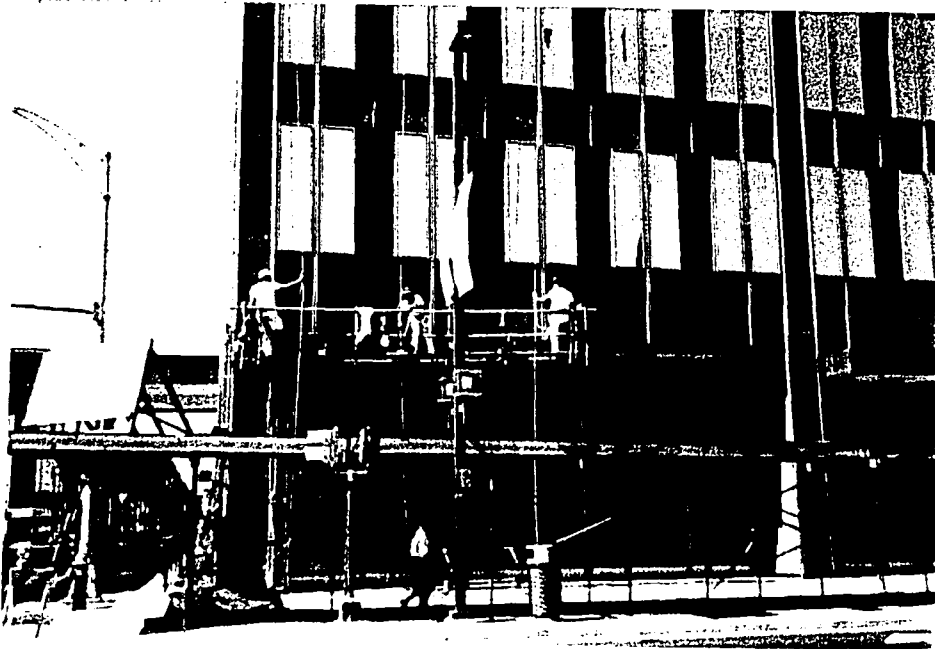
A CITY BUS TRIP TO THE CITY

We rode the city bus to the city.



We saw lots of people and cars in the city.





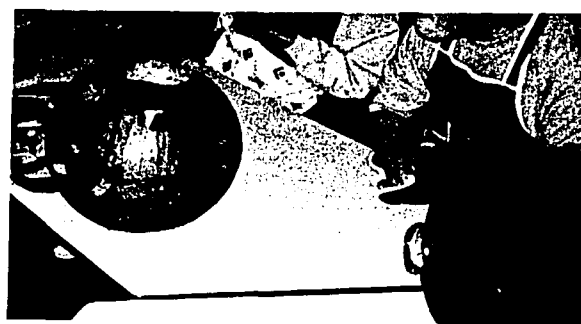
We saw men painting a big building. Did they fall down? No!



We went to Woolworth's to eat.



The bus took us back to school.



### OUR HAPPY HALLOWEEN

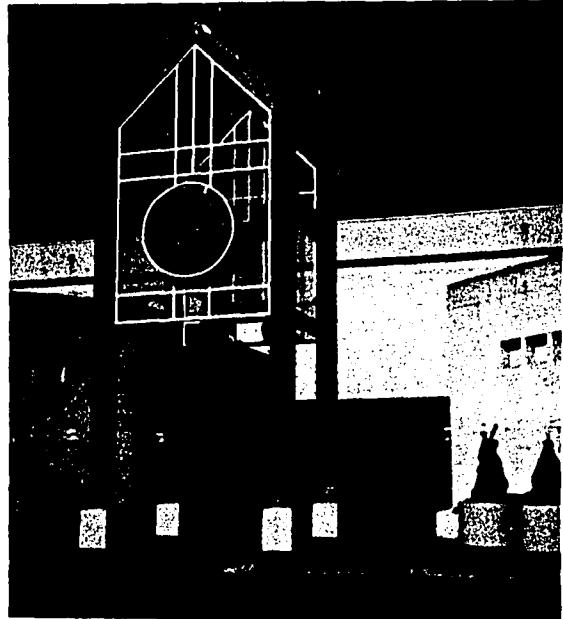
We walked to the store to buy a pumpkin. Our teacher helped us spoon the seeds out of the pumpkin. The pumpkin became a funny jack o' lantern! Our teacher cut a face on the pumpkin.



