

Holding Values

What We Mean by Progressive Education

Essays by members of the
North Dakota Study Group

Edited by Brenda S. Engel with Anne C. Martin

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For Vito

Our beloved friend, our moral and intellectual lodestar

Introduction

BRENDA S. ENGEL

On a group of theories one can found a school, but on a group of values one can found a culture . . .

—IGNAZIO SILONE

I: History of the North Dakota Study Group

In November 1972, seventeen educators came together at the University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks to discuss a subject of crucial importance to their professional lives: assessment of student achievement. Those individuals had been asked to meet because of their common interest in equal access to good schooling—*good* in this case loosely defined as child-centered, John Dewey-influenced, progressive educational practice.¹ The persuasiveness and success of much of the work of the educators, in schools, teacher centers, and institutions of higher education, depended on how student achievement was evaluated. At that time, and to some extent still, standardized testing with multiple-choice questions was not only the preferred method but, in fact, the only method for assessing children's learning in public institutions.

The meeting at UND was convoked by Vito Perrone, the dynamic, forward-looking dean of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota. Perrone's purpose in bringing the group together was to look with care at the current situation in evaluation and consider alternate possibilities for the future. The issue was of particular significance because the tests not only served to effectively define the curriculum—the lessons to be learned—but also discounted much of the agenda of the more progressive programs. Schools that encouraged creativity, curiosity, and inventive thinking, for example, were disadvantaged. Time spent on building a model of an Egyptian pyramid, observing the patterns of growth in a tree, or painting a class mural was time lost in terms of standardized testing. Children in progressive and "open" (also called informal) classrooms, although learning perhaps with more depth and personal involvement, were not necessarily as well prepared for tests as those in programs with more traditional methods

and content. For these reasons, published evaluation results worked against programs relying on inquiry learning and hands-on experience, giving them a bad name and at times threatening their ongoing existence.

As Deborah Meier pointed out in a pamphlet, "Reading Failure and the Tests" (1973), a child taught to think for himself or herself might well choose the wrong answer on a multiple-choice, standardized test. He or she would look for the answer that made sense in the context of his or her experience but not necessarily the one considered right by the test writers. One of Meier's examples shows a drawing of a woman holding to her chest a bag overloaded with groceries; she is facing a clerk who is weighing a bunch of bananas on a scale.

Two children engaged in a verbal battle over the drawing of a lady shopping. "The man weighs the fruit before Mother buys it." [The correct answer] couldn't be right, according to one girl. "Where will Mother put the fruit he's weighing? She's already carrying one bag that is too full." Her classmate tried to demonstrate how Mother could carry another bag. The first girl remained unconvinced. (Meier 1973, 22)

Evaluation was a topic of intense concern for the educators gathered in Grand Forks; they felt that the dominant mode of assessing learning was narrow, dry, and often irrelevant to the aims of what they saw as good education. Some of them had just come from a much larger meeting of sponsors of the national Head Start and Follow Through programs in Denver, Colorado. Convened by the U.S. Office of Education (OE), the purpose of that meeting was to celebrate the accomplishments of the Follow Through program and to discuss its future. Its precursor, the federal Head Start program, provided (and still does) educational programs for poverty-level preschool-age children. Follow Through, funded somewhat later, was meant to extend the benefits of Head Start to children in kindergarten through grade three.

In 1972, there were almost two dozen operating models of Follow Through based on the pedagogical theories of the various sponsors, ranging from the educational right (the behaviorist theories of Bereiter and Engelman) to the left ("open education" influenced by contemporary British primary schooling). Each site had selected one or more from the list of sponsors to oversee theory-into-practice.

Perhaps for reasons of economy, Follow Through had been redesigned as an experimental rather than a service program like Head Start. The experiment, as conceived by the U.S. Office of Education, was to determine which of the models (and consequently sites) were most effective in educating children. Presumably the others would then be discontinued. The Office of Education had contracted with Stanford Research Institute (SRI) to identify the best models through standardized testing.

There was a strong presence of parents in Denver due to a Follow Through mandate giving parents an unusual measure of authority in the conduct of local programs. When the parents became aware, apparently for the first time, of the experimental nature of Follow Through and of the uncertain future of some of the sites, they became incensed. They were angered too by the Office of Education's explanation that the worth of the pedagogical models would be judged by standardized tests given to the children. The parents had little patience with Stanford Research Institute as a reliable arbiter and with test results as criteria of worth, and in fact with the federal Office of Education as an educational decision-making agency. They believed they knew more about the benefits of the programs to their children and resisted a narrowing down of recommended practices in early education.

The parents drew up a strong statement in full support of Follow Through: "We know that our children are learning. We know that they can learn. We have the evidence that they are learning and can learn. No one has ever asked us to demonstrate that Follow Through is working" (McDonald 1972, 12). In addition, "We are tired of others deciding when a program is 'not good' or 'good' for us, based upon their concept of 'data' and their concept of what is 'wrong' with our children" (McDonald 1972, 14). Parents demanded a voice in any future decisions on federal education programs with implications for their children and threatened to enlist the support of other parents nationwide. The Follow Through sponsors were quick to support their demands:

One truth emerging from our experience in Follow Through is that the involvement of parents in decisions concerning their children is essential for effective education. Plans and counterplans that ignore this truth are unacceptable. (McDonald 1972, 15)

On this note, the OE-sponsored conference in Denver ended. Reliance on the results of the proposed SRI evaluation was abandoned. Parent power, which of course easily translates into political power in the form of votes, had effectively derailed the government's plan. A crucial question, however, continued to hang in the thin air of Denver: If not standardized testing, *then what?*

Vito Perrone was not present at the Denver meeting. However, some members of the group who met at his suggestion at UND came directly from the Denver meetings bringing with them insights and understandings gained at those stormy sessions. The seventeen individuals invited to Grand Forks were selected for a range of progressive values they held in common—on the content, process, and desired outcomes of schooling. Perrone's own institution, a Follow Through sponsor, was at the more progressive end of the continuum. Most present had already been in communication with each

other—met, read each other's work, and visited each other's educational institutions. Their common enterprise had been the search for more constructive, relevant evaluation tools consistent with their beliefs about worthwhile educational practice.

The Early Education Research Group at Educational Testing Service (ETS) had previously done a report for one of the Follow Through sponsors—the Education Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts (Bussis and Chittenden 1970). The report analyzed the issues around evaluation and suggested some alternative possibilities. For the many individuals and institutions concerned with evaluation, this report defined the field, giving it a common language and common reference points. It also served to put these individuals and groups in touch with each other, thus incidentally preparing the ground for the future North Dakota Study Group.

The report received a lot of attention from educators. But it never had much impact on evaluation practices of OE [the federal Office of Education]. I believe that Marjorie Martus of the Ford Foundation contacted us after she had read the report. I recall that Ford was providing support to the Workshop Center at City College and to a project of Ann Cook and Herb Mack, among others. This in turn led to meetings with Lillian Weber, Ann, and others. I don't remember when I first met Debbie [Meier]. . . . At any rate, I believe Ann Cook suggested to Vito that we be invited to the first NDSG meeting. (Edward A. Chittenden, personal communication, October 10, 2003)

Another theme of common interest among educators at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies was the British primary school movement. American educators' knowledge of the movement was advanced by a series of widely read articles by Joseph Featherstone published in *The New Republic* in August and September of 1967. The articles, later gathered into a book (Featherstone 1971), described in detail the practices that had evolved in a number of English schools. They aroused great interest, particularly among more politically aware educators looking for teaching practices that would be consistent with a democratic ideology.

There is nothing in England's placid political life to compare with the ferment in America over race, equality, and issues like community control. Nonetheless, visitors to scattered industrial and immigrant areas of Britain have noted large numbers of primary schools doing an exemplary job with the children of the poor and the working classes. England remains, like America, a caste-ridden capitalist nation; the millennium is far away. Yet, a comparable change in our schools would mean a great deal for the quality of our children's lives. (Featherstone 1971, xii)

Sparked by Featherstone's writings and by their own pilgrimages to England, some members of the American teaching establishment looked to the English *integrated day* as the model for the American *open classroom*. Among the teachers, schools, institutions, and teacher education agencies that were directly influenced by English practices were several of the Follow Through sites, including the one sponsored by UND.

Interest in English progressive primary education itself led to the development of networks of progressive educators. While working in the Brooklyn, New York, schools in the late sixties, Ann Cook and her husband, Herb Mack, encountered Vito Perrone at "one of those meetings" (Ann Cook, personal communication, June 2003). Recognizing their common interests and commitments, Cook and Mack subsequently went to visit the school of education at UND where Perrone was dean. As already noted, it was they who suggested some of the names of those Perrone invited to the meeting in Grand Forks.

That, then, is the background for the first meeting in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The original group members were energetic, experienced, and imaginative thinkers about schools and schooling and were professionally well prepared to take on the question: "If not standardized testing, then what?"² Vito Perrone opened the meeting:

I'm really pleased that this many people were willing to come for a couple of days to deal with the issue of evaluation as it relates to more open processes of education. Evaluation is an issue that all of us have struggled with in a variety of ways over the past five to eight years. While some of what we have been doing is quite conventional, much of it breaks some fresh ground. Unfortunately many of the latter efforts in evaluation have not been disseminated very widely. Too much of what we are engaged in is being carried out in isolation. (1972)

All the individuals present had thought and written about school evaluation practices and had had practical experience developing alternatives to standardized testing at a variety of sites. Their purposes as a group soon expanded to include evaluation in traditional as well as progressive educational institutions. The need for better methods was seen as universal, not confined to one type of education.

