

JUST WORDS: TALKING YOUR WAY PAST REFORM TO EDUCATIONAL RENEWAL

RICHARD A. GIBBONEY, *University of Pennsylvania*

Can something as ordinary as conversation informed by solid readings make schools better? Can something as simple as a conversation between teachers and their principal be a useful way to revitalize schools choking on "busyness" and routine? The interventions and research in eight secondary and elementary schools that my students and I have done since 1983 suggest that an informed conversation between a group of teachers and their principal helps schools to become better.

This conversation between teachers and their principal is informed by readings that deal with ideas about education and by the participants' practical knowledge. The interaction of the conceptual knowledge gained from the readings and the participants' practical knowledge creates a powerful dynamic within the group that the teachers and principal find stimulating—after initial resistance to ideas on the dubious but understandable ground that "theory is useless."

We have found that most of the teachers and principals who take part in the kind of conversation we encourage approach their work more thoughtfully and with greater enthusiasm. Their work is done in a more democratic way that values initiative and discipline—virtues that America did much to shape and then seemingly forgot as it encouraged its schools to pursue a mindless if "objective" scientific and managerial efficiency.

The idea of informed conversation as a practical medium for school renewal sounds strange to many of those in governors' offices and legislatures. The voice of the dialogue is rich—and different from the voice of state mandates that rarely rises above the monotone of more testing and longer lists of things to be covered by ever-more hurried teachers. The idea of an informed conversation sounds strange to those in the schools who believe that a two-day encounter with a consultant will somehow make the elephantine thing we call school run faster or run smarter.

THE LEARNING-LIMITING QUALITY OF SCHOOL LIFE

No state and no consultant can make schools better without addressing the learning-limiting qualities in the school's way of life—things in its routines

that dull the intellect and put scratches on the imagination of teachers, students, and principals. Some of these qualities are given in the synoptic sketch that follows. The conversation between teachers and their principal is one way to look at taken-for-granted routines of school life that curb its intellectual and emotional vitality.

Schools are full of people, but the quality of their social life is low. Teachers work in isolation and do stand-up monologues before a listless audience of could-be learners in little theaters that line the corridor. Principals work on paper and summon electrified images to their screens behind the redoubt of the front counter and the oak door.

Twice each year, the administrative routine briefly touches that of the monologists in a hurried encounter called supervision. Once each month, the monologists emerge from their cells with a regularity that suggests some recurring hunger and go to a large room. There the collectivity of solo performers mutely sits, symbolically changing places with its audience as if in penance, and listens to an administrative litany of revised purchasing procedures, bathroom patrols, and the ceremonies proposed for American Education Week.

The ritual is effective. Potential "goods" are purged. The teacher enthusiasm that breaks out in some classes never surfaces. The principal's burdens are unshared. The drift to making the test the curriculum is not mentioned.

We come together, and we are one. We meet and have nothing to say.

An anthropologist from Mars would be moon struck to find the severe restrictions that American schools place on the use of language. Language is part of being human. Language is a medium for learning. And we stifle it.

Conversation sounds strange to us who live in a culture saturated with the values of technology. We are hurried. Good talk takes time. We distrust it. Deep within our technological selves our creed lives. If something is not a gadget, if it does not have a light and a wire on it, it is not real. Henry Adams saw today 100 years ago when he said that the new American "was the child of steam and the brother of the dynamo."¹

Without sustained talk between teachers and principals, we have no way to address the learning-limiting qualities in school life. Something is wrong in schools. Too many students (and teachers) are alienated in the very institutions that the culture sets up to nurture them. They are like plants whose roots refuse the soil.

A CONVERSATION IN ONE HIGH SCHOOL

I have been writing about conversation in abstract terms. What does conversation look like when it is undertaken in a school? The excerpt that follows is a condensed 40-minute segment of a 3-hour session at Lower Merion

¹Alfred Kazin, *An American Procession* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. 24

Senior High School in Ardmore, Pennsylvania. I serve as moderator for the sessions.

Teacher: The readings say that one thing that changing the structure of a school means is more staff involvement. Now one thing that hit me in the readings is that teachers need more involvement, interaction with their students. So conceptually we are talking about the same idea for kids that we are talking about for teachers. The same idea works both ways, it seems to me.

Teacher: But when we are dealing with teachers and administrators we are dealing with adults about professional things. Dealing with kids is different.