We made stick puppets and had a show.

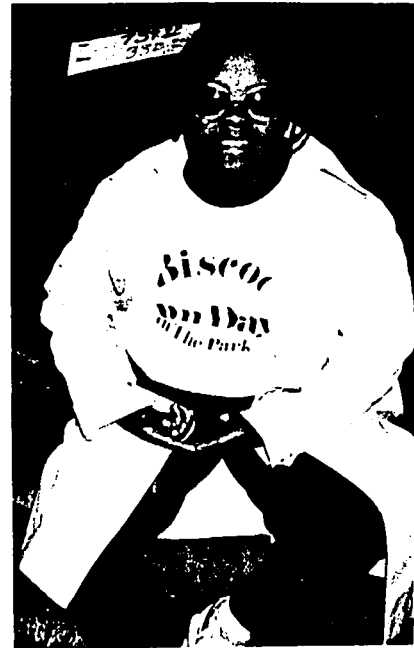
The jack o' lantern, scarecrow, and witch were funny.

We dressed in funny clothes and had a party. We danced.



### A TRIP TO THE MALL

We took the city bus to the mall. We walked around the mall.

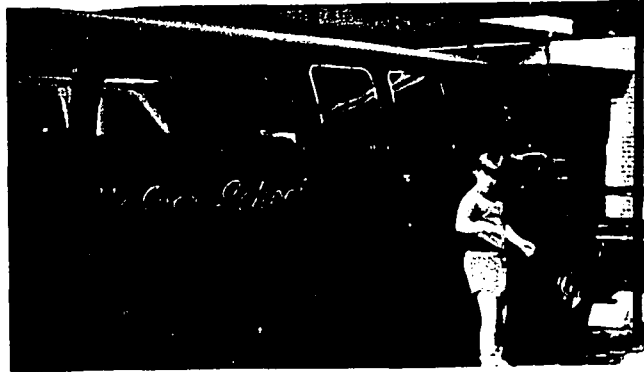


We saw sofas and chairs. We sat on them.  
We saw mattresses and beds. We sat on them.



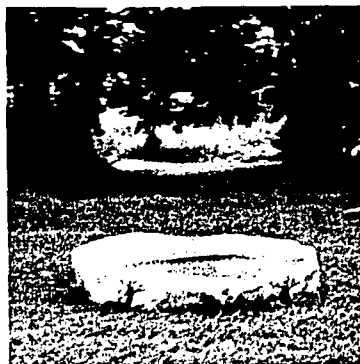
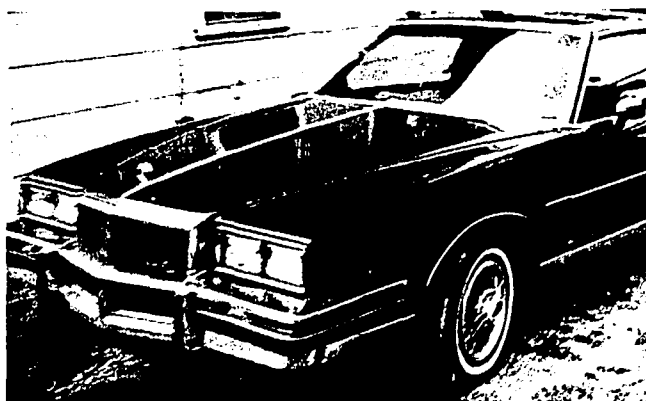
We looked in ovens. We saw rugs. We heard music and danced. The bus took us back to school.



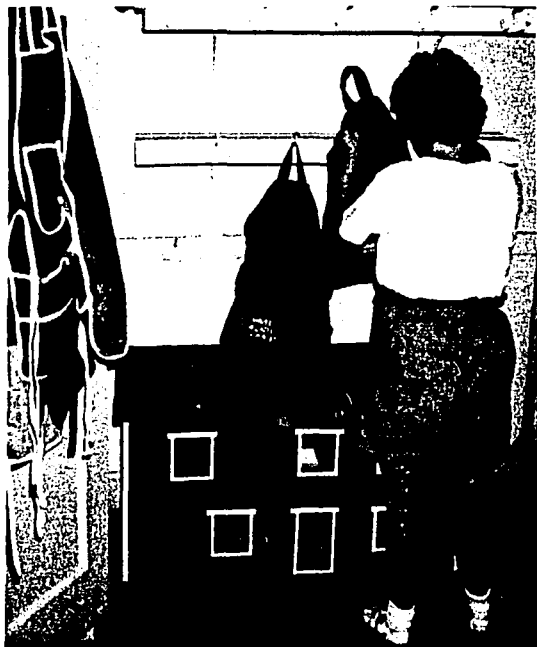


### A TRIP TO OUR FRIEND'S HOUSE

We rode on the van to our friend's house and saw her mamma.