A variety of alternatives were discussed, including new forms of testing, interviews, observations, longitudinal studies, checklists, collections of children's work, and program documentation. The conversation went on for three days, mostly focused on the intertwined subjects of documentation, evaluation, and reporting, although related subjects crept in among them: the role of parents, myths about education, and areas for research. At intervals, Perrone reminded the group of the urgency of the task at hand.

At the end of the three days, and after agreeing to keep in touch and meet again the next winter, participants dispersed to various parts of the country. In February 1973, most of the same group plus a few new interested persons met in Ida Noyes Hall at the University of Chicago. The same subjects were pursued with the addition of new information and news about progress. At the termination of that meeting, Perrone again asked (and continued for a time to ask at the close of each successive annual meeting): "Should we meet again?" Although the question was real, the response was never in doubt. After a few years, Perrone stopped asking. The group continued to meet over Presidents' Day weekends in February in conference centers in Minnesota, Massachusetts, North Dakota, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

As an anchor pulled up after many years on the bottom of a harbor brings with it long strands of attached material, the subject of educational evaluation necessarily brought into the spotlight many topics in education—all of them inextricably bound up with it. Over the years, the discussion broadened to include, among other matters of interest: early childhood education, the small schools movement, areas of the curriculum (e.g., art, science, literacy), second language speakers, John Dewey and other philosophers, Jean Piaget, Myles Horton, equity issues, educational standards, teacher education, teacher centers, racism, and cultural diversity. Consideration of these central issues in education—discussing, researching, writing about, organizing, and acting on them—constitutes the history of the North Dakota Study Group.

In the mid-seventies, the designation "North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation" (frequently shortened by omitting the last two words) was adopted by the participants. The title indicated the informal, voluntary nature of the organization, but also recognized its geographic origins on the Midwest plains, perhaps with overtones of both its plainness (no pun intended!) and its unlikeliness ("Why North Dakota?").

Although then a referable entity, the group continued in the same fashion—with no dues, no budget, and a mailing list instead of a formal membership list. Its continuing life was made possible by the efforts of Vito Perrone and his dedicated staff at the University of North Dakota and the energy created by the ideas and actions of the membership. The frustrations and misunderstandings experienced by this group of educators in their everyday professional lives and the felt pressures from a largely disagreeing education establishment also may have contributed to keeping the group together and ideologically coherent. Its strength, moreover, was continually reinforced by the developing warm personal as well as professional relationships among the participants.

The meetings themselves evolved into forums for the introduction and exploration of ideas, an opportunity to exchange references to events,

people, and printed materials and to hear firsthand reports on the gains and losses in the never-ending struggle for worthwhile values and practices in education. Its function as an occasion for the reunion of like-minded friends and colleagues, however, was key to the group's longevity—and not separable from its intellectual and informative purposes.

Vito Perrone, the original convener, was the intellectual and emotional heart of the NDSG as well as its administrative center whether he was actually in North Dakota; at the Carnegie Foundation in Princeton, New Jersey; or at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The distinctive style of his opening and final summary remarks became not only annual expectations—part of the ritual—but key to the tone and content of the meetings.

Perrone's presentations were discursive, low-key, informed, often ironic, humorous, and inclusive. He summed up and interpreted what was happening on the national scene in education, putting it into a historical context (Perrone is a historian as well as educator). Despite his quiet tone there was never any doubt about the bent of his ideological and political commitments. His views were consistently guided by a vision of what he deemed good for children's learning, development, and general welfare. Something of Perrone's style, his gentle irony, can be felt in the following excerpt from his opening remarks on standards at the 1998 NDSG meeting.

The standards-based reform direction is generally discussed as new to American education, getting us caught up with other major industrialized countries in the world. We should all exert caution every time we hear that something relating to schools is *new*. It usually means that those speaking of the new haven't chosen to examine the historical record. Our need for historical perspective is always large. Otherwise, we lose sight of the larger context, the roots of our work. We also lose, I believe, the potential for genuine reform. In addition, we should worry when the motivation to do something educationally is to help us catch up with some other country—a stance that seems to look right past the students most of us see day in and day out, almost as if they aren't there. I envision here a group of six- or seven-year-olds being told that they have to study hard to make sure we stay ahead of the Japanese. Why would any of these children care about competition with Japan? Why should their teachers even have that in mind? (Perrone 1998b, 7)

Vito Perrone's actual presence and gestures—his way of sitting back in his chair, taking his time, making eye contact with persons in the group—conveyed extraordinary warmth, openness, recognition, and appreciation of individuals and of the group as a whole. Deep seriousness and optimism—without-illusions, however, underlay his apparent ease and informality. He

had a sophisticated understanding and knowledge of the workings of the institutional world and loci of power. His wide network of acquaintances in the field of education benefited the NDSG, bringing it additional members and speakers and greater visibility.

Until the mid-nineties, Perrone, as administrator, kept the mailing list and bank account; he obtained supportive grants and periodically requested donations when funds were running low; he oversaw the selection, editing, and production of a series of monographs published by the University of North Dakota under the imprint of the NDSG (see the listings of them at the end of this book). By keeping the administrative procedures largely in his own hands, Perrone was able to exercise quality control over the NDSG's output. He also influenced the Study Group's course of development: to continue as long as it proved useful and, as much as possible, to do so without the usual time- and energy-consuming organizational trappings. In a 1975 report to a funding agency, Perrone described the group with characteristic directness and simplicity, as "a relatively informal network of individuals with some common experience and with particular concerns about 'support systems for teachers' and 'evaluation'" (1975, 1).

As the NDSG continued, it began to develop a context of understandings and assumptions—a special in-group culture that, like all such cultures, had both strengths and weaknesses. Traditions established themselves—about procedures and rituals at the meetings, as well as often unspoken assumptions about values. Some of the positive traditions were, along with Perrone's opening introductory talk and final wrap-up summary, the inclusion of film, poetry, dance, and space reserved for individuals' special interests and passions. At the opening sessions, a ritual that members came to expect was an opportunity for anyone who volunteered to give a brief account of his or her current work, concerns, thoughts, or recommendations for reading or viewing.

Among the hazards were the potential for self-congratulation; easily obtained positive responses; and a sense of *specialness*, perceived at times as *exclusiveness*, particularly by newly attending participants. The NDSG membership's own commitment to democratic values generally served as a countervailing force working against thoughtless parochialism. People spoke out, often in painful ways, about unequal representation, authority, and voice. Classroom teachers and representatives of cultural and ethnic minorities at times felt slighted. In 1982, for example, a group of teachers from Philadelphia who were attending the meetings expressed their sense of being patronized—invited almost as "token" practitioners (from notes of telephone conversation with Lynne Strieb, March 10, 2004). Their voices and those of others began to be heard, their messages were usually acted on.

I was—and remain—puzzled as to my role and/or participation as a classroom teacher. Several years ago, some classroom teachers who attended the meeting decided that the NDSG was set up for educators who are not schoolteachers, and that this was all right. They felt that it provides teachers with a supportive network and resources, but did not need to have teachers attend the meetings. I am not sure that this is so. It seems to me that there should be a strong line of connection between the researchers/administrators/university people and the practitioners in the daily life of the classroom. (Anne Martin, personal communication to Vito Perrone, 1984)

It was not a coincidence that in the mid-eighties there was a distinct increase in the number of classroom teachers not only attending meetings but making presentations, serving on panels, and taking part in program planning.

A few years later the lack of leadership roles filled by educators from minority cultures was brought dramatically to the attention of the NDSG—the fact that African Americans and Latinos had come to meetings, mainly as invited speakers or as delegations from schools, but rarely returned. In 1986, Vito Perrone's interest in the National Coalition of Advocates for Students led him to invite Richard Gray, an African American then the organization's deputy director, to a meeting of the NDSG. Gray, along with Hubert Dyasi from the Workshop Center at CCNY and a number of other teachers and students brought the issue of minority involvement sharply to the attention of the group. They pointed out that it was not only a question of minority presence or leadership roles but also the urgency of establishing race itself as an ongoing subject for examination.

The minority students . . . as well as teachers . . . were very vocal [in] expressing notions of not just bringing in and sustaining minority participation in the group, but also about focusing on issues of race and equality in the annual meetings. . . . As you probably know, discussions of race have permeated most of the last several meetings. (Hubert Dyasi, personal communication, February 3, 2003)

The message, although painful, was heard and the situation began to change—more minority voices were heard and the leadership became more diverse (although there is still a ways to go). The NDSG continues to develop the capacity for self-examination and correction, surely one of the reasons members return.

Two months after the February 2000 meeting of the NDSG in Woodstock, Illinois, Vito Perrone suffered a massive stroke while working in his office at Harvard. Partially paralyzed and without speech, he had to

suspend all activities including his leadership role in the group. Since that time, Vito Perrone has been fighting his way back toward a participatory life. He has regained a good deal of mobility, speech, and intellectual capacity and was able to attend the 2003 meetings held, for his convenience and in his honor, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Other members of the group have taken on, at least temporarily, responsibilities formerly belonging to Perrone—communications, summary talks, and planning. But the central presence, the organization's heart, still remains mostly absent.