Teacher: I disagree. We stand up front and lecture. We do "top down." But I know why. It's what we are supposed to do—it's what teaching is to the students. They want me to learn it for them.

[Discussion continued with neither teachers nor administrators willing to make an educated guess on the amount of teacher talk in the school.]

Moderator: Let's take humanities—your fields. How much do teachers talk in your subjects?

Teacher: Well, it depends again. In honors sections, there is more discussion. The regular sections need more direction because of the materials and the students.

Moderator: But those are choices teachers make. There are other choices. Don't you have a gut feeling on teacher talk? Let's walk around 10 minutes on each floor, and I'd bet we would know.

Teacher: Okay. There are times when we all talk too much. But I find that to get students to talk takes more time, it's more work with all the other things. When I have more student talk, I run short on time. It is much easier to just tell the kids what's what. Days I talk too much, I feel bad about it.

Moderator: There are lots of influences on teacher talk.

Teacher: That's what everybody ignores in these articles. The articles imply that teachers do it on purpose because they don't know better.

Teacher: Isn't it because we want to be in control? There's lots of stuff wrapped up in this one.

Teacher: Maybe, too, it's how others see the teacher. The community thinks that teachers should be in control (and they should be). But a teacher is demonstrably in control if she stands up there in front. Anyone can see she is in control. But if the teacher sits and the students are talking, she doesn't appear to be in control. We do not want to give up the idea of seeming to be in control.

Teacher: Involving students takes more than time. It takes tremendous amounts of energy and imagination to do that day after day. We need other things, too. Collaboration time to share ideas with others. This is more than teachers can hope for now. Maybe in the future.

Teacher: All of this takes more time than people imagine.

Principal: But there must be more than time to it. My professors had time, but they lectured, and I imitated them when I began to teach.

[Positive and negative contrasts between college and high school teaching were then discussed.]

Teacher: Back to my original point. You [the moderator] said in one of the sessions that change begins with an idea and that teachers need more interactions with adults

and more intellectual stimulation. More involvement with principals. It seems to me that the same thing applies to how we interact with our students.

This segment suggests that the teachers and principal addressed solid topics. Teachers know that the fast pace of teaching lowers the quality of learning, but few in policy-making positions listen to them. They do not need a research study to tell them that top-down teaching has roots in their need for control and in the community's expectations. They want to do something about these things. The last comment is a moral insight: If more interaction with principals is good for teachers, the same principle applies to teachers and their students. Teachers know a lot. More of us need to listen to teachers and to learn to talk with them.

This segment is atypical because much was said in 40 minutes that coheres well in print. Thoughtful conversation is not usually this efficient. But the tone and substance of the talk are typical of conversations that we have had in eight other schools, six of which were high schools.

This group has read Callahan's *Education and the Cult of Efficiency*, Sizer's *Horace's Compromise*, chapters from Goodlad's *A Place Called School*, and articles that view teaching from several perspectives.² The Lower Merion group consists of 18 teachers, the principal, and 1 vice principal. This excerpt is taken from the 4th of 10 sessions.

This account of the conversation in Lower Merion High School gives concreteness to the idea that conversation may be a good way to use language and social interaction to renew schools in fundamental ways. But the account's concreteness is a limitation if the ideas and values are ignored from which a structure is deliberately created that both frames and energizes the conversation (hereafter more formally called *dialogue*).

THE DIALOGUE'S STRUCTURE

The dialogue is energized and disciplined by the elements that interact to create its structure.

1. *Participation*—Principals and teachers volunteer for the dialogue. Volunteerism is valued on the principle that one person cannot make another do anything worth doing. Personal choice and commitment are important because a renewal process that uses dialogue involves the risk of failure and exposure to an open process that demands both individual initiative and thought.

²Raymond E. Callahan, *Education and the Cult of Efficiency. A Study of the Social Forces That Have Shaped the Administration of the Public School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1984); Theodore R. Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984). Callahan's book makes clear to teachers and principals how a narrow managerial efficiency became dominant in American schools. The dialogue tries to develop a historical perspective through this and other readings. Teachers enjoy it.

2. *Group size*—High school groups range in size from 15 to 20 people. Groups may start with 20 or more because a few people usually drop out without prejudice. Elementary schools are different. If a school's total faculty of 28 volunteers, for example, the moderator must judiciously use small-group work along with total-group discussion in a way that increases interaction through the small groups without breaking the continuity that total-group work provides.