We saw our friend's kitchen and living room. We saw  
our friend's bedroom. We saw our friend's swimming pool.  
We saw our friend's car. We went back to school on the van.



AN EXAMPLE OF A TYPICAL DAY'S SCHEDULE

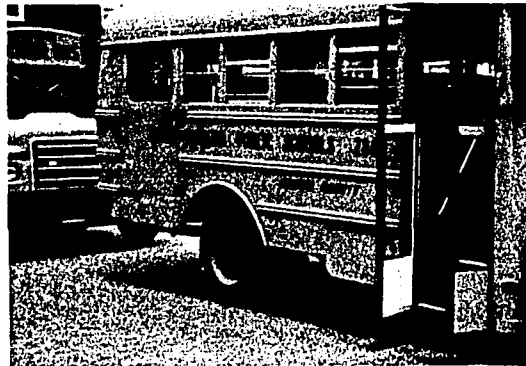
- 1) 8:30 arrival
- 2) 8:45 morning group
- 3) 9:00 physical education followed by hygiene and dressing skills
- 4) 10:00 language group



**A TYPICAL DAY'S SCHEDULE CONTINUED**

5) 10:30 industrial arts 6) 11:00 lunch

7) 11:45 bus trip to the grocery store



A TYPICAL DAY'S SCHEDULE CONTINUED

8) 1:15 yard and/or greenhouse work

9) 1:45 cooking 10) 2:15 departure routine

SECTION 2  
SIGNIFICANT GROWTH RELATED TO TEACHING  
STUDENTS TO TELL PERSONAL STORIES

My students made significant developmental gains during the 1989-90 and 1990-91 school years. These gains are documented in the basic concepts, domestic, leisure, social, physical and emotional health, symbol use, social, and vocational sections of The McIver Curriculum assessment. Additionally, the students are making gains on standardized tests of language, intelligence, and social functioning, which is quite unusual and unexpected considering their ages and IQ levels. Typically, the scores of mentally retarded people decline with age. While these improvements on criterion referenced lists and standardized tests are gratifying, and may serve the students by expanding placement options, they do not reflect the significance of what has occurred in my classroom during the past 2 years. I assert that the students' most significant developmental gains can not be communicated through lists of accomplished objectives or standardized scores. Instead, I contend that the most important learning that has occurred in my classroom relates to issues of purposeful living and self valuing. This statement is supported by the students' positive affect, improved attending and motivation, decreased disciplinary problems, very positive reports from students' families and friends, and by my daily observations. Specifically, I contend that the most significant growth has occurred in the areas of interpersonal relationships, and the connecting of events and experiences into meaningful units or wholes. Additionally, my students are now comprehending basic time concepts, limits and boundaries, and expressing more appropriate affect and empathy.

I am convinced that the source of my students' development is the holistic approach that is documented in this dissertation. It begins with a commitment to a spiritual metaphor, Sarah's Dancing Circle, and the new scientific paradigm, which is grounded in the scientific revolution of this century. Then, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, by providing a compatible conceptual framework, provides a logical structure through which paradigmic beliefs and values can find expression. Next, the basic story form, provides a methodological means to organize the classroom under the paradigm and theory, and finally, the students' stories become the vehicle for teacher-student interactions. All of my students' significant developmental accomplishments followed this path from metaphor and paradigm to theory to structure to interaction.

At this point, it is necessary to make a distinction between that last two phases of this process. The story form is the structure upon which the story is built. Egan distinguishes between the story form and actual stories in Educational Development.

. . . it is important to observe a basic distinction between stories and the story form. Stories are composed of fictional content. The story form refers to the abstract structure that underlies the content. This form/content distinction is a little unreal, but it serves to emphasize that my concern is not with the *content* of stories, but with the *story form*. That is, I am not advocating that we should tell children stories about whatever is to be learned; I am advocating something much more radical-that we use the main features of the simple story form to organize whatever is to be learned (1979, 18).