II: Values

To lose a focus on democracy—not to be closely connected in our practice to the world, its problems, and its promise—is to lose the moral base of our work. (Perrone 1991a, 9)

Why the title of this book? What were the values held so tenaciously and articulately over the past three and a half decades by members of the NDSG? What were the intellectual shared territories and common purposes that lent urgency to the meetings?

First, a bit of relevant autobiography: I was born in New York City in January 1924, the same year Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* was published. The novel, widely read—by my parents among others—concerns a man, Hans Castorp, who visits a friend at a tuberculosis sanatorium and ends up developing the disease himself and remaining there. The popularity of *The Magic Mountain* helped bring tuberculosis back to center stage for the educated middle class (where it had always been, of course, among poor and immigrant populations).

When I was five, I was taken to a prominent New York pediatrician who decided, on what later turned out to be flimsy evidence, that I had “potential” or “incipient” tuberculosis. My family panicked. I was immediately isolated and put to bed where, as far as I can remember, I remained most of the time for the next three years, cared for by a kindly woman, sent south for the cold winter months (Miami Beach, South Carolina), and totally isolated from my siblings and other children. At age eight, presumably cured of TB (although still sent early to bed and not allowed to exert myself), I was readmitted to the family and sent to school as a shy, illiterate, awkward child.

The Windward School, settled on by my parents, was a relatively unstructured and relaxed private school, probably considered suitable for the sensitive, delicate, inexperienced child I then was. Located in White Plains, New York (my family had moved to the suburbs), it was ideologically pure;

that is, pure John Dewey as interpreted by the somewhat naïve, semi-Bohemian, idealistic group of parents and teachers who had founded it not long before I was enrolled. The school shared most of the hallmarks of other progressive schools of the 1920s and 1930s: woodworking at the center of the curriculum (if indeed there was anything that could have been described as a curriculum); a great deal of time and importance given to art, crafts, and nature study; weekly field trips; lots of encouragement to invent and explore; project-based learning; teachers addressed by their first names; high parent involvement (it wasn't always clear to us who were the parents and who were the teachers); and an absence of textbooks. “Arithmetic” was the only subject taught in noninnovative ways—probably for lack of know-how—and it was the only subject we found boring.

I have intermittent and perhaps undependable memories of the school: a teacher, Kitty, who taught literature and theater—who was thought (by us children) to live on the stage and wear the costumes in daily life. (Or perhaps it was the reverse—the costumes for the plays were selected from her personal wardrobe.) We designed and constructed one of the school buildings and I learned to hammer nails, mix mortar, and lay bricks. I must also have learned to read though I don't remember much by way of process—except that I was introduced on the first day to a teacher named Marcelle and she apparently showed me how.

We studied medieval times through literature, history, and art; built a model of a medieval town; and visited a real castle with a stone-paved courtyard on the Whitelaw-Reid estate in upper Westchester County. We studied bridges and dams and made field trips to the George Washington Bridge and Kensico Dam. I spent a great deal of time in the art room drawing and painting. At the start of each week, we were given a “contract” to fill out specifying the work we meant to accomplish in those five days. My best friend usually completed her contract by Tuesday; as far as I remember, I never did complete one although it didn't seem to matter.

I loved the Windward School. Although my years there have undoubtedly been romanticized through selective memory, they seem to have been full of wonder, discovery, and pleasure. I went from being a distinctly strange, semi-invalid child to being an active learner, enthusiastic about school and education and curious about the wider world. One of the most important things we all learned at the school was a kind of confidence that we, by ourselves, could do it, make it, find out about it.

Many years later, visiting primary schools in England in 1969, I recognized with delight beliefs and practices from my own early experience of school (only there the schools were public and inclusive): value put on the arts and creative effort, trust in the implicit interest of the man-made and

natural worlds, respect for children's autonomy, and belief in children's serious mindedness and serious intent. These, with the addition of belief in democratic community and inclusion, are the closest I can get to defining the *values* behind the work of the North Dakota Study Group. To have meaning, of course, they have to be in context, not merely appear on a checklist. They are distinctly different from those values held by the majority of the educational establishment that, with some notable exceptions, lie behind conduct of public education.

Since the days of excitement over the *integrated day* (the English version) and *open education* or *informal education* (the American translations), those terms, along with *progressive education* (from the work of John Dewey), have become suspect. Attaching them as descriptors to any educational endeavor brings considerable risk in the current political climate.

Dewey's own use of the word *progressive* was applied in fact more to society and politics than directly to education. He believed that "progressive communities . . . endeavor to shape the experiences of the young so that instead of reproducing current habits, better habits shall be formed, and thus the future adult society will be an improvement on their own" (Dewey 1944, 1916, 79). For John Dewey education was "an instrument of realizing the better hopes of men" (79); he went on to prescribe what such an education for change might be. (My understanding of John Dewey's philosophy of education has been deepened and extended by many conversations and exchanges of emails with George Hein, colleague and friend.)

Conservatives favor education as a *handing down* of values and academic content to each succeeding generation, with students seen primarily as receivers of knowledge rather than as active creators of meaning. The difference between the conservative and progressive positions could be characterized as maintaining the status quo versus moving forward. Neither view, of course, is monolithic and both depend on what kind of society or culture is envisaged for the future. Dewey stated this succinctly in 1916:

Particularly is it true that a society which not only changes but which has the ideal of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs. (81)

In recent years, the country has moved toward the right, politically and ideologically maintaining what is essentially a conservative ideology by Dewey's definition. Since public education is inevitably tied in with national and local politics, it too has moved toward the right. This means, on the school level, prescribed curriculum, standards imposed from above, and increased standardized testing—all justified by a rhetoric of rigor and

economic necessity. These leave little room for the arts and imagination or inquiry learning.

Yet . . . yet . . . an undercurrent of progressive educational practices persists, and, even when not named or recognized as such, continues to influence schools in many ways. The evidence: instances of project-based learning; assessment by portfolio; hands-on activities; emphasis on inquiry, on small classes, and on small schools. The dissonance between, on the one hand, those schools and individual teachers trying to act on their own convictions about how and why children learn and, on the other hand, officials responsible for carrying out top-down policy decisions has led at times to political action, passive resistance, and even occasionally deception (like altering test scores).

Some of those attending the early meetings of the North Dakota Study Group were veterans of school battles—ideological and political struggles—and had been active in promoting equal access to good education for all children. Others were occupied primarily with developing progressive educational practice and child study. The ideology of the two activities coincided to a remarkable extent: the nature of practice and the policies that enable or hamper it are interdependent (though less so, of course, in independent schools). Vito Perrone himself was notably an effective progressive educator with a high degree of political awareness. And the galvanizing issue on the table in Grand Forks, evaluation, had immediate implication for both politics and education.

The issue of educational evaluation has to do basically with power relationships, which are at the heart of politics: Who has the right to evaluate what and whom? Who decides on criteria and instruments? What degree of consent needs to be sought from those having a stake in the consequences? Finally, there are the questions about values themselves—*what* values are lurking behind judgments? These questions lead to further questions: Can so-called "objective" methods determine the worth of qualitative experiences like education?

Michael Patton, at the time of the 1972 meeting still a graduate student in sociology at the University of Wisconsin, later wrote one of the first monographs published under the imprint of the North Dakota Study Group (1975). Proposing an alternative research paradigm for the fields of education and sociology, Patton contrasted characteristics of quantitative and qualitative methodologies: reliability versus validity, objectivity versus subjectivity, distance from versus closeness to the data, component analysis versus holistic, outcome versus process evaluation, generalization versus uniqueness. The second in each of these pairs is consonant with the beliefs and inclinations of members of the NDSG. Taken together, they describe not so much a political stance as a context for making decisions—one that

assumes the importance of the individual's experience and views and emphasizes understanding over judgment.

Edward Chittenden and Anne Bussis and colleagues in the Early Education group of Educational Testing Service, in Princeton, New Jersey, mentioned in Part I of this introduction, were thinking in ways congenial with Patton's analysis. As psychologists and educational researchers, they developed qualitative ways of looking at children's learning, their methods relying on closeness to the subjects being studied with validity (relevance) established by detailed observation of children in the process of learning. They emphasized the importance of context—the particular group of children, particular teacher and particular setting—to academic outcomes. In planning a study of children learning to read, the ETS researchers spent a week at the Prospect School in Vermont consulting with Patricia Carini and colleagues who had been developing useful protocols for observing children. Bussis and Chittenden, with their coauthors Marianne Amarel and Edith Klausner, also spent time with children in classes—many of them taught by members of the NDSG.

A research focus on readers carries several methodological consequences. It implies the need for evidence of a child's understandings and manner of functioning across the full range of classroom activities. It requires a study over time, in order that patterns may emerge from the documented evidence and the relationship of reading to the reader's broader purposes and meanings may be discerned. A focus on readers also calls for the in-depth study of relatively few learners rather than gathering more limited data on a great many children. It means, in effect, an approach using naturalistic methods and procedures that can be sustained over time. (Bussis, Chittenden, Amarel, and Klausner 1985, ix)

Aside from the study's close-up view, breadth, length, and emphasis on meaning, another striking (and unusual) characteristic of the ETS reading study was its collaborative design—researchers coequal with practitioners: “Practitioners were centrally involved in all phases of the investigation, from planning and instrument development through data collection and analysis” (1985, x).