3. *Moderator*—The moderator is a "teacher" in a facilitative role. The moderator's primary function is to help the group find its strength in its efforts to realize the aims of the dialogue. The moderator helps the group reach independence within the structure of the dialogue. The moderator is not responsible for the group's success or failure. The group makes the decisions along the way, with whatever knowledge or advice it chooses or does not choose to use. A good moderator has her ego under control, has a deep respect for the complexities of practice, has a sound knowledge of education, and wants to use ideas to transform practice in ways that are intellectual and democratic, which means in ways that are truly professional and free.

4. *Time*—Time is a critical variable. The minimum length of time required for the dialogue is three successive semesters. Fifteen months to two years is about right. The dialogue takes place on school time. Substitutes free teachers to participate. Regular inservice days are also used. Forty-five hours should be scheduled in 15 months. This time block reduces to about 12 three-hour sessions or so with some full-day sessions in the middle and toward the end of the 15-month period as work demands.

5. *School-based*—The dialogue takes place in a school—a school whose learning-social system we are trying to renew and whose history and character are known to the participants from their perspective as players on its stage. When a school is offered as a theater on which the renewal play is to be staged, it becomes a place in which mountains of academic words and reams of administrative paper could be re-energized and put to the test of practical action. (And what do we typically find? Most professors would sooner write than fight; most practitioners would sooner manage than renew. Somewhere, beneath all those words and paper, a moral issue is struggling to get out.)

6. *Books*—Books and selections from books provide the depth and the ideas that are necessary critically to examine the participants' present practice. Articles are used early in the dialogue to introduce the importance of reading or to provide close-ups on a topic that might open the door to a more fundamental idea. An article on effective teaching research might be critically discussed as a current issue and to point the way to the larger issue of scientism that has been dominant in education since 1920. The participants could then sketch the historical development of the observe measure quantify philosophy of educational reality from reading Callahan's *Education and the Cult of Efficiency* or Cremin's *The Transformation of the School*, for example.

7. *Aims*—The primary aims of the dialogue are to empower teachers and administrators, to improve teaching and administrative practice in ways that cultivate the intelligence and feelings of students, teachers, and administrators, and to change the organizational structure of schools as needed to support the first two aims.

8. *Ideas*—The dialogue must include a body of solid ideas that both inform and criticize the ideas and values learned implicitly through years of practice. Talk uninformed by serious reading, or talk that follows a prepackaged formulation, or talk limited only to the participants' experience, is rejected because such talk is unintelligent on its face. Schools cannot become intellectual and democratic through means that are themselves nonintellectual and undemocratic.

9. *Spanning the hierarchy*—The dialogue involves participants who must come from at least two levels in the school-system hierarchy. In no case are people at the same level of the hierarchy talking only with each other: teachers to teachers or principals to principals. In one high school that used the dialogue, *spanning the hierarchy* meant that the participants came from the structural layers labeled principal, department chair, and teacher. In another site that involved two secondary schools, the participants came from the levels between the superintendent and teacher.

10. *Fundamental problem focus*—The initial problem focus stated by the moderator is general yet fundamental. The important condition is not to state a narrow problem that pre-selects a solution—for example, Which of three thinking-skills packages should we adopt this year? This unthoughtful and ultimately impractical question implicitly contains answers to hidden questions: Is thinking primarily skills? Will the package hinder or encourage thinking by the teacher? I use a general initial problem statement that is capable of more specific redefinition (or rejection) as the dialogue process matures: How can we improve the intellectual and emotional quality of learning for teachers, students, and administrators in this school?

11. *Rigor with flexibility*—The essential structure of the dialogue as an intervention strategy is created by the synergy of two dimensions that appear to be different or conflicting if one thinks of them superficially—rigor and flexibility. The dialogue is both rigorous and flexible, it is both tight and open. Rigor comes from five major sources: the educationally significant and complex nature of the initial problem focus, the expectation that something both practical and fundamental will be accomplished within the constraints of a known school situation, the readings, the participants' practical knowledge, and the provision of adequate time to reasonably accomplish some things that are educationally difficult. Flexibility comes from four major sources. The dialogue is democratic and open, the agenda can be made and remade across the sessions by the participants within the general aims and structure of the dialogue, the initial problem focus is more specifically and thoughtfully redefined over time as experience warrants, and no topic or concern is arbitrarily

ruled out because its discussion may be unsettling to someone or some group or because it questions the value or purpose of the dialogue process itself.

