Enhanced lives: A classroom structure for human development

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Abstract

A researcher observed in a second grade classroom from the start of school in September until Thanksgiving, watching a skilled teacher with 19 years experience. Over the course of that time, the teacher taught the students many things, but most importantly, she taught them how to be and how to learn in this rich and complex classroom. This is the story of how, under the teacher's guidance, students learned to take responsibility for themselves and their learning.

1 Starting out: What is the Researcher doing here?

The educational researcher, is the new technocrat of pedagogy (Hargreaves, 1979). Equipped with tape recorder, notepad, video camera and six senses, they visit classrooms to see, to listen, to evaluate, to watch, taste, and smell. They are the university experts. Ostensibly, they have the perspectives to learn what the teacher does not know, point out what is missing, describe what is *really* going on, and then publish their findings.

"I don't see how you can stand it," shudders a colleague of Mrs. K, whose classroom I studied for three months. "Someone sitting in your room like that, every day, watching, and taking notes." The expectation is for the researcher to find out what is wrong, to identify what is broken—so that it can be fixed, even though this expectation leaves teachers extremely vulnerable.

At the outset, Mrs. K declares, "I want something substantive, now—not just 'Your slip was showing this morning.' " It seemed like I should be telling her what she was doing wrong. Instead I was amazed; she did everything so well, so much better than I could have done.

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I tried to be "critical". Somewhere there must be a dark thread in this weaving, the one upon which a light persistent tug will unravel the whole fabric. I peered beneath the surface of her actions and behind her words, seeking some kind of contradiction to justapose in glaring light. None of the suggestions I could even think to make amounted to more than second-guessing the details.

Other researchers knew how to find the trouble spots. Courtney Cazden describes students whose expression is stifled by teachers who control talk without regard for students' sense of its purpose (Cazden, 1988). Bronwyn Davies and Andy Hargreaves recount incidents where teachers' heartless assumptions drive students to deviancy (Davies & Munro, 1987; Hargreaves, 1979). Elliot Eisner wonders about researchers' ethical responsibility, when they are bound to speak up and disclose the horrors they have witnessed, even if it may damage their future access to other classrooms in a school or district (Eisner, 1991). As a colleague, a parent, and a substitute teacher, I, too, have had occasion in corridors, faculty rooms, and coffee shops to listen to teachers and cringe.

In the daily classroom observations that constituted the greatest part of this study, I did not cringe. I watched, I took notes. I felt amazement, awe, inspiration, delight. My reports to Mrs. K about my progress seemed lame: "I see more and more pieces. I peel the layers. It all fits together." She wondered if I was holding back something from her, sighed, and grudgingly mused that if I simply told what I saw, it was probably her job to figure out the rest anyway.

It was Elliot Eisner who eventually extended my critic's license, exhorting me to seek richness, not inconsistency:

> Criticism is an art of saying useful things about complex and subtle objects and events, so that others less sophisticated, or sophisticated in different ways, can see and understand what they did not see and understand before ... Effective criticism functions as a midwife to perception (Eisner, 1991).

It is true that to improve education we must fix what is bad. Even so, we need an understanding of what is good. Gradually it became clear that the question to which my research would yield a good answer was, "How does it go, what is a second grade classroom like, what happens day-to-day, when education is good?" The time that I spent watching in the classroom and writing about it was not going to turn out to be a service rendered to Mrs. K to improve her teaching. The access I had to her classroom and students and the time that she spent talking to me constituted a service that Mrs. K rendered. Through these efforts other educators can benefit from what she knows and does.

2 Standards of judgement for teaching and learning

I judge the processes and outcomes of this classroom as "good" because within it are upheld my own values about the goals and purposes of education and how they should be achieved.

My view places less importance upon the delivery of certain listed curricular items, counted and measured as hoops and hurdles, than it seeks the development of human potential. I concur with Eisner who writes that the goal of education is not merely to change lives, but to enhance them by nurturing curiosity, and teaching ways to achieve the satisfaction inherent in the doing of things worth doing (Eisner, 1991).

In a classroom where these goals prevail, a teacher seeks a conoisseurship of children and their development, not unlike the conoisseurship of fine wine.

> [Conoisseurship is] the ability to make fine-grained discriminations among complex and subtle qualities...[It] is the art of appreciation. It can be displayed in any realm in which the character, import, or value of objects, situations, and performances is distributed and variable." (Eisner, 1991)

When the teacher is a conoisseur of children, the researcher must develop similar sensibilities in order to understand and become a conoisseur of the classroom, and the learning and teaching that occur there.