The ETS team had deep respect for, in fact depended on, the knowledge, insights, and understanding of the classroom teachers. Unlike the stance of the Office of Education in Denver, they did not set themselves up as experts, deciding the criteria for judgment and anticipating the nature of the decisions that would be attendant on its outcomes. In seeking the collaboration of subjects, Bussis and colleagues were acting perhaps more for practical reasons than for political and/or ideological ones. Just as Willie Sutton robbed banks because, as he said, that was where the money was, the ETS researchers under-

stood where the knowledge was: in children and teachers. Still it is striking that they consistently maintained “democratic” relationships with study subjects as well as within their own collaborative group at ETS.

In the mid-seventies, with my help, George Hein formed the Program Evaluation and Research Group (PERG) at Lesley College (now University) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its political and educational ideology was consistent with that of the NDSG, although it's difficult to know whether PERG was influenced by the beliefs of the NDSG or whether it was drawn to the NDSG in the first place because of already existing sympathies; it was probably a combination of both. In a 1977 monograph on evaluation, I wrote, “People have the right to participate as active agents in decisions that directly affect them” (Engel 1977, 3); and “Unity of thought and action leads toward freedom of the individual—whenever a person acts in obedience to someone else's thinking, he is giving up a measure of independence” (4).

Although these statements pertained to practices in evaluation, they were essentially political in nature, having to do with power and authority. The practices of PERG followed the guidelines of qualitative evaluation as described earlier by Michael Patton. Clients initially were asked to articulate their own goals and evaluation was conceived as a collaborative effort, its purpose to achieve deeper understanding in the service of program improvement. The instruments, too, were primarily qualitative: interviews, observations, questionnaires, collections of artifacts, and so on, although the results of some of these, particularly of the questionnaires, were frequently converted into numbers. Neither in its conduct nor purposes did PERG typify the *de haut en bas* assumptions of most evaluation practice. However, the PERG methods were not easily adapted, for some of the same reasons, to large-scale, national assessments. If it had been responsible for the Follow Through assessments, the sites would have been individually evaluated with the aims and perceptions of those immediately involved taken into account. Plus, the purpose would have been improvement of each site, not the kind of *horse race* designed by the Office of Education to determine the “best method.”

Some educators who attended the first meeting in Grand Forks had a high level of political consciousness and experience. These included four from New York City: Lillian Weber, Deborah Meier, Ann Cook, and Herb Mack. Weber, the oldest and most experienced of the group, was professor of Early Childhood Education at the City College of New York and also director of Advisory Services to the Open Corridor Reorganization of the New York City public schools. Weber's basic commitment was to greater access for all children to good (i.e., progressive, child-centered) schooling, no matter what their age, class, or race. This meant, of course, public education. In the United States until that time, progressive education had been mostly limited

to private (independent) schools. In the late sixties, Weber heard about the new primary school education, known as the integrated day, being practiced in some areas of England.

It had not been clear to me that “good” education could exist under the conditions usually found in the public sector until I discovered that England had what I considered to be “good” education, even with large classes, and that it provided this in the state framework. (Weber 1971, 1)

Weber spent a year and a half in England studying British education and observing schools for young children. On her return she wrote a book describing in detail the creative, child-centered practices she had seen in state schools. Her interest had always been in bringing about change in the system of compulsory education in the United States. She saw the structures of American education as a mismatch with the nature of children—with children’s innate ways of learning. Essentially a pragmatist, however, Weber was able to work within the givens, gradually creating developmental learning communities in classrooms grouped around an “open corridor.” Children and teachers used the corridors for display and as alternative workspaces. Teachers began to see themselves as part of a community of peers rather than as individuals isolated in their classrooms. The corridors were *open* too in that they made the education community accessible to parents and other visitors. Moreover the curriculum itself made use of the surrounding culture rather than being confined strictly to academics.

Weber supported teachers’ growth and change by instituting a system of “advisors,” a model imported from England. The advisors were there to help and suggest rather than supervise in the traditional sense—again, a more democratic relationship instead of the usual vertical hierarchy of power and authority.

Deborah Meier was one of Lillian Weber’s advisors in Districts Two and Three in New York City. A longtime socialist and political activist, Meier wrote several pamphlets criticizing standardized testing of reading. She also published articles in the teachers’ union magazine, in *Dissent*, and in various other journals even though she saw herself primarily as a teacher:

I certainly didn’t see my political agenda as primary in my work in schools. I went into being a kindergarten teacher for the sheer fascination of it, quite surprisingly, although I always saw it as compatible with my politics and values. (Meier, personal communication, January 2, 2003)

Meier, like Lillian Weber, had visited England in the sixties, recognizing there some elements of the progressive pedagogy she herself had experienced as a child in private school. Again like Weber, she had a vision of bringing thoughtful, developmental, exciting education into the public domain.

The thrill of the English developments was that they were reaching working-class kids, ordinary schools and suggested to us the possibility that these ideas might be viable for more than the small, private school elite that was still influenced by Deweyism. (Meier 2003)

In 1974, Deborah Meier was asked by a district administrator to create a new public school in New York City’s District 4 where a system of school choice had recently been instituted. Central Park East (CPE) in East Harlem, the school Meier started, was (and still is) an outstanding example of a distinctive, innovative, and successful learning community. Although attended by a diverse body of students as in other public schools, CPE was very different in its pedagogy and explicit values. The school, with a relatively small total enrollment, was characterized by small classes, project-based curriculum, centrality of the arts, developmental learning theory, and a good deal of teacher autonomy. Guiding these practices were strong convictions about educating for a democratic society: That children—all human beings in fact—are capable of making responsible choices, being engaged by the things of this world, asking good questions, and becoming independent thinkers and learners.

Respect for the dignity and worth of the individual student worked against practices such as tracking, conventional grading, and standardized testing—all of which are associated with top-down judgments. Motivation for learning came in part from the close association of adults and children (adults serving as “models” of readers, artists, scientists, and engaged thinkers) and from the surrounding natural and man-made worlds viewed as an always-intriguing subject for exploration.

Although Ann Cook and Herb Mack also created a public school in New York City, they had originally come to education from a background of political activism. Cook, while still a student at Sarah Lawrence College, helped organize a national conference on civil rights. Later, in the early sixties in Chicago, she and Mack, then a high school teacher, initiated a program in which high schoolers were tutored by college students (SWAT). Both Cook and Mack were involved in a number of civil rights organizations (including the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) and public actions (boycotts, freedom schools). In 1966, they too traveled to England where they stayed and worked for two years, interested in the new ideas and practices they found there. Their initial focus was attitudes toward race in state comprehensive schools though while there they also participated in projects on curriculum development.

Back in the United States, during the period of administrative decentralization in New York City, Cook and Mack worked with the city’s public schools and, in the early seventies, established the Community Resources

Institute. The institute, similar to the English advisories, provided material resources, workshops, and consultation for teachers. In 1985, they founded the Urban Academy, a small New York City public high school.

Ann Cook and Herb Mack, like Deborah Meier and Lillian Weber, have stood for—and fought for—progressive values in education, ones that they saw as compatible with their political ideology: respect for and confidence in the individual learner, antiracism, creative curriculum related to students' experience with the outside world, and education for participation in the community and in a democratic society.

During the period when Weber, Meier, Cook, and Mack were creating or influencing educational institutions in New York, Patricia Carini co-founded, in 1965, a small, independent, "alternative" elementary school in southern Vermont. At the 1972 meeting in Grand Forks, Carini was an articulate, passionate speaker. Her experience and development of documentary processes at the Prospect School offered promise for responding to the question, "If not standardized testing, then what?"

Teaching practices at the Prospect School were influenced by the examples of primary school education in England as well as by John Dewey and the traditions of progressive education in the United States. But the school—staff and administrators—also developed its own pedagogy and practice from seeing, experiencing, reflecting, and discussing, and from broad reading; philosophy and psychology, educational theory, poetry, and fiction.

[The school] reflects a humanistic understanding of how children learn: through play they follow their natural curiosity to explore the world and their relation to it; through science, language and art they learn to represent, describe and express their continually evolving perceptions of the world; through firsthand involvement they seek and extend their individual interests and personal meanings. (Prospect School Brochure, n.d.)

Carini herself, in addition to being an educator, is a philosopher, psychologist, avid reader, and creative thinker. She has developed, with the school's teachers, ways of observing and recording children's in-school lives in order to gain deeper understanding of who they, the children, are as learners and creators of meaning—in her words, making them "visible."

Carini's essentially nonjudgmental, descriptive, and appreciative approach to deeper understanding of children depends on extensive documentation: observations by teachers and administrators, collections of children's work, interviews—all qualitative data. The view, in Patton's terms, was of "closeness to the data." Documentation served as material for staff "reflections" aimed at providing for children's interests, propensities, and ways of

learning. The "Prospect Processes," as they came to be called, were a new form of evaluation in the service of supporting the child's full development rather than judging mainly academic achievement.