These 11 interactive structural dimensions make generating reconstructive social power more possible in ordinary schools.

Informed conversation in schools might reduce teachers' isolation from each other and from their principals, schools might use language to foster thinking and to be more stimulating places to learn and to teach, and conversation might be a practical way to renew schools in educationally fundamental ways. What are the outcomes when this proposition is put to the test of systematic inquiry in one high school?

RESEARCH-BASED OUTCOMES

William Tennent High School serves a lower- to middle-class population of 1,800 students in grades 10 to 12. The school is located 20 miles from Philadelphia.

Kenneth Kastle is the school's able and gutsy principal. In January 1983, when we began the conversation on a pilot basis, Kastle was looking for a way that he and his teachers could set an educational course for the school. The average teacher at William Tennent was a 17-year veteran. Some of the wounds left by a teachers strike 7 years earlier still festered.

The research reported here is based on a conversation held during the 1983–84 academic year with 18 volunteer teachers who represented a range of academic subjects and fields in the fine and practical arts. Two of these teachers were strong "union teachers." The principal and vice principal were part of the group. Six full days of released time were scheduled.

The major outcomes for the dialogue group are given below. When terms such as *desirable direction* or *positive* are used, they mean that an outcome is consistent with Deweyan theory. Deweyan theory is the perspective from which teaching, for example, is approached and in which the dialogue process is rooted.³

1. The teachers in the dialogue group changed their attitudes and knowledge about learning and teaching in desirable ways.
2. The teachers in the dialogue group changed their teaching practices in ways consistent with this attitude change. The changes in teaching practice support a more intellectual and active way of learning.
3. The dialogue group held more positive attitudes on factors related to school climate and morale.

³John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1966, originally published in 1916 by Macmillan Company). Most dialogue groups read some Dewey. The William Tennent group read most of *Democracy and Education*. Chapters 11 through 14 on experience, thinking, and teaching are the minimum.

4. Teachers were increasingly involved in school decision making beginning in 1985–86, but this change, though important, was not judged to constitute a major change in the structure of the school.

The research design used at William Tennent is a case study complemented with a comparison group of 20 teachers who took the regular inservice program. The teachers in the comparison group were judged to be equivalent to the teachers in the dialogue group in teaching ability and peer esteem. The researcher was a teacher in the school who acted as a participant observer in the dialogue group.⁴

I can only present illustrative data in this short account. A description of the instruments used and a complete presentation of the qualitative and statistical data are not feasible. There are no anomalies in the pattern of the qualitative or quantitative data nor with the outcomes reported. The study itself should be read.

Table 1 summarizes the statistical data on changes in the dialogue group on attitudes that reasonably might be expected to provide fuel for school renewal. The findings in Table 1 are important because they suggest that some powerful currents may be flowing within the dialogue group. The teachers' change in attitudes toward learning and teaching and toward the principal, for example, are energizing—they provide a motivating force for renewal. Why? The teachers learn that change in schools is possible by experiencing change in themselves. What could be more direct or practical?

Teachers in the dialogue group changed their teaching practices in ways that are consistent with the inventory and the qualitative data on attitude change. Changes in teaching practices are supported by data derived from direct observations, pre- and post-essays on the teachers' typical practices, interviews, and documentary reviews of student work. Teachers in the dialogue group self-selected learning and teaching practices that support more active student learning, greater use of oral and written language in small groups, more discussion and problem-solving activities, and less concern for rapid coverage.

The teachers' interview responses reflect the ideas and feelings that motivated changes in practice:

Just as we conferred in small groups sometimes in the dialogue, I felt it was important to involve students in their own learning. More individual effort is possible in small groups as students search for answers. There are fewer observers and more players.

I've copied the unpressured attitude that we had in the dialogue. It has created a better climate in my classes.