## ENHANCED INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The most obvious area of change for my students deals with their abilities to participate in expanded relationships with others. By sharing school experiences with their families and friends, they have been able to project who they are, and have become known as unique individuals with interesting lives. For all of us, knowing an other person is to a great extent dependent on the sharing of simple, mundane narratives over time. Tales of our days, told around a dinner table or while riding in a car, connect us to those significant people who do not participate directly in our daily routines. Simple stories let others know who we are, what we want, how we feel, and what we think. They to a great extent keep us from becoming isolated, and estranged. Prior to learning to tell their stories, my students could bring very little of themselves to their relationships. After learning to tell stories, their narratives became gifts of self to others. Also, by telling their experiences, the students were able, for the first time, to hear their own stories. In doing so, they affirmed their own autonomy and uniqueness. This last point is supported by the following quote from Kieran Egan's book, Primary Understanding.

Whether telling stories or reciting them to tape recorders for joint listening with friends or teacher or writing them down, each child can begin to learn how to use the conventional forms and contents of simple stories in ways that locate and follow the rhythms of his or her own "voice." The main educational value in making stories lies in learning to create and shape events in a commonly comprehensible form that bears the stamp of one's "hidden self," in Matthew Arnold's sense, that enables one to express and enlarge one's unique, isolated consciousness (1988, 97).



## THE CREATION OF MEANING THROUGH MAKING CONNECTIONS

Another significant accomplishment that occurred during the 2 years that I used the creation of simple narratives as a primary educational methodology deals with the students' abilities to connect what had previously been unrelated events. For the first time, as evidenced through our conversations and behaviors, I witnessed students connecting their experiences into meaningful wholes. This assertion is supported by Egan's in Primary Understanding.

*The story is a technique for organizing events, facts, ideas, characters, and so on, whether "real" or imagined, into meaningful units that shape our affective responses. It is a basic conceptual tool for providing coherence, continuity, connectedness, and meaning to its content, and building from their coalescence a further level or kind of meaning. Stories, after whatever transformations, reflect a mental predisposition. One implication of these conclusions for education is that we would be sensible and courteous to organize what we want to teach children in this form that can make its contents engaging and meaningful (1988, 116).*

In an attempt to illustrate this assertion, I will describe and analyze a typical class outing that generated several stories. The focus of this illustration is not on the specific stories that were created, but on how the basic story form grounds the entire sequence.

We purchased and had our film processed at K Mart. The students were required to participate in the planning of and the preparation for these trips. First, we established the need to purchase film by opening the empty camera. The implications of not having film were discussed. Next, we had to determine where to get photos and film, followed by a discussion on how to get to K Mart. After the city bus (the preferred mode of travel) was chosen, the problems of

scheduling had to be considered. Where and when would we catch the bus? We had to decide if we could fit this trip into our very busy schedule (which was posted in photograph form). If we were over scheduled, priorities had to be set. We had to establish how much money we needed for film, processed photographs, and bus fare, and count out exact change for the bus. (The students earned enough money each week to buy their own film and cover transportation costs by baking and then selling muffins and cookies to their parents and the school staff. A small grant covered the cost of film processing). Dressing for the occasion and the weather was always a concern, and if a student was inappropriately dressed, the problem of finding the right sized jacket, etc. had to be solved. Next, we had to lock up our room, and get permission from the principal to leave campus. At the bus stop, we had to deal with issues of traffic safety, and appropriate public behavior. Once on the bus, we had to practice other rules. At the store there were additional rules to follow, and of course, a very important business transaction to accomplish. Then we were faced with the issues of the return trip, and what to do until the inbound bus arrived. Occasionally, if there was extra money, or if it was raining, we would order Cokes at McDonalds. On many trips, we witnessed unexpected events, i.e. traffic accidents, or public conflicts. (Once we witnessed a serious accident at a department store where a small child pulled a display mirror onto his head. He was seriously injured, and after receiving emergency medical care, was rushed to a hospital by ambulance). All of these experiences were photographed and became stories. Finally, back at school, we reviewed, sequenced, and put the new photographs into story form. When completed, the stories had to be photo-copied, collated, stapled, and taken

home. The next day, the whole sequence was reviewed and connected as we discussed the students' returned homework.