3 Rituals and routines are central to learning

Davies has argued persuasively for considering children's and adults' cultures as separate, but coexisting, with the participants in each having distinct worldviews and agendas. The conflict and tension between the social worlds of children and adults is greatest when schooling is set up by adults without regard for the children (Davies, 1982). In Room 103, those separate cultural agendas are merged because the adult has and demonstrates a willingness to enter and understand the children's world and invites the children, draws them in, to participate in a culture constructed with their needs in mind.

Human learning is not as simple and tidy as one person telling and the other now knowing. Human development, not the acquisition of material, is central to the notion of learning. The course of this development is guided by the activities in which the individual engages, and the interplay among the activity, the individual, and various social partners (Rogoff, 1990). The precise effect of a teacher's announcing that insects have six legs, or that paragraphs are made up of sentences, can neither be predetermined nor observed. One person can neither imagine, nor notice, the many contexts and associations within which such information is mulled, recalled, and rehearsed. In other words, the information behind what the teacher says is as likely to be transmogrified as transmitted.

If the rules, facts, and algorithms delivered on the surface don't reliably make their way into the lives and functioning of the individuals who were intended to receive them, what is reliable, and what are teachers supposed to do? In Room 103, instruction focuses on the establishment of suitable rituals within which values and skills can be transmitted. Students are taught strategies for participating. It is through rituals and everyday activity that values, assumptions and skills are transmitted inside of a culture (Lave, 1988).

Everyday activity in Room 103 is predictable. Each morning the school day begins with ten minutes of free time, after which a little bell rings, the lights flick, and everyone recites the Pledge to the Flag together. Then the teacher will always lead a discussion that centers on the ideas printed on the Good Morning Board. After the discussion the students will gather a circle on the floor and begin a workshop in reading, writing, or math— whichever one has been scheduled for the morning. The students have learned these things because this is what happens every single day. They know where to write their guesses for the Riddle or the Mystery Object, what kinds of things to do at the science table, and where to stash their art for safekeeping. If there will be an interruption or if a workshop will not occur as scheduled, the a sign propped in a chair near the doorway which they pass as they come into the room will warn them of the change. A myriad of possibilities exists within this framework, but also, there are no surprises.

4 What assumptions prevail? What skills are taught?

A second grade teacher spends the better part of each school day amongst little beings engaged in weighing and revising the sense they struggle to make of the world. They look to her constantly for cues. Her attitudes cannot hide.

In Room 103, the teacher's attitudes are declared and deliberately projected. Her beliefs about children and their education are consistent with her bearing and her words. She exudes them. They project into the room and on to the students. They are as follows:

1. School is serious. School is fun, we laugh, we are active and jolly, even silly sometimes. The purpose of school is to learn, to grow, to develop the wonderfulness of ourselves. This is very important, and we shouldn't lose sight of it.

2. The people here, the children who come every day, are, without exception or reservation, wonderful human beings with unique perceptions, feelings, emotions, potential. To spend every day with them, to come to know and understand them, share their perceptions, feelings, and emotions is a privilege, and a gift.

3. Everything is interesting and exciting—objects, ideas, people. Nothing exists in the world as a dull lump. It can always be reflected upon, connected to other objects and ideas, shared with other people. Our minds do this naturally, and so we have thoughts, a wealth of them, each one leading to another. The energy, the excitement in the world and in ourselves is ubiquitous, connected, wonderful, and sometimes overwhelming.

4. Everything and everyone deserves to be regarded and treated with gentleness and kindness: the dead bugs on the science table, each other, our work.

5. The highest standards for ourselves operate at all times. We deserve no less.

Not only do these assumptions lie at the foundation of the selection and structure of classroom rituals, they are the values transmitted to those who participate in them. Similarly, the skills one must learn in order to participate well are the skills that are valued and taught. These are:

1. To think—analytically, critically, whimsically, creatively. To tap the wealth and power of our own amazing minds.

2. To focus. As we discover the world of other people and things and the power of our minds, the array of interesting things and the excitement can be overwhelming, distracting and confusing. So we learn to focus. We decide to think about just one thing, to choose an idea and develop it. What of all those other magical, wonderful, irresistible things that dance around us? We can try to embody them in what we are pursuing, or we can work to prevent them from distracting us.