⁴Shelly K. Salaman, *An Evaluation of the Dialogue Approach to Staff Development in Effecting Change in a Comprehensive High School* (doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1988)

Table 1. Outcomes in the Dialogue and Comparison Groups on Teachers' Attitudes Toward Learning and Teaching and Feelings Related to Morale and School Climate—Outcomes 1 and 3, 1983–1984

Dimension	Mean		Change in dialogue group	Level of significance (<i>t</i> test)
	Dialogue group	Comparison group		
<i>Within-group changes on attitudes toward learning and teaching^a</i>				
Pre-essay	73	69		
Post-essay	81	68	8.0*	.05
<i>Within-group changes on attitudes toward principal-teacher relationships^b</i>				
Pre-essay	3.4	3.5		
Post-essay	3.9	3.4	5*	.05
<i>Within-group changes on attitudes toward staff development^b</i>				
Pre-essay	2.1	2.4		
Post-essay	2.8	2.5	7*	.01
<i>Post-test mean comparison on job satisfaction^b</i>				
Pre-essay	3.8	3.6		
Post-essay	4.8	3.4	1.4*	.05

^aBased on responses to "Educational North," developed by the writer, which consists of 23 questions on learning and teaching drawn from Deweyan theory. Reliability is .88.

^b*Teacher Opinion Inventory*, National Study of School Evaluation, Falls Church, VA, 1981. Reliability is .91.

*Statistically significant at the level indicated in favor of the dialogue group.

I place more emphasis on the conceptual basis for mathematics. I try to get students to discover as much as possible through questioning. I encourage the discussion of alternative approaches. I individualize more.

The changes in teaching practice that encourage purposeful student talk, social interaction, and a spirit of inquiry cultivate intelligence and initiative—two essential qualities for citizens of a democratic society, according to Deweyan theory. The teachers' practices, then, are so important: The practices point to a more fundamental social criterion rather than to intermediary pedagogical activities alone that, if unconnected to larger democratic social concerns, are circular. However valid the activities may be on their own limited terms. Most research on teaching is circular because it substitutes a false precision of measurement and the numbers generated for essential social ends necessary for a vital democratic society.

Fundamental realignments in governance, time, and curriculum did not occur at William Tennent. Teachers participate more in school decision making, but this important advance is not gaining momentum. Why is this improvement in decision making stalled—particularly when the principal and 60 percent or more of the teachers favor it? Kastle gives two reasons: the over-riding time pressures in high schools that make it difficult for teachers and

principals to step off the merry-go-round to find the time to invert concrete proposals to further desirable goals and the inhibitions exerted by systemwide norms.

The inhibiting systemwide norms that Kastle and his superintendent identify are common to American schools. Dysfunctional norms include such things as rigid formulas to determine class size, restrictions in the union contract, avoidance of intelligent risk taking, and subtle idea-attitude factors in the system that do not encourage a thoughtful examination of learning-teaching practices in conjunction with existing organizational structures and routines that might better support the district's critical learning-teaching function.

Unlike many school districts, the superintendent and the principals are now addressing the issue of systemwide norms in a dialogue process. This dialogue began in the fall of 1986 and is moderated by Kastle. This unanticipated outcome is a dividend that flows from the dialogue that began five years ago at William Tennent High School.

The dialogue with the superintendent and the administrators could be considered a structural change within the system because it is the district's first effort to thoughtfully address basic problems of learning and teaching in tandem with the system's organizational routines. If the school system is thought of as a growing organism, the administrative dialogue is analogous to ingesting food that leads to the organism's growth. Food (the dialogue) may not be growth itself (structural change), but if not, it is a desirable precursor for growth.⁵

How did Kastle, the principal, fare? His relationships with teachers are much better. He consults teachers more often, and they have the authority to make decisions on some things. Teachers, for instance, have chaired and run several faculty meetings on matters of concern to them, such as goals for the school and discipline. Kastle attributes this step toward teacher involvement in schoolwide policy to the dialogue because there "we learned to talk to each other after a bit of a struggle."

The outcomes at William Tennent High School demonstrate that conversation informed by ideas and practical knowledge may be a useful way to help principals and teachers make their schools more intellectually and emotionally alive for themselves and for their students. Practice changes as the feelings and ideas held by teachers and principals change. Most staff-development

⁵Structural change is site-specific to some degree. At Upper Perkiomen High School (Greenville, PA), not reported here, the dialogue process resulted in the development of a 9th grade humanities course in which average and able students studied together in a team-taught double period. This course is required for all 9th-grade students and will be required in grades 10 through 12 in succeeding years. The humanities course required radical changes in tracking policies, content, the way time is used, and in learning-teaching practices that parallel those reported for William Tennent High School.

efforts skip feelings and ideas and a democratic social process and proceed to technique. This practice models the anti-intellectualism and neglect of language in schools that must be changed.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH, THEORY, AND CRITICAL THEORY

One hypothesis emerges from our experience with the dialogue process. Educational renewal appears to follow three overlapping but successive phases. the participants' feelings and attitudes toward their work and the school change first; changes in feelings are followed by a willingness to reflect on the ideas and values that underlie practice; and finally, practice changes. Fundamental changes in practice should be freely chosen and should be grounded in feelings and ideas that have been assimilated through the social medium of the dialogue.