I first heard of Patricia Carini and the Prospect School in 1971 when I faced the task of evaluating a new, alternative school. It was immediately evident to me, from what I heard and read, that Carini was thinking about children and education in ways [that] were both startlingly original and, at the same time, had a distinct ring of truth. I made arrangements to spend ten days that summer at the first Prospect Summer Institute. I came away with an exhilarating sense of having encountered a coherent theory with implications for practice not, to my knowledge, being articulated by any other educator in our time. (Brenda S. Engel, personal communication to a funding agency, February 1988)

During the seventies, the Prospect School evolved into a three-part institution: the school, the Prospect Institute for the Study of Meaning, and the Prospect Archive of Children's Work. (Its current designation is The Prospect Archive and Center for Education and Research.) The association with the NDSG remained strong: Members of the group made visits to the school, attended summer sessions for education and research, and used the resources of children's work in its archives. In fact, the Prospect Center became something like an associated network, its list of participants overlapping that of the NDSG.

The group of teachers from Philadelphia, mentioned earlier in this chapter as having felt at times like "token" practitioners at NDSG meetings, have been closely involved with the Prospect Center over the years. Designating themselves the Philadelphia Teachers' Learning Cooperative (PTLC for short), this voluntary group has had a remarkable record of longevity—twenty-six years. The group, mostly made up of practicing public school teachers, holds weekly open meetings in participants' homes for the purpose of discussing and supporting worthwhile school practices.

At the core of our meetings is a particular kind of conversation guided by the descriptive format developed by Patricia Carini and colleagues at the Prospect Center. These formats include procedures for describing a single child; a child's work such as writing, drawing, explanations of mathematical ideas; the work of a class such as whole-group discussions. In addition, we discuss our own work and larger educational issues. In anything we do, we try to focus on the strengths of children and teachers. Most of our meetings end with implications for the classroom. (Statement distributed informally by the PTLC)

The teachers in the Philadelphia TLC have been outspoken advocates of progressive school practices in their work, writings, and political activities. Carini herself, although not a political activist in the sense of joining picket lines or testifying before state legislatures, is essentially political in her outlook and dedication to the aims of equity and access held by Lillian Weber and other members of the NDSG. Her ability to accept and appreciate all children without the usual assumptions about “educability” because of background or ethnicity gave her a strong affinity with the NDSG’s political stance and struggles. Patricia Carini and Lillian Weber were dramatically different in style, background, and kind of educational setting in which they worked but the close friendship that developed between them was based, in part, on commonly held beliefs in educational progressivism; equal access to good schooling; and, above all, the well-being of children.

I was at that first meeting called by Vito in Grand Forks in 1972 to talk about evaluation, and more specifically, to challenge mandatory standardized testing and to seek ways to influence evaluation of children’s growth and learning. Much about that meeting remains vivid in memory. This isn’t the time for those memories. What I do want to select from that first meeting is that it was a gathering—a gathering of experiences and points of view on a matter, as Lillian says, of first importance: How to make room in schools for children to grow and learn, how to make schools that are rich resources for that growth, how to have the flourishing of the child be the standard for what is “good education,” how to have an evaluation that starts from these first commitments. (Carini 1994, 14)

In addition to the educators whose work is mentioned in the preceding pages, others present in Grand Forks in 1972 were directors of progressive Follow Through sponsors, students of Perrone, or members of his staff. All brought to the table their own experiences and frustrations with traditional methods of evaluation. The tone of the conversation set by that original group and the implicitly and explicitly held values that informed those conversations has shaped the NDSG for over three decades.

As others joined later, they broadened the compass of concerns and enriched the group’s thinking and intellectual experience. The membership became more diverse in several ways—race, culture, experience, work, age, and geographic location. The original themes to do with evaluation branched and twiggged over the years although regularly returning to the root issue—evaluation itself. Those who came consistently to annual meetings were attracted by a shared vision of possibility, even when (which was most of the time) the vision seemed somewhere “off in left field”—certainly a minority view.

Those joining more recently have brought their own areas of knowledge, personalities, and passions to the group. It would be reductive to try to summarize here the variety, depth, and significance of their interests and contributions, although many of these will be represented in the chapters that constitute the body of this book. Participants can be characterized as generally steadfast in their commitment to a set of commonly held values with regard to schooling and the politics of democracy.

For many of us directly involved, the NDSG has been at the center of our professional lives. It has provided comfort and intellectual companionship to individuals in their allegiance to unpopular tenets and a sense of worth derived from being afloat in the same boat with thoughtful, respected, engaged, and remarkable colleagues. The Study Group has also had an important function on the wider scene by “holding values”—helping to keep them, to some extent, within the national consciousness. The values stem from the conjunction of two visions: the political one of true participatory democracy, and the related educational one of child-centered, progressive practice. Both are inclusive—for everyone.

III: The Progressive Tradition

Adherence to a general set of beliefs has kept the North Dakota Study Group together and ongoing for more than thirty years—beliefs about what constitutes worthwhile, relevant education for a democratic society. Like most beliefs, however, they were not born yesterday. The pedigree of progressive education can be traced back at least as far as the mid-seventeenth century. Between then and now, thinkers and practitioners, although living in radically different societies and under very different circumstances, came up with ideas that have strong implications for the present and that are still being argued over, played out, credited, and discredited.

There are two strands to the story: First, the relatively recent recognition that childhood is a distinct phase of life, not simply preparation for adulthood but worthy of respect and study in its own right; Second, the change in view of what is proper subject matter for education—a breaking away from the strict confines of the academy and becoming engaged with the surrounding physical, social, and moral world.

I will refer briefly to the work of a few of the thinkers who are the most interesting and seem to be significant to the history of the NDSG, to set the stage for the chapters that follow.

In the 1600s, John Amos Comenius was one of the first to record on paper some of the values still current among progressive educators. In his

emphasis on learning as developmental, progressing from concrete experience to abstract thought, Comenius anticipated some of Piaget's discoveries by several centuries. His guiding image for appropriate curriculum was the natural growth of the tree, its form becoming increasingly complex as the trunk divides into branches, the branches into twigs.

Comenius also expressed remarkably modern, democratic views on access to education, recommending the use of the vernacular instead of texts available only in Greek and Latin and seeing education as a *universal entitlement* (to inject a contemporary term): "Not the children of the rich or of the powerful only but of all alike, boys and girls, noble and ignoble, rich and poor, in all cities and towns, villages and hamlets, should be sent to school" (1896/1657, 218).

In the following century, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was also concerned with issues of equality, railing in his writings against social and political injustices. In *The Social Contract* (1756), Rousseau laid down his precepts for a democratic society, opening with the poignant and ever-resonant statement: "Man is born free and everywhere he is in chains." In his best-known work on education, *Emile* (1762), Rousseau, like Comenius, turns for guidance to natural forms of development and growth. He contrasts the benign influence of nature to the pernicious one of corrupt man-made institutions, society in particular being deemed unnatural.

The child, Emile, was to learn from direct observation of nature and through experience with concrete objects in his immediate environment. He would thus build not only knowledge and understanding but would develop enough inner strength to enable him, later on, to resist the temptations and corruptions of society. Rousseau saw human intelligence as a development from the earliest stage of feelings, through those of the senses and intellect to the final stage of conscience or soul. Eventually Emile would emerge from the woods and join society, but as a strong, wholesome, resistant man.

Although evaluation as such was not then an issue, both Comenius and Rousseau emphasized the logic and efficacy of intrinsic motivation for encouraging learners—interest in the world and its workings—as opposed to negative motivation through punishment. In the late eighteenth century, Pestalozzi, a Swiss school master, put the theories of Comenius and Rousseau into practice, adding his own interpretations.

Pestalozzi's ideal curriculum was based on the use and observation of ordinary objects in the home and the activities of everyday domestic life. All children, no matter what their social station, were children of God and deserved the power-giving benefits of education. He recommended manual work to cultivate students' attention span, memory, and powers of observation. Although primarily a practitioner, Pestalozzi wrote several books on education that have had a wide influence in Europe and America (1781,

1801). His emphasis on immediate experience and observation as sources of understanding put Pestalozzi in the same general tradition as Comenius and Rousseau. (Pestalozzi's strict pedagogical methodologies—for instance, prescribed steps in reading instruction—now seem rigid, however, more like *Hooked on Phonics* than *Whole Language*.)

Friedrich Froebel, the inventor of the kindergarten ("children's garden") in the nineteenth century, also starts his educational agenda with the senses and immediate perception. He echoes his antiestablishment, romantic precursors in seeing nature as the ultimate teacher, cautioning schoolteachers against trying to interfere with the natural growth of children.

We grant space and time to young plants and animals because we know that, in accordance with the laws that live in them, they will develop properly and grow well; young animals and plants are given rest, and arbitrary interference with their growth is avoided, because it is known that the opposite practice would disturb their pure unfolding and sound development; but the young human being is looked upon as a piece of wax, a lump of clay, which man can mold into what he pleases. (Froebel 1900, 8)

One of the most important enduring, longtime benefits of Froebel's pedagogy is the strong case he made for the educational and human value of play. "Play is the highest phase of child development—of human development at this period" and "the germinal leaves of all later life" (1900, 55). Beginning at home, then further cultivated in the "children's garden," play is at the center of the child's "natural life."

For Comenius, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Froebel, God and Nature are almost indistinguishable. The good life—the moral, spiritual life—is the natural life; although how that was interpreted depended of course on the place and the period as well as on the personal experience of the writer. The natural life implies an organic curriculum, one adapted to the child's broadening awareness and capabilities.