3. To carry tasks through to completion—multi-step tasks that require planning and decisions, tasks that may take days, or may require rethinking, tasks than can be brought to an unexpectedly fine final product. The unexpected fineness will become expected, and the high quality of process and product will become the motivator for the hard work and persistence that bring a task through to completion.

4. To plan. To plan a school day, to plan for a school day, to know the structure of school life, and to look ahead to what will be happening. To think thoughts like: I can read this book at reading workshop tomorrow; this idea I will save to write about in my journal; I need to keep an eye on the clock because it is my job to flick the lights when the big hand hits the 7; I better get my pencils sharpened now; I can work on my art project as soon as I get to school in the morning; it is my turn to play with the guinea pig at 10:00. Planning involves accepting and understanding the structure of activity and devising ways for needs and desires to flow in it and be realized.

5. To read. So many thing that we need and want to know are written down. More and more, people are expecting us to know how to read. And the whole world of books opens to us when we do.

5 A Classroom Observation

Most students arrive at least 10 minutes early. Some explore the room in small groups, peer into shelves, examine insects on the science table. Several students are filling basins of water, others are in their seats, drawing, writing, talking. A few simply watch, faces expectant, serious, anxious.

The "Good Morning Board" message is printed on the chalkboard. It reads,

> Good Morning. Today is Thursday, September 5, 1991. It will be hot, hotter today. What can you do to stay cool?
>
> Did you hear about the mountain lion not too far from hear [sic] who got a little too close?

Our Important Book will be ready by next week.

A little bell tinkles. The lights flick off, and then back on again. Mrs. K stands a little taller in the back of the room, places her hand over her heart. The activity in the room continues. She waits motionless for at least a full minute, then addresses the room sternly: “Listen to me, people. This is important. A long time ago the little bell rang. That’s a signal to remind you to get ready to start your day. When the lights go off and on, you *must* come to your place and be ready to begin. Who is the Pledge Leader?”

Students have scurried to their places. A voice begins, “I pledge allegiance ...” The others join in. After the pledge, she hands Paul a slip of paper. Students are milling, talking.

“Hot lunch?” calls Paul. Some hands go up. As he counts, people move about. “You can put your hands down now,” he says and writes a number on the paper.

Mrs. K peeks over his shoulder at what he has written.

“You need to count again. Some hands were only half way up.” Then, she speaks to the group. “Can you please be courteous to the Lunch Count Person? Hold your hands up high. This is important information for our cooks. They need to know how much food to make for lunch.”

Paul counts again, and she continues. “Let’s see ... Notes from home. If you have any, they go here in this basket. What else? Oh, whose job is it to erase the board at the end of the day?” Dan’s hand goes up weakly.

“Every day after everyone has gone and I’m here alone, I notice that board hasn’t been erased. Then it’s too late to ask you to do it. Do you have a reason for not doing it?” He looks down.

“Is it because you forgot?” He looks up, nods, looks back down.

“So there isn’t a problem with the *job*. The problem is in *remembering* to do it.” He nods.

“Every day we have been working very hard right up to the very last minute of our time. I can help everyone by asking you to stop working a little bit sooner. That will give you the time you need to get ready to leave, and Dan and other people who have jobs will have time to do them. So I’ll try to remember that. All of you can help me. With all of us here, somebody will remember that we should stop working and get ready to leave. And whoever remembers will remind the rest of us.

“I know who else can use that extra time. The people who are in charge of the library.. Who’s that?” Three hands go up.

“Here’s what *they* do.” She picks up a book and points out the title on the spine, demonstrating how easy it is to find the book if the title is facing outward. You can know what all the books are without pulling them off the shelf.

"Who read the chair sign this morning?" David motions tentatively "David did. David, did you notice that it said exactly the same thing that it did yesterday?" He gives a meek affirmative response.

"Who can guess what the chair sign says?"

Murmurs ripple across the room, there is recognition on some faces, no hands go up, not even David's. She gets the sign from where it leans on a chair that stands just inside the door, and holds it up in front of her. It reads:

3 sharp pencils?
Check out the riddle.