The individual skills that my students learned on the trips to K Mart are included in The McIver Curriculum. Just from the preceding example, I can list numerous targeted objectives. In the the domestic domain, they learned to eat in public and lock up a room. In the mental/emotional health area they learned to follow rules, make decisions, practice conversational skills, and develop interpersonal relationships. In the area of physical health, the students worked on grooming and dressing skills, and vehicle/traffic safety. In the area of social development, I emphasized adapting behaviors to differing settings, using good manners, purchasing food, and using public conveyances. In the social domain, the students worked on time concepts, functional use of money, buying goods and services, and "reading" symbols. Finally, in the vocational domain, I targeted dealing with authority, following directions, sequencing, and collating. Basic concepts included making decisions, differentiating quantities, using descriptors, and setting priorities. Language development was stressed throughout the experience.

While each of these skills can be separately identified, it is clear that my students learned more than these specific objectives. A new reality, much greater than the sum of its parts, was created when isolated skills were unified by a common purpose into a meaningful whole. The story form united our experience. This assertion is supported by Egan in Educational Development.

However, we need to ask what is a story? Perhaps the most important feature of a story is that it is the linguistic unit that can ultimately fix the meaning of the events that compose it. Take, for example, the event, "He shot Tom." By itself the event is not very meaningful; we don't know how or

why or where he shot Tom, or who he and Tom are, or, most important, whether to feel glad or sorry that he shot Tom. The only linguistic unit that can finally answer all these questions is the story. The story, as Aristotle pointed out, has a beginning that sets up expectations, a middle that complicates them, and an end that satisfies them. The meaning of an event in history cannot be fixed in any ultimate way because history has not ended - no one can establish finally that it was good or bad that, say, the French Revolution took place. As new things happen, we constantly reassess the meaning of all past events. We especially reassess how we *feel* - whether it was good or bad, whether we are glad or sorry that this or that happened. With a story, however, the meaning of events may be ultimately fixed. Each event has a place in the whole, and we know we have reached the end of a story when we know what to feel about all the events that compose it (1979, 16-17).

My students were not simply learning to plan, dress, groom, count money, read symbols, follow rules, etc. They were actively involved in creating a story called "Buying Film at K Mart". This story has a clear plot line that begins with the realization that we need film, and proceeds to a successful transaction with lots of complicating details, conflicts, and adventures along the way. Once the purpose or climax of the story occurs, (the film is successfully acquired) then the story satisfactorily ends. We happily return to the security of school with the materials and power to tell more tales. According to Egan, this type of instructional organization is necessary for the development of connected thinking.

We must start seeing knowledge of the world and of human experience as good stories to be told rather than, or as well as, sets of objectives to be attained (1988, 117).

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LIMITS AND BOUNDARIES

Another significant developmental gain stimulated by the creation of personal stories relates to the establishment of clear limits and boundaries. As previously stated, the plot of a story has a definable beginning followed by a series of related events, and conflicts which lead to a climax or the realization of a purpose. Once the climax is reached, the various conflicting elements of the plot are resolved and the story ends. This idea is described in Educational Development.

Another way of saying that the most important feature of stories is that they fix meaning is to say that the most important feature of stories is that they come to an end. That is, they don't just stop. The end involves satisfying the expectations set up in the beginning, thus creating a whole, a unit, within which meaning and feeling are bound together and ultimately fixed (Egan, 1979, 17).

Prior to learning to create their personal narratives, my students seemed unaware of boundaries and limits. The basic concepts of beginning, middle, and end, and past, present, and future were missing. Consequently, unrelated experiences became continuous chaotic flows, or related events were interpreted as disconnected, chaotic fragments. With the introduction of the story form, events were associated with beginnings, climaxes, or at least purposes, and endings. Current or present experiences are related to prior events, and future expectations. The acquisition of these basic concepts enable the students to create cohesion between experiences, and set boundaries between unrelated events. Egan contends that limits are prerequisites for the creation of meaning.

We know that things generally become meaningful within contexts, within boundaries and limits. Very generally we may say that young children's experiences of the world is such that they have very little sense of the limits, the boundaries, the contexts in which much of their experience is meaningful. And they have an urge to make sense of their experience, asking endless questions, eager to learn. The story is the linguistic unit that, as it were, brings its boundaries with it. Within the story, as within the game, the world is limited, the context is created and given and so the events of a story can be grasped and their meaning understood more readily than can the events in the less hospitable, imprecisely bounded world (1988, 100).