Research

The importance of one's ideas in practical action is often overlooked. Many educators turn to research for "ideas" on which to base actions (or for "authoritative" techniques that imply an idea). But a caution is necessary because the body of educational research today is not informed by a comprehensive educational theory. This theoretical deficiency exerts a subtle influence in support of existing practice.

The body of educational research lacks comprehensiveness and educational substance; research is not informed by a powerful educational conception of learning and teaching that relates to democratic social ends. Further, because many educational researchers are social scientists, they do not have the educational knowledge (or interest) to develop comprehensive educational interventions and to assess and illuminate the process and outcomes of a comprehensive intervention in school renewal. Most social scientists *do* "social science" on schools. They too often accept the framework of "what is" and from which a strong critique of schools can be advanced, but from which a constructive intervention is not usually developed. The best research efforts on "what is" reflect the limitations of the ordinary in existing schools rather than the possibilities of the extraordinary in schools responding to a powerful intervention.

Two examples illustrate the weakness of research as social science devoid of a powerful educational theory from which an intervention can be constructed. The research on direct teaching that makes such intellectually empty variables as time-on-task and engaged time minor theories reflects the world-view of psychological behaviorism, with its denial of mind for the observable and the measurable. A more sophisticated example is Lortie's fine research on the teacher's work-world. His study helps us to understand teachers, but

his view that teachers are conservative, for example, reflects the influence on research findings of schools-as-they-are.⁶

Research on teachers and teaching that is coupled to a comprehensive educational intervention shows something different. Teachers at William Tennent who were given opportunities for leadership in the dialogue, for example, changed their own practices and were open to more fundamental changes in the school. Urban teachers, too, challenged school-as-it-is when the opportunity arose.⁷

Research as social science unlinked to a comprehensive educational theory is rooted in university norms that value research and devalue education as a field of professional practice. The weak position of education in research-oriented schools of education thus lowers the educational significance of the research itself.

The dialogue process is deliberately built on an educational theory. A process of educational renewal must rest on open communication in which ideas (theory) and practice reciprocally modify each other in a dynamic relationship.

Dewey and Habermas

To give or receive a communication, Dewey says, is to have a qualitatively enlarged or changed experience. To communicate something to another requires that one "has to assimilate, imaginatively, something of another's experience. . . . All communication is like art."⁸ This idea suggests the complex emotional and intellectual qualities in honest talk. Can schools ever become truly intellectual so long as "talk" is made routine by syllabuses and sluiced from the mind and feelings by a didacticism that distorts the medium and destroys the message?

⁶Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 181-183.

⁷Harry B. Dissinger, "Implementing a Staff Development Project to Promote Active Learning and Increase Student Interest in Elementary School Social Studies" (doctoral dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1988). This study in an urban school showed marked increases in student interest, teacher satisfaction, and active learning when veteran teachers reconceptualized their approach to social studies. The percentage of D and F grades given in social studies, for example, decreased from 40 to less than 5 percent. Students do not need remediation; educators do. Also, teachers in a rural school changed their teaching practices with 8th-grade underachieving students. Teachers in the dialogue group changed their teaching practices to encourage more student-to-student interaction and more thoughtful learning. Preliminary results on a standardized achievement test, one of several criterion measures in this continuing study, indicated that the students taught by teachers in the dialogue group achieved significantly higher in mathematics, science, and language usage than did students in the comparison group. The participants in each group were fewer than 10. This part of the study will be replicated next year with larger groups, see Gary B. Campbell, "Staff Development Through Dialogue: A Case Study in Educational Problem Solving" (doctoral dissertation in progress, University of Pennsylvania).

⁸John Dewey, *Democracy and Education. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: Free Press, 1966), p. 6.