"I noticed that when some of you came in the door and saw this sign, you stopped right in your tracks to read it and see what was written here. It's always important to find out what the chair sign says. Especially when there are question marks. They are a signal that we have to find something out from *you.* Now, I *know* some of you can't read, but that doesn't mean you can't find out what it says. If you can't read, you just grab someone by the arm and say, 'Hey! Tell me. What does that say?' 'Read it yourself!?' HUH-UH! That is *not* something we *ever* say in here! Everybody in here is a teacher.

"OK, let's check out the riddle: What did the fast tomato say to the slow tomato?" She walks to one side of the room where this is written on a small chalkboard propped on a low shelf.

"When you have an idea for what the fast tomato might have said to the slow tomato, come over here, get one of these pieces of paper, write your answer on it and put it in this box here. Julie, come over and check to see if anyone has put a response in yet."

Julie, who contributed the riddle, hops up and checks, reporting, "Just one!"

"When is a good time to do this?" she asks. "We want lots of people to have a chance to try before Friday when Julie tells us the answer."

Nina volunteers, "In the morning when we get here, or just before you go home."

"These are both good times. Or you can do it when we stop early for jobs and you don't have a job to do. Or just before or just after you go out for recess. You can be thinking about fast tomatoes and slow tomatoes all the time, and when you have an idea for what the fast tomato probably said, you say something to yourself like, 'Oh, I have to remember at the end of recess to come in and while everyone else is being kind of slow and walking to their seats, I will be in a hurry and grab one of those pieces of pape and write down my answer, and put it here in this box.' "

Anne's hand has been up for a while. "Can I try the riddle *now*?"

"No. Now is not a good time. It's almost time to read the three paragraphs of the Good

Morning Board. What's a paragraph?" There are no responses.

"Sometimes when I'm walking, I like to say this: First come letters. Letters make up words. Words make up ... [*a couple of voices say, "Paragraphs!"*] ... sentences. Sentences make up ... [*more voices say, "Paragraphs!"*] ... paragraphs. Paragraphs make up ... [*voices: "pages! stories! poetry! chapters!"*] ... chapters. Chapters make up ... [*chorus: "Books!"*] ... books. Books make up ... [*shifting, no responses*] ... libraries."

She continues, "I say that sometimes. I like that." She repeats it twice. Students join in.

They are told to read the Good Morning Board silently, then a student reads it aloud. The unseasonably warm weather has been appearing on the Good Morning Board daily. They review strategies for keeping cool. *We must take care of ourselves.*

The discussion about the mountain lion is short. It ties in with their inquiry about animals and where they live. "Habitat" is one of the science words. Carl recounts a moderatly convoluted story, which he claims is true, about a mountain lion that came someplace near here and recently killed something—a puppy or a child. She presses for details: exactly, how did you find out about this, and when. She stresses the importance of verifying all of the facts. *We must get the details exactly correct if we are going to report the story as true.*

On this, the 6th day of school, the morning discussion is primarily teacher performance. Mrs. K does most of the talking, even answers many of her own questions. "Some people say that they teach to the middle," shrugs Mrs. K. "In this discussion, I teach to the top. It sets the standard for what I want, they know what they are striving for. I think it is very frustrating for them when you start in the middle and keep raising the bar."

Courtney Cazden reminds us how adults and children can have very different expectations about acceptable structures of talk (Cazden, 1988). "Critical Thinking/Problem Solving" is the label for this block in the daily schedule, and the standard Mrs. K has set is for a focused discussion in which students think critically and hear one another's thoughts. To focus as a group is difficult—far more challenging than focusing on an individual task. In these early performances, Mrs. K takes nearly all the parts in the script, relinquishing them over time as students learn how the talk goes and become more capable.

In the first weeks, issues of classroom structure and organization are central to each day's discussion. Observation, clarity, analysis and other tools of the problem-solver and critical thinker are carefully employed and applied to the problem of how to function and get your needs met in the classroom.

The beginning of each day follows a predictable routine: a bell, the lights, the pledge. Today was the only stern reprimand about establishing that routine. In the future, they will rate themselves on the efficiency of this and other transitions, and brainstorm on ways to improve them. Special areas of the classroom, such as the riddle shelf, each with their own set of procedures and acceptible behavior, are being unveiled. Students already share the responsibility of keeping the classroom functioning. They have important jobs: lunch count, pledge leader, board cleaner, library maintenance. Those who read the sign on the chair and the Good Morning Board can predict the course of the morning.