While many teachers schedule the instructional day to maximize the use of very limited time, too often inadequate attention is paid to connecting scheduled events. When the story form is utilized to structure the day, events become connected, and boundaries are obvious. Our bus trips to K Mart provide a clear example of this kind of structuring. While these trips provided specific experiences which became personal narratives, the underlying story form provided the structure for the day and even helped to relate previous days and project the future. The purpose of the trip, (the climax of our story) provided the pivotal element that brought all the events together into a meaningful whole.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFFECT AND EMPATHY

In addition to the development of enhanced interpersonal relationships, the creation of meaning, the establishment of boundaries, and limits, I have witnessed a significant change in my students' emotional expressions. The range of their emotional responses has expanded and become much more situationally appropriate. For the most part, isolated, inappropriate laughter,

yelling, and crying has stopped. The students are now making simple jokes, expressing righteous anger and disappointment, and even comforting one another. When we witnessed the injury of a young child at a department store, my students' concern and empathy for the boy was clearly apparent, (even on the photographs) and very appropriately expressed. Prior to learning how to tell stories, they responded to accidents, even when someone was injured, with surprise and then nervous laughter. Egan contends that this affective development is a direct result of exposure to stories.

But the primary stuff of stories is human emotion. As the landscape becomes humanized in the context of human hopes, fears, loves, hates, and so on, so even more vividly do we understand other characters through the behaviors caused by these common emotions. Stories have the power to enable us to feel with others. We can see the world through others' eyes, through their emotional responses to events. As the stories become more sophisticated the range and complexity of emotions that move the story along, and move the emotions of the listener or reader, are expanded. This entails the expansion of sensibility and sensitivity. Out of these, in part at least, grows our moral sense (1988, 124).

My students' emotional growth became very apparent to me during the late autumn of our third year together. Many teachers were ill, and available substitute teachers were already assigned. So despite a bad head cold, I decided to teach. By late morning my patience was exhausted, and my temper was raging. In what seemed to me a survival tactic, I isolated each of my students in a different corner, and dared them to make a sound. Then I sat at my desk with my head cradled in my arms. Suddenly I felt the hands of one of my students on the back of my neck. He was offering a neck and back massage with the clear message that he understood that I was having a very

bad day. Within a few seconds, the remainder of my students had gathered around, and were patting my arms and stroking my forehead. With their permission, I went home. The next day, my assistant reported that our students were perfectly behaved in my absence.

I was extremely impressed by this expression of empathy. My students clearly expressed concern about my welfare, but did not accept responsibility for my inappropriate behavior. I interpret this event as an indication of numerous changes. First, my students had developed a sense of autonomy. They perceived themselves as individuals apart from me. My behavior, while effecting them, was not caused by them. They understood I was in bad shape, but did not assume responsibility for my condition even though I was trying to make them responsible. Further, they chose to disobey my order to remain silent in the corners. Disobedience certainly was not rare in my classroom, but most of the time it appeared to be motivated by issues relating to control and power. But this time, a power struggle was not the motivation for disobedience. Instead, there seemed to be a sincere desire to comfort me, to reciprocate in our relationship. Finally, I interpret this incident as a clear example of their empathy. Each of my students knows what it means to be sick, and to be comforted. But now they are beginning to understand that others feel the same kinds of feelings as they do. And these shared experiences not only unite us, they can be communicated and serve to deepen our relatedness.

The next day, I told them the story about being sick, and how good it felt to go home to bed. I told them how much it meant to me that they cared, and how sorry I was that I had taken my distress out on them. They were obviously relieved that I was feeling better, and accepted my apology. Prior to learning to



tell stories, my students were unable to respond in these ways, and this wonderful event would have never happened.

### CONCLUSION

During the past three years, my students made significant changes. But it is also apparent to me that I have also changed in very important ways. Through our conflicts and pain, explorations, creations, and celebrations, I have come to know how important it is to ground not only my teaching, but my living in a world view or root metaphor that fosters a vision of compassionate, creative and just interrelatedness. I now realize that such a vision provides a rich common language, helps me to identify and participate in a supportive, nurturing, and passionate community, and serves as a primary guide as I set professional and personal goals, create and interpret meaning, and struggle with issues of justice and morality. I recognize that my relationships with the students have stimulated these realizations. For these exquisite gifts, the joy of our connectedness, and our many wonderful stories, I am truly grateful.

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