What struck me while reviewing the work of these four theorists of education is their persistent, focused, and central concern with the child, his or (occasionally) her welfare, happiness, and growth. Their recommended practices would now be called *child-centered*. Traces of Froebel's influence and, from further back, the writings of Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi can be seen in the 1967 document known as The Plowden Report issued by an official British government commission on education:

At the heart of the educational process lies the child. No advances in policy, no acquisitions of new equipment have their desired effect unless they are in harmony with the nature of the child, unless they are fundamentally acceptable to him. (73)

This document provided the rationale for the integrated day in the early grades, in England, and, indirectly, for open education in the United States.

The most immediate influence on progressive education, John Dewey, lived (and wrote for much of) a phenomenal ninety-three years, from 1859 to 1952. Relatively early in his life, when still in his thirties, he opened an experimental school in Chicago as a laboratory for his theories about education. (It later became, and in fact still is, the Laboratory School of the University of Chicago.) During this time, Dewey published “My Pedagogic Creed,” which laid out, in brief form, his then current thinking about schooling.

This education process has two sides—one psychological and one sociological and neither can be subordinated to the other, or neglected, without evil results following. Of these two sides, the psychological is the basis. The child’s own instincts and powers furnish the materials and give the starting point for all education. (1897, 77)

Education of the “psychological side” begins at home and develops in accordance with the child’s nature—his “powers, interests, and habits.” The school, as community, then represents “present life”—life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the playground.” Although Rousseau, in *Emile*, exalts nature in dramatic contrast to society and is bitterly critical of the latter, Dewey sees education itself as inseparable from social (or community) knowledge. In a later work, he takes this issue on directly:

The seeming antisocial philosophy [of the eighteenth century] was a somewhat transparent mask for an impetus toward a wider and freer society—toward cosmopolitanism. . . . The emancipated individual was to become the organ and agent of a comprehensive and progressive society. (Dewey 1944, 91–2)

Dewey’s attempt to reconcile his theories of progressivism with those of his predecessors, particularly Rousseau, came from an apparent wish to integrate them into the thinking and practices of his own times, the industrial age. Dewey, like them, writes about the child’s nature being the touchstone for instruction but gives equal urgency to the cause of educating for a progressive society. Like them also and along with his belief in science, Dewey affirms a belief in God. “My Pedagogic Creed” ends with a description of the teacher as “the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God” (1897, 80).

Dewey’s Chicago Lab School virtually defined progressive education. It was created specifically to test his theories of education (and, almost equally

important to Dewey, to provide good schooling for his own children). On November 1, 1894, he wrote this to his wife, Alice:

I sometimes think I will drop teaching phil [sic]—directly & teach it via pedagogy. When you think of the thousands & thousands of young’uns who are practically being ruined negatively if not positively in the Chicago schools every year, it is enough to make you go out & howl on the street corners like the Salvation Army. There is an image of a school growing up in my mind all the time; a school where some actual & literal constructive activity shall be the centre & source of the whole thing, & from which the work should be always growing out in two directions—one the social bearings of that constructive industry, the other the contact with nature which supplies it with its materials. (Menand 2001, 319)

Louis Menand, in *The Metaphysical Club*, further explains Dewey’s view:

By “unity of knowledge” Dewey did not mean that all knowledge is one. He meant that knowledge is inseparably united with doing. Education at the Dewey School was based on the idea that knowledge is a by-product of activity: people do things in the world, and the doing results in learning something that, if deemed useful, gets carried along into the next activity. In the traditional method of education, in which the things considered worth knowing are handed down from teacher to pupil as disembodied information, knowledge is cut off from the activity in which it has meaning and becomes a false abstraction. One of the consequences (besides boredom) is that an invidious distinction between knowing and doing—a distinction Dewey thought socially pernicious as well as philosophically erroneous—gets reinforced. (2001, 322)

This idea, the inseparability of “knowing and doing” is, I believe, at the heart of the matter. In the penultimate sentence of Part II of this introduction, I wrote, “The values [of the NDSG] stem from the conjunction of two visions: the political one of true participatory democracy, and the related educational one of child-centered, progressive practice.” All the theories, experiences, and practices described by the authors in this book can be accommodated within this conjunction—or, in Dewey’s words, “experiential continuum” (1963, 33).

The educational enterprise itself can be seen as having two facets, one more inner—home-based, reflective, and in harmony with the nature of the child; the other more outward—in-the-world, communal, moral, and political. Both, constantly interactive, are essential to a progressive education. Learning starts at home, in the child’s immediate surround, and as the child enters school, she moves out, though not away from her beginnings. The

image is more one of an expanding circle than a road being traveled. When she enters school, she comes already equipped with her early interests, habits, knowledge, skills, feelings, and character (e.g., curiosity, playfulness, inwardness or outwardness, sense of humor).

Children (or adults) learn different things in different ways, some of them more “inner” some more “outer.” They learn through activities and experiences, observation and reflection, participation, imitation, social communication. These means of gaining knowledge and understanding blend together; at times, one (or a combination of several) dominates depending on the particular nature of what is being learned.

An example: My grandson, Will, has accumulated in his twelve years of life what seems to me an impressive knowledge of baseball. By a rough estimate I would say that Will is familiar with the facts about many (most?) of the players on most of the major league teams—their statistics, styles, professional and sometimes personal histories. He also knows a lot about the teams and their competitive records going back fifty or sixty years. He has a thorough grasp of the rules of the game and understands the subtleties of signals, strategies, and decision making, as well as the authority that goes with the various roles and positions in the baseball hierarchy. Complex stuff. And Will is by no means exceptional in his control over this extensive body of knowledge. They all seem to know it, Will and his friends.

So the question is, how did it happen? The answer: In all the ways I just listed, seamlessly blended. Will shares his intense interest in the game with his father (my son) who was equally involved as a child and continues to enjoy baseball now as a spectator sport. Will goes to baseball games and often watches games on television. He plays on a Little League team and does hours of batting and throwing practice at home with his father. Will and his friends talk endlessly about their favorite players and teams. They collect and trade baseball cards, analyze and find meaning in baseball statistics, read the sports section in the newspaper, read and discuss baseball novels. They have become experts—with no instruction. No one explained to Will why a runner has to touch first base before going on to second, the fact that there are three “bases” and one “plate” or what constitutes an “error.” In current jargon, this is called *holistic learning*. One might equally well call it “contextualized learning” or, when teacher-guided, even “progressive education.”

In considering the two facets of education, the personal and the political, the most urgent these days in both are questions of equity and access which include, of course, issues around racism. In John Dewey's day, concern with social justice had a somewhat different focus—more on poverty and the status of immigrants, problems that are still urgent and unsolved. But in recent years the dramatic growth of minority populations, the legal empow-

erment of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement—the rising voice of the disenfranchised and underprivileged of all ethnicities—has changed the moral and political landscape and radically altered the terms of the discussion. Any words or actions of progressive educators must deal first with issues of diversity, access, and equity and with those who have traditionally been denied, or short-changed, on all three.

The chapters that follow are bound together by their authors' general subscription to the values of progressivism. They have been somewhat arbitrarily grouped under six headings—“arbitrarily” because the same concerns tend to pop up throughout, ideas echo back and forth along with the names of certain hovering tutelary spirits cited by many authorial voices (John Dewey most often!).

Notes

1. Part II of this introduction goes more deeply into the beliefs and values held in common by these educators who eventually called themselves the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation.
2. The group included Patricia Carini, cofounder and researcher at the Prospect School—a small, independent school in Vermont; director George Hein and Margaret DiRiviera from Follow Through at the Education Development Center in Newton, Massachusetts; Shirley Childs from the University of Connecticut Follow Through directed by Vincent Rogers; Edward A. Chittenden and Anne M. Bussis, research psychologists in the early childhood unit at Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey; Lillian Weber, professor of Early Childhood Education at City College in New York and director of Advisory Services to the Open Corridors Program in the city public schools; Deborah Meier, an advisor in Weber's program as well as coordinator of Open Education in District 2, New York City; Ann Cook and Herb Mack, codirectors of the Community Resources Institute, which also offered advisory services to the New York City public schools; Elizabeth Gilkerson, director of the Bank Street College Follow Through; Bob Gaines of the Follow Through program at Fort Yates sponsored by UND; Chuck Nielsen, Linda Harness, and Nancy Miller from the Center for Teaching and Learning, UND; Joe Grannis, professor at Teachers College, Columbia; and Michael Patton, doctoral candidate at the University of Wisconsin and consultant to the UND Follow Through.

world and an impact on it; about potentiality and the conditions of life that nurture or suppress the flowering of potentiality; about the conditions that allow the recognition and emergence of ideas; and about the professional, theoretical, and institutional context of schooling. What is inherent to open education understood in this way is a broad acceptance of all humans as part of the group and value and respect for all persons as active learners, capable of intelligent, active efforts to survive. It followed naturally for us to value stories of human experience—even more, stories of immigrant survival and the self-assertions of the oppressed. In these informal, historical accounts—whether novelistic or autobiographical accounts of how each group or each family unit, struggling to survive, organized cultural and personal experiences to sustain and fulfill a way of life—we found the roots of open education. And out of this understanding, which has blown life into our work at the Workshop Center for Open Education, we organized our conference. The all-day meeting, which drew an audience of more than 500 people, was a dramatic and often stirring convergence of old and young—those in the vanguard of today's efforts to restore humanistic values to schools as well as spokespersons for similar but older, even vanished, currents in American life.