Dewey continues: "Any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it. Only when it becomes cast in a mold and runs in a routine way does it lose its educative power."⁹ Dewey anticipated the wisdom of later thinkers when he said that the mere existence of a group (one thinks of a teacher and a group of students or the faculty of a school) does not mean that desirable social relations exist. "A large number of social relationships in any social group are still [on] the machine-like plane," he writes. "Individuals use one another so as to get desired results, without reference to the emotional and intellectual disposition and consent of those used." Such uses express technical superiority or power of position or command of fiscal or other resources, but they form no true social group. Giving orders may effect results, but it does not "effect a sharing of purposes, a communication of interests."¹⁰

Several salient dimensions of Dewey's theory relate to any learning situation that rises above training. Learning is inquiry. The true method of learning is thinking. Emotions always accompany learning. All these critical elements are mediated by a social environment and by language. These dimensions strongly influence the structure and process of the dialogue as a comprehensive school-intervention strategy. The dialogue itself represents "a practical inference from theory." When readings and practical knowledge are connected in an open and democratic dialogue among teachers and their principal, for example, and when the complex aim of the dialogue is to arrive at practical actions that will create a more intellectually challenging and emotionally satisfying environment for teachers, students, and administrators, we have created a potentially rich social environment in which thinking and language help achieve worthy human ends.

Theory has done its primary job at this point, and we enter the problematic and scary world of practical operations. This Theater of Practical Operations exceeds any theory in its complexity. Insofar as theory is viewed as a source of reconstructive social action in education, it must enter the Theater of Practical Operations and move from words-on-paper to action. Practical action is the emergent outcome of the dialogue process.

Although many practitioners think that Dewey is a relic from the pre-modern era, his 70-year-old educational theory is compatible in some important ways with the idea-action link in the recent work of continental European philosophers such as Habermas and Gadamer. Habermas, for example, is concerned with the tendency in today's scientific-technological culture to reduce all questions that require practical action to problems of technical control and manipulation.¹¹ This technological view is the dominant view in

⁹Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 5

¹¹Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), pp. 187-188

education today. Habermas, seeking a more comprehensive view of knowledge, suggests three ways of knowing: the traditional scientific, the hermeneutic or interpretive, and the critical. The hermeneutic way of knowing deals with the practical interests of people to work out their lives through social and political interaction.¹² The critical way of knowing deals with a critique of society and ideologies to free people from restrictive conditions and ideas so that the communication required to serve the hermeneutic-practical interest can be fulfilled.

Schubert lists 10 characteristics for the hermeneutic and critical modes of knowing. None of the characteristics Schubert lists is contrary to the epistemology of the dialogue. Under hermeneutic, for example, he lists "communicative interaction" and probing for "meanings beneath the surface of daily life"; under the critical mode of knowing, he cites the "necessity for critique and action" and "examin[ations of] concepts of justice." The dialogue engages these things.¹³

I am not suggesting that Dewey's and Habermas's theories are commensurable. They are not. But ignoring the different epistemological and historical roots of the two theories, many isolated notes resonate when one instrument, the dialogue, a means for practical action derived from one theory, is played in the presence of the other.

This comparison of the dialogue's epistemology and idea-based comprehensive school-intervention strategy with Habermas's theory of knowledge suggests that the dialogue is mining a rich vein of social gold if one assumes that Habermas is thinking about important questions. In contrast, comparing the dominant epistemology of school practice and research on learning and teaching with the intellectually discredited view of materialistic behaviorism, with Habermas's theory, not one blip would show on the behaviorist screen.

Critical Theory—Inaction

Because the theme of this article is reconstructive practical action based on a coherent set of ideas that will free intelligence to probe its way to better schools within a democratic social process, it is important to raise some questions about the critical theorists with respect to practical action. Most critical theorists are reluctant to engage the real world of school renewal as a partial test of their theory. While a barrage of "relentless criticism" flows from the prolific pens of the critical theorists, the "bourgeois" critics such as John Goodlad and TheodoreSizer, and some others, engage schools in com-

¹²Ibid.

¹³William H. Schubert, *Curriculum Perspective, Paradigm, and Possibility* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 180-182.

plex efforts of renewal.¹⁴ Most critical theorists stand by and (merely) write, seeming to forget that Marx was both a labor organizer and the author of *Capital* who saw his theorizing as having practical intent.¹⁵

Who, then, might be the true members of the bourgeoisie? Where is the "relentless criticism" of the possible immorality of inaction by the critical theorists themselves? How is their inaction in school renewal pragmatically any different from the inaction of a school principal whose main concern is to get the schedule of classes "right" and to keep it "right"? Is one "class," school bureaucrats, open to criticism while another "class," critical theorists, is immune to criticism? On what grounds?