Assumptions and values are woven into the delivery of all this information. Students will be taking cues from Mrs. K to find out how they should act in such a place. She speaks with seriousness, animation, and warmth. Her tone says, “I want you to know about how this works. It’s really interesting.” She reviews the routine, models thinking, gives strategies for getting along in the classroom. She maintains high standards for accuracy in the lunch count and in the facts of a story reported as true. She stresses the importance of taking care of ourselves in the extreme heat.

In the early weeks of school, the feel of this 20 minutes is that of a strategy session—strategies for developing the skills needed to function in the classroom. She offers assistance, suggests approaches to getting things done, reviews what the procedures are. The skills highlighted in the first weeks are of year-long (life-long?) utility—-reading, thinking, planning, finishing things.

Reading is useful, others can help us do it. It allows us to glance at the shelf and find our favorite books. Reading helps us predict, predicting helps us read. What we read has a structure: from letters and words to paragraphs and libraries.

We use paragraphs in our writing. Ideas are in paragraphs. Today there is a mistake in the second paragraph on the Good Morning Board; we find out why and learn a way to make a correction without needing to scribble out or erase. Tomorrow there will be stars in the indentations.

We plan for things that are important or complicated, and for things that we want to finish. The little bell helps us plan. Checking to see our pencils are sharp is a form of planning. We think when we plan, sometimes talking to ourselves in certain ways. When plans are easy to forget about, we ask people to help us remember them.

Although Mrs. K seeks connection with the students, in the first days of this conversation, they seem distant. Students figit and whisper. Some draw while she talks, others finger small toys covertly on their laps, or nonchalantly on desk tops. A few students sit very, very still. Some are watching, but it is hard to tell exactly who may be listening. I had seen many students read the chair sign, but only one child raised a tentative hand to say that he had. It is hard for the children to know when to talk, or what they are expected to say. This environment is new. People may laugh when they are doing their serious best. They seem shy. No wonder their behavior is anamolous and unfocused. They do not yet know how to be. Over time, they are drawn in and learn how to participate.

In the days that follow, she asks the most reticent children questions for which they are sure to have answers.

“Jack, you live in the country and are outside a lot.” He perks up and looks her way.

“What signs of fall are you seeing?” He looks away, sinks into his seat, appears frightened.

“We’ve been studying about how animals get ready for winter. Have you noticed any of those things?"

Shoulders hunched, head down, he glances up and mumbles, "Birds are gone."

She writes that on a poster-sized list labeled "Feeling Fall", and puts Jack's name in parentheses after his words.

One morning, after announcing that it is time to read the Good Morning Board silently, she adds that she is pleased to see how some people are using many different strategies to find out what it says. Bill and Michael jump up and clamor to her side. Katherine joins them shyly. She draws them into the protected space alongside her. They point to the words that they don't know and she tells them what they are. She encourages them to guess at other words. "The first paragraph almost always says something about the weather," she reminds. When they gues what it says, she is delighted that they can read.

6 How do you know the structure is working?

The facility and clarity with which the structure of everyday activity is presented to the pupils does not guarantee its acceptance or comprehension. Observing the students without teacher direction or supervision does provide a measure of the degree to which the culture established by the teacher has become the students' own.

Depending on when they arrive, students will have from 10 to 20 minutes of unstructured free time before the pledge to the flag. Mrs. K is relaxed, available to the students, but also busy herself, preparing for her day.

On an October morning, Susan, Katherine, and Nina are in the first wave of students that bursts in from the cafeteria. They stop to study the chair sign. Nina's lips articulate the words that she whispers softly.

Paul strides into the room exuding purpose. He checks the chair sign, walks directly to his desk and rights his chair. Speaking to no one, he glances quickly about the room, walks to the library shelf, pulls out a book, and settles on the floor to read, remaining absorbed until the lights flick.

Bill brushes past the chair sign and it slips to the floor. Dan helps him put it back. They look at it and laugh. Janice is outraged. They have put it up-side-down. She rushes across the room to tattle.

Mrs. K's voice is reassuring. "If you have noticed something that is not right, by all means fix it. Can you manage? Do you need some help?"

Peter shuffles through a stack of drawings on a shelf, pulls out a blank sheet with his name printed on it, and waves it in front of Mrs. K.

“Mrs. K! Mrs. K! Look! Warm colors and cool colors!” He rights his chair and puts the paper on his desk, then moves to the listening center. In a basket are cards with students’ names printed on them. He locates his and plucks it out.