Nor was this conference simply a nostalgia trip. Its evocation of the past was organized with the idea of confirming the continuity of those strands in our national life that encouraged self-development. By bringing together people whose experiences in informal organizations appeared to reinforce the truth about our contemporary belief in human educability, the conference hoped to reaffirm the humanistic wellspring of America. It created the opportunity for firsthand encounters with men and women who had played a vital part in programs predicated on faith in the educability of all people. Through informal, small-group interchanges, conference participants experienced the excitement of sharing in living history. Their sense of renewal flowed from the spirit and substance of the presentations they heard. What they were treated to was genuine oral history about persons, times, and ideas whose meaning, often overlooked, obscured, or bypassed, was this day given new life. Their appreciation was succinctly expressed by one participant: "When I thought back over the day, it struck me very forcibly: There is no culture without history. History gives feelings of connectedness. It refreshes you and lifts you."

3

Progressive, Democratic Education: A Primer

JOSEPH FEATHERSTONE

My grandmother was the teaching principal of a small, mostly immigrant elementary school in the Pennsylvania coal country—one of many Irish Catholics who took part in the progressive educational and political movements of her time. She was ambitious about kids' learning. The children of immigrant coal miners, whose fathers were often out of work, read high-class literature and poetry—she had a weakness for the English poet Robert Browning. She checked to see that kids brushed their teeth. My beloved Aunt Mary was a student in my grandmother's fourth-grade class. She remembered how strict it was. Like the others, Mary had her teeth checked. And Mary, too, had to not only memorize and recite a passage from Browning's poem, *Pippa Passes*, but also to explain its meaning in her own words.

My grandmother was a force in local and state politics, fighting for labor rights (her allies in politics were the United Mine Workers, whose leader was her hero, John Mitchell), pioneering in women's rights, and leading the movement to end child labor. She was the first woman elected to the state Democratic Committee. She saw a clear link between democratic politics and her teaching practice.

She was a domestic and classroom tyrant. Her teaching was almost certainly not what we think of as classic child-centered progressivism. There was, though, the interesting assumption that workers' kids should read the best literature—they should get whatever rich kids get. Asking for meaning, she invited a child to interpret and understand a poem, not just memorize it. The business about teeth says something too: She was concerned about the whole child, body as well as mind. The true basics in education were what

kids would need to grow up healthy and well and to participate in the ongoing creation of democracy.

I like to think that all this made my grandmother a variety of progressive teacher who is a constant in each generation of U.S. schooling, public as well as private. I believe they exist in growing numbers today: Teachers who don't necessarily wear a progressive or democratic label, but who have holistic, complex, democratic ambitions for all the kids they teach; teachers who aim at helping students of all backgrounds to participate in politics and life and culture, not just pass a standardized test—to become actors and players, not just spectators.

In his beautiful primer on democracy, the "Gettysburg Address," Lincoln spoke of the United States as an experiment in government of, by, and for the people. The classroom counterpart would be an education of, by, and for the people. Lincoln, self-taught as he was, implied an ideal democratic culture that has never existed, not even in the democracy of ancient Athens with its slaves and inferior status assigned to women. The great American progressive democrat John Dewey sums all this up (deliberately echoing Lincoln) in his classic, *Experience and Education* (1963/1938), by calling for an education "of, by, and for experience." Learning how to learn from experience—to act, to reflect on results, and then to take the next step thoughtfully—is Dewey's ideal of the educated person, an ideal that is never finished because experience keeps on going. Dewey was speaking in a long line of democratic thinkers and educators. Lincoln, Walt Whitman, W. E. B. DuBois, Margaret Haley, Leonard Covello, Myles Horton, Lucy Sprague Mitchell, Vito Perrone, and generations of less famous schoolteachers and parents have all dreamed of such an education and of such a culture for everybody's children. As with Lincoln's ideal of democratic politics, the essence would be the experience of active participation. Full participation in school now would be the best preparation for what DuBois called as the three goals of democratic education—the capacity to take part in "work, culture, and liberty."

The founding members of the North Dakota Study Group thirty years ago came out of the revival of progressive education in the 1960s; they were also products of the Civil Rights Revolution. In the early 1970s they were responding to the challenges—especially in areas such as testing and evaluation—of putting progressive educational and political values into place in public schools on a significant scale. They were trying to maintain the connection between classroom reform and egalitarian political reform. The thought and practice of the NDSG reflect the complex and many-sided goal of the creation of a better democracy in which students will grow up to be good citizens not only of their own nation, but also of the world. The group

draws on, and adds to, a long record of more than a century of social, political, and educational practice that has opened up certain big themes as sites for investigation. The themes can be thought of as questions or problems that each generation of progressive teachers and parents have explored. My friend the late John Holt used to warn that "a conservative is someone who worships a dead radical." Each new generation needs to write its own fresh chapter. But the experience of the past is a help in rethinking the present. The following are some of the big themes I see when I look around at the work of my colleagues and friends.

1. Walt Whitman wrote: "It [democracy] is a great word whose history, I suppose, remains unwritten because that history has yet to be enacted" (1871/1949, 8). The progressive emphasis on schools as democratic communities is important and necessary in its own right as an ideal in opposition to many of the reigning market, corporate, and consumerist visions of education; it ought to figure more prominently in a nation and world facing unprecedented immigration, dislocation, and the movement of peoples around the planet. This is the time of greatest immigration in all of U.S. history. City, suburban, and even rural schools are encountering immigrant families. It seems truly bizarre to us progressives that therefore one of the major policy themes today is the drive to standardize and tighten bureaucratic control over teachers, teaching, and classrooms. The diverse population in schools today would be far better served if more educators felt free to adopt the stance toward immigrants and historic outsiders of Leonard Covello, the teaching principal of Benjamin Franklin High School in New York City during the 1930s (see Perrone's wonderful 1998 book, *Teacher with a Heart*). Covello argued for schools as democratic communities, welcoming families and capitalizing on diversity. He devoted much thought to ways of reaching out to families and personalizing learning for individual kids, helping schools become networks connecting families and communities, and taking advantage of the languages and experiences and knowledge immigrant families bring to America. He was a pioneer in teaching ethnic studies and in promoting understanding, tolerance, and coalition-building among the groups that make up the American rainbow. For Covello, running a school and teaching are forms of democratic community organizing.

2. Another challenge for schools and families today has to do with the ecology of childhood—the task of making schools and other settings good environments and communities in which children develop as whole and healthy people—not test factories where kids get evaluated in one-sided ways. The progressive-democratic tradition is built on a vision of childhood as a time of imagination, construction, and growth through understanding

and action—and schools as communities that link adults to children in relationships of care. The social, the intellectual, and the aesthetic are not separate in this complex tradition of teaching. In an era of school reform driven by managerial values and test scores, progressives remind us to keep focused on the quality of schools as places for the growth of children. Progressives share the worries of many families about child care, and the amount of time kids now spend outside of the family in impersonal formal institutions such as schools, day-care settings, after-school programs, and the like. School policies framed in the light of progressive values would, for example, emphasize aligning schools with families and childrearing, particularly in this time of enormous pressure on families of all social classes. Our current policies seem to be the work of men (I choose my word deliberately) who don't have a clue about childhood and families and their needs. The care of children from morning to evening is a concern that touches families across the spectrum of social classes. Most families need much better support for childrearing than they are getting. The opposite is what they are getting in fact—a corporate vision of education as a grading and testing machine to produce a workforce. The quality of children's lives and the relationships between kids and grownups ought to be central concerns of educational policy, yet they scarcely appear in all the stacks of current standards. Progressives demand a more personalized and communal vision of education—a social and emotional, as well as an academic apprenticeship to growing up. Childhood at present, like our forests and wetlands, is at risk from the developers and *Gradgrinds* who have highjacked policy.

3. The progressive tradition these days also offers a small but growing and important body of classroom work in all the school subjects that suggests possible pathways toward the relatively new (in U.S. and world history) democratic goal of educating all students for participation in intellectual and academic complexity. Americans continue to disagree as they always have about the elements of a decent education but most would agree that the demands of work, citizenship, culture, and perhaps even such aspects of life as parenting have grown more complex and demanding. Formal schooling and educational credentials play a greater role in people's lives. A fair expectation, for example, is that most students in school now will at some time enroll in some form of higher or further education. In any case, being good at school matters more than it used to. Being bad at school is especially disastrous if you are working class or dark-skinned or poor. Conservatives and progressives all have a stake in schools where most kids (not just an elite) know and understand more than in a simpler era. More

and more Americans now agree with my grandmother and Deborah Meier that poor kids deserve what the rich kids are getting—an intellectually ambitious education.

Despite the current talk about high standards and academic and intellectual complexity, the school curriculum is actually getting dumbed down in many places. This is especially and disturbingly true for schools dealing with working-class children, poor and immigrant kids, and kids of color. By contrast, the work of progressive elementary and high schools have over recent decades given us wonderful examples in the arts, drama, literacy, science, environmental studies, and mathematics of what it might look like to have children actually participate in and experience intellectual life. High schools, like Central Park East Secondary and the Urban Academy in New York, and elementary schools like Mission Hill in Boston, stand as models of education for citizenship and sophisticated thinking. They help us see a complex and sophisticated vision of educational standards at work.