CONCLUSION

My adaptation of Deweyan theory to create the dialogue process as an intellectual and democratic intervention in schools suggests a way to increase the potency of teachers and principals conceptually to reorder and operationally redirect the essential elements of school life. Social collaboration leads to power-in-action. Power-in-action directed by intelligence is empowerment. True empowerment for teachers and principals can be rooted only in a democratic social process. Empowerment is only secondarily an act of policy or of changes in school structure. As Dewey addressed elementary school teachers in 1903:

¹⁴John I. Goodlad is an exemplar of the academic-in-practice. He has thought, written, researched, and tested his ideas in schools for more than 35 years. Goodlad's insightful formulation of the school as the locus of change was first conceptualized in 1955. His look "behind the classroom door" in the mid-1960s revealed that in only 4 of 67 elementary schools were teachers and principals seriously engaged in making their schools better. In 1965, Goodlad began exploring change with 18 elementary principals linked in a League of Cooperating Schools in which some of the principals, after great initial resistance, grew in leadership. Complex change-related elements were orchestrated in this effort, including a university-related hub of people who both challenged and helped the schools in a climate of "productive tension." The idea of *dialogue* was used both as a research tool and as one process for renewal. Although Goodlad's formulation of dialogue is different in some important respects from mine, I believe his work with the league is the first practical and intellectual effort to harness the potential power of dialogue to the heavy work of renewing schools, see John I. Goodlad, *The Dynamics of Educational Change Toward Responsive Schools* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975). Also, Theodore Sizer does more than the important work of writing books. He is following up his artfully written *Horace's Compromise* with a coalition of schools whose aim is nothing less than to restructure these schools in more intellectual and democratic ways. The work of serious people who try to do important things in the humbling conditions of practice goes back at least to Francis Parker and John Dewey in the progressive tradition. Parker was a superintendent of schools. Dewey was a philosopher who also directed an experimental elementary school in Chicago; he was active in the movement to organize teachers, and in the political realm, he chaired the commission to investigate the charges against Leon Trotsky, who was on Stalin's purge list. Parker and Dewey engaged life with their minds and their hands. Given the record of practical action by "democratic liberals," is it not fair to ask what the critical theorists are doing—as well as writing?

¹⁵Richard J. Bernstein, *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), p. 206.

Until the public school system is organized in such a way that every teacher has some regular and representative way in which he or she can register judgment on matters of educational importance . . . the assertion that the present system is not . . . democratic seems to be justified. . . . It is said that the average teacher is incompetent to take any part in laying out the course of study or in initiating methods of instruction or discipline. Is not this the type of argument which has been used from time immemorial against the advance of democracy? What does democracy mean save that the individual is to have a say in determining the conditions and aims of his work?¹⁶

RICHARD A. GIBBONEY is Associate Professor, University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

Grumet, Madeleine R. *Butter Milk. Women and Teaching* Amherst. University of Massachusetts Press, 1988. \$30.00/\$12.95.

Rarely do we find feminist theory and curriculum theory brought together with such artistic style and power as Grumet has done in this volume of her most important essays. Here she focuses attention on the dilemmas of being a female teacher. Of direct interest to those who work in curriculum and supervision, this book is equally valuable to scholars and students in women's studies, cultural studies, philosophy, and political theory. It is hardly possible to emerge from reading these essays on pedagogy and mothering, the feminization of teaching, the theater of the classroom, text interpretation, and school and family relations without perceiving education in new ways.

—William H. Schubert

Pinar, William F., ed. *Contemporary Curriculum Discourses*. Scottsdale, AZ. Gorsuch Scarisbrick, 1988. 548 pp.

Twenty nine articles, mostly reprinted from the *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, make up this sampling of work on issues of curriculum development and management. The issues are explored through historical, theoretical, practical, political, aesthetic, phenomenological, and feminist studies—all by scholars who have broken new ground and reconceptualized curriculum discourse.

¹⁶John Dewey, "Democracy for the Teacher," in *Readings From Progressive Education*, ed. Stephen I. Brown and Mary E. Finn (Lanham, MD. University Press of America, 1988), pp 199-201. This article originally appeared in the December 1903 issue of *Elementary School Teacher*.

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