“This is *not* right,” he informs me. He mimes putting on a set of headphones, then shakes his head. “I haven’t done it yet. It doesn’t go here.”

He places his card in a different basket, then runs to the other side of the room, and signs up to conference with Mrs. K during writing workshop.

At the science table, Michelle, Lynne and Tammy adjust the position of a gooseneck lamp over a collander full of soil. Michelle explains the experiment to me: “We are checking to see where worms go when it gets hot.”

Michael crosses the room to meet Jack at the door. They whisper. Michael bursts back into the room. “Aw, no! *Still* no Mystery Object yet!”

Several more students have joined Paul on the floor reading. A few others are drawing and writing in their places or at tables. A clot of boys around David’s desk finger and examine a toy car. Another group clusters around Mrs. K. Several notes from home have landed in a basket on her desk. Jane is in her seat, hands folded.

The little bell rings, and Brain nudges Bill and whispers something, motioning to the clock and to the lights. Bill races over to the light switches. The lights flicker and there is a general scurrying all over the room.

Students take their places, hands over their hearts (except for a few boys using a two-fingered scout salute, and a few others with comic variations thereupon). Mrs. K stands tall. We wait. And wait. Heads turn, there are a few murmurs, then a stage whisper, “Nin*aaaaa!*” A small voice begins, “I pledge ...” The others join in. The day has begun.

“The day doesn’t really start with The Pledge of Allegiance and a discussion, does it?” I ask Mrs. K. “Everyone starts their own day in the morning before the little bell and the lights.”

“You *do* get it don’t you!” she laughs. “I learn things in that time that I couldn’t learn any other way. Before we begin together, I know who is tired or in a bad mood. I find out what they think is important among the things that are set up in the room. Sometimes I can see what different ones will find important to work on or finish during the day. They need this time, too. They can’t come in the door and *Snap!* become instantly focused on what *I* think they should think about.”

7 Coming to know the students

A rich, cohesive classroom structure which the students understand and use is not an end in itself. It is potential: the medium for the transmission of skills and values, the context and the occasions for participation and learning. The participants in the classroom culture are individuals, not groups. Each person must have tools for finding his or her own way.

Students need guidance in making their participation productive and meaningful. Useful guidance requires quite a lot of knowledge about each student. What is the texture of each child's understanding? What is the sense they are making of the various activities? Such questions can't be answered without knowing each child. Coming to know them is a gradual, uneven process.

Because my role in the classroom was unobtrusive observer, the students I first came to know were the ones most compelling to watch. They attracted my attention because they caused me anxiety: they weren't doing what they were "supposed to be doing". I was anxious both for them and for the teacher. They were being themselves, going against the grain of group participation, and as such were vulnerable to reprimands. I winced for their sweet sheepish faces if a reprimand came, and when it didn't, I worried on the teacher's behalf that soon things could "get out of hand".

I searched for consistent patterns that set the norms for "maintaining order". Peter seldom seemed to follow the discussion, although he occasionally piped in with a pertinent remark. He would read or draw, and every day take a long ambling trip to the bathroom. These trips involved slow circuits of the room—he'd stop and visit the science table, the maps, the library. Only when lost in a book would he stay in his seat for any length of time. Michael, on the other hand, had the potential for similar mental and physical wanderings, but Mrs. K would bring him back with a sharp reprimand before he ever got far. Did she notice how differently she responded to these two?

"They are different people. The rules are different for them," she replied matter-of-factly. "Michael can follow and participate in the discussion. He needs to be there. Peter is not up to it yet. Some students find that very hard, that the rules can be so variable. But really that is less stressfull than trying to force everyone to follow the same set of rules.

"Peter can't sit still and look where everyone else is looking while we talk for a half an hour. He just can't do it. If I try to make him do it, he just gets frustrated and angry. And I find that most of the time he does know what is going on. I'll say, 'Isn't that right, Peter?' or 'What do you think about that, Peter?' and he knows where we are, he's been listening. Everything distracts him, I don't know why, and it frustrates him enormously. I think he reads because with a book he can shut everything else out. I've referred him for help so he can go and talk, work on staying with one idea, and carrying it through to completion. I think he will find that very satisfying.

"But Michael, oh. he's sharp. Last year he repeated first grade and just floated along, never trying very hard. But he can do it. I want to make him think hard, and wrestle with those ideas. I love to watch him squirm and sweat, he can work so hard and well. He spent two days editing his story, getting it perfect. Even when there were just a couple of little mistakes left, I didn't just let them go by. He can take it, he'll do it. He stuck with it until it was perfect, and he was so proud!"