4. This brings me to the final and most important way in which the democratic progressive tradition in education and politics speaks to us today. The radical, growing inequalities of power and wealth in U.S. society are harshly reflected in current school inequalities—and even, alas, in the reform efforts to reduce inequality. Now more than ever we need to link democratic possibilities in education to fresh possibilities in politics and our national life. Within education, democracy has to mean not only the participation of all children intellectually and socially in school subjects, but also a renewed fight for equal access and racial justice. We need a fresh new struggle to equalize the scandal of unequal funding for education, and new scrutiny of the role of schools in reinforcing inequalities of class and race and gender. It is also obvious that schools alone cannot take us to a better democracy, though clearly they have a role to play. Progress in education on a large scale will not happen without parallel democratic gains in the rest of U.S. society—in child care, adequate preschooling, full funding for Head Start, medical care for all families, adequate housing, full employment, voting and political and campaign finance reform, human rights, and other big steps toward a less radically unequal society. Without democratic movements to counterbalance corporate power and greed, the country will continue to move in seriously wrong directions, and teachers in public schools will continue to be scapegoats. With a sense of the true complexity of the nation's educational and social agenda, a slogan like "Leave No Childhood Behind" can be our inspiration. Without it, the slogan can become a slick joke on the rest of us.

A few threads link the many varieties of progressive practice over the centuries. They fuse the democratic ideal with the discovery of childhood and the potential for children to grow through experience—the progressive tradition offers today's rising generation of teachers and parents the adventure of the big idea that an education suited to children's nature is possible, that classrooms for everybody's children can provide opportunities for intelligent conversation and reflection on experiences that matter—and that such reflection is childhood's best preparation for both life and citizenship. Progressives from Dewey and DuBois to teachers in Reggio Emilia, Italy, today have shown such teaching to be possible with all sorts of children in many different countries and at different times in history. On the other hand, the progressive tradition at this moment in our public life also speaks with what F. Scott Fitzgerald is reported to have called "the authority of failure." Progressive, democratic ideas are not exactly in fashion today in a country whose government claims to favor democracy abroad, but not at home—and certainly not in classrooms. That is why we democratic progressives believe these ideas are needed now more than ever.

4

Teaching by the Book(s)

ALICE SELETSKY

I have read a lot of books about teaching and learning during my fifteen years as a teacher. I bought some and borrowed others; reread important ones, and passed them along to friends; discarded the ones I disagreed with. By midcareer, my bookshelves bulged; when I retired I cleared away most of the books.

When the subject of this chapter came up, I began creating a list in my head of the books that had mattered most. Many titles popped right up with little prompting, like icons on my computer screen. They were an important part of my personal history, inextricably bound up with the kind of teacher I became.

Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age* (1967) tells of the struggles of integrated schools in Boston. As far as my husband and I were concerned, the timing of its publication was exactly right. In 1964, there was a full-blown school crisis in New York City. Kozol's work was more than just another politically powerful and timely book: It was a call to arms in the integration wars.

We were living in the Bronx, where I taught in a school not far from home, and my daughters attended the local elementary school. Its racial composition reflected the immediate neighborhood, which was middle working class and about 50 percent white, the remaining students evenly divided between Latino and black. A few blocks away was another elementary school whose population was almost entirely black and Latino. The Princeton Plan was proposed as a way to achieve a greater degree of integration. All the five- to eight-year-olds would attend one school; the nine- to twelve-year-olds the other. Our Parents Association got caught up in a fierce, divisive struggle, some of us actively advocating for the plan.

7

*Narratives of Transformation**Education and Social Change in Rural South Texas*

FRANCISCO GUAJARDO
AND THE LLANO GRANDE CENTER STUDENTS

The Llano Grande Center for Research and Development met the North Dakota Study Group in the summer of 1997, when teachers and students from Edcouch-Elsa High School (E-E High) in South Texas came upon Vito Perrone. Vito directed the Annenberg Rural Challenge Evaluation team, and I directed the nascent Llano Grande Center, which was born out of my classroom at E-E High—a rural public high school located along the Texas-Mexico border (see Figure 7-1). We described Llano Grande's purpose as an attempt to capture the story of a community through the use of a range of activities in our public schools. We would build relationships with elders as we collected their experiences through oral histories; our students and teachers would become active participants in building the history of our community. Equally important, we suggested to Vito that as our students listened to the stories of the elders, the students themselves would emerge as storytellers.

Vito was intrigued by this notion. "Tell me more about that, about young people becoming storytellers," he asked.

"Well, Vito, we're not quite sure how that's going to happen, but I know we're committed to the process. Let's wait and see," I said.

Students as Ethnographers

Shortly after our conversation, the center embarked on a community-based research project where we trained student ethnographers to conduct oral histories, write reflective journals, and work on creating digital stories focused on their lives as youths in rural South Texas. Hundreds of E-E High

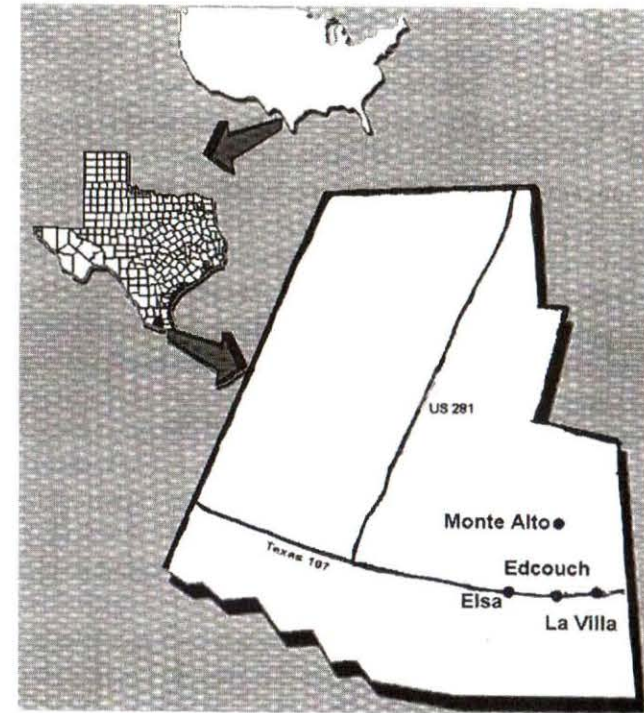


Figure 7-1

students took part in the ethnography research project, and each took seriously the act of interviewing, self-reflecting, and building a community history. In the end, the ethnography project helped students understand themselves and their personal, familial, and community identities. The following student reflections convey some of that understanding.

Myrta Ventura

Through studying her family's story, Myrta Ventura found there was no shame in her experience as a migrant farmworker. Herein, she describes her struggles and her triumphs.

Edcouch, Texas, is the only place that I can truly call home, but as a migrant, it is not the only place I live in. Every year as school comes to an end and the heat begins to burn, my family packs our bags and boards up our house. It would be nice to say that leaving gets easier every year, but I cannot. It has gotten

tougher every year. I can't say goodbye to my friends because I'm not really leaving, and I can't get sad because I know that I'll be back. Sometimes the only thing you can do is close your eyes for five minutes, because that is how long it takes to leave Edcouch and Elsa. Then, when you open your eyes, all you can do is hope that the three months of upcoming labor will speed by.

I can honestly say that up until my twelfth year of life I did not know what work was. Then one morning before the sun rose, my mother shook me out of bed and told me to get up. It was time to work. I didn't take the moment seriously because it was summer, and I was still twelve. No one under twenty woke up before the sun, especially when you didn't have school. Who was I to break this unspoken rule? Unfortunately, that did not pass through my parents' minds.

The moment initiated my new stage of life, as a worker. I was to rise at the same time as the adults, and to do the same work as the adults. So at twelve years old my summer days were going to be spent in the fields. We started off thinning peaches, the job that I hate with all of my heart. We rose at five in the morning, to make the day shorter and cooler, and terminated each day at around three. This cycle continued for the first month, and proceeded with the picking of raspberries, cherries, and blackberries for the last two months. While other kids were at home watching TV and going swimming, I was beneath the sun in my peach tree wearing long-sleeved shirts.

I did not complain as I worked because I understood that this was what my parents needed me to accept. If I complained, I would only make myself look foolish because every other person there wasn't complaining. So, every morning as I rose my heart sank, and I longed to make the sun disappear or the clouds pour their rain. My twelfth summer of life was spent in denial and confusion.

I am now eighteen, and I've gone back to Utah as a worker for the last five summers. As each summer passed, I learned things that I know other people would take a lifetime to learn. I experienced life with a new perspective, and I found myself being thankful to my parents for teaching me what hard work is. The opportunities that this type of work offers are overshadowed by society's stereotype of migrant farmworkers. Positive effects are blurred by the negative statistics and other data that researchers, the media, and others collect.

My summers spent in and with the land have educated me. I still deplore thinning peaches, but I have an understanding of life and nature that makes my heart race. Every day that I begin before the sun is to my benefit. With this teacher, I have become a better student, not only of school, but also of life.

Myrta conducted numerous oral histories, including a historic interview with her grandmother, Rosa García, who unfortunately passed away within months after the oral history—the videotape of the interview has become a prized family possession. Myrta attends Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and intends to pursue a Ph.D. in geology because she loves the land.

Olga Cardoso

Like many students at E-E High, Olga Cardoso came into the United States illegally. She arrived at the high school at fifteen, just three years after crossing the Rio Grande River with her family. Olga became part of the work of the Llano Grande when she founded the Llano Grande Spanish