I continued watching Peter and Michael. I got less anxious, they got more charming. When Peter scrunched over his book, or began sharpening his crayons, I had less of a sense of Peter being off task, and more of a sense of Peter being Peter. I saw more of Michael's eager, tenacious enthusiasm. I found myself grinning, giggling aloud, beaming inside at the things that they did. And I felt myself experiencing what I had often described of Mrs. K in my notes—delight. Pure and simple. *Wonderful human beings ...*

The insights I gained from watching these two taught me about some of the others. Jumpy, jerky, Dan-of-a-thousand-elbows had always put me off. He was impatient and rough, I didn't like to be near him. Without my "training" from Michael and Peter, it wouldn't have happened one day that when he asked me a question, he caught my eye I saw—instead of wildness—eagerness, intensity and concern in his face. A window opened. From then on, the person who is Dan began to be more intriguing than his behavior was annoying.

There is a wonderful human being in each one of those bodies, but coming to know all of those people takes time. Impressions and judgements, even negative ones, were acknowledged and recorded, but not immutable. My understanding grew as I learned to be open to it. The easiest ones to know were those who are like my own children or others that I already know. From them understading spread outward. This is how it is for a teacher. It would be nice to know all 27 students from the first day, but that isn't the way it happens. It was near Halloween when Mrs. K told me, "You know, I can feel myself lightening up a lot. I think that at last we are all starting to be acquainted with one another."

Lucy Calkins writes that in a classroom where the teacher is involved with the students, the management plan should be simple. This frees the children to be active and the teacher to observe and assess their interactions (Calkins, 1994). At first glance this seems a contradiction. A classroom is a rich culture. It took weeks to establish all the ways there are to function in this classroom. True. And now it is established. The teacher can be intellectually and professionally present in the unfolding of activity rather than expending energy to force action. The teacher does not need to control the students when they respect what they are doing and the environment in which they do it.

One afternoon while I was there, Mrs. K slipped out of the room for half an hour. "I think that is the real test," she said. "I like it so much when they reach the point where I can be sure it isn't my presence that keeps them busy." Nothing seemed to change when she left. During her absence, a few students asked each other or me where she was. No one knew, but no one seemed particularly concerned. When she reentered the room quietly, it was a non-event.

8 Conclusion: What can Researchers do for Educators?

In Room 103, the threads of everyday activity weave into a rich, multi-layered texture. What the details provide is not a methodology to be replicated step-by-step elsewhere, rather a demonstration that if the goals and purpose of education center on the enhancement of human lives, it can be achieved in a classroom like this one. Here, direct instruction focuses on establishing classroom rituals consistent with the teacher's own beliefs about children and learning. The teacher is conoisseur and guide to students who grow and learn by participating in these rituals. This is simply not the same as delivering and attempting to transmit a body of knowledge.

The way that Mrs. K constructs the classroom culture and functions within it has evolved over 16 years.

"Every methodology and teaching style you can think of—I've tried it," she laughs. She attends workshops, conferences, classes. She does what she does because she feels it works. Every year it changes.

"I get so tired sometimes of explaining to people what I do." Parents, administrators, and colleagues are often uneasy because the children aren't quiet and still so they can be "taught". I was able to understand the rich subtleties of this classroom because I visited every day, observed, and was not responsible for teaching. Had I been busy with students, or spent less time there, my understanding would have been qualitatively less. It took such a long focus for me to see all the pieces, understand how they were constructed, and how they fit.

When do teachers receive such opportunities to understand one another and be understood? Outside the classroom, teachers can talk about what they have done or seen, debrief, or release tension, but they have few occasions to thoughtfully and consistently observe, to show one another what they do, or to inspire each other.

The educational researcher, with the time, the resources and the mission to become a conoisseur and critic of classrooms would do well to avoid the monniker of technocrat and develop the skills of the shuttle diplomat. When teachers and researchers square off, the vulnerability for the teacher is substantially greater than that which precedes growth. As collaborators in developing the kind of observation that enhances the conoisseurship of children, researchers can, through their observations, help teachers perceive how children participate in the classroom culture and develop their awareness of students lives and how they can be enhanced. Their criticism can be midwife to the perception that is antecedent to substantial improvement in educational quality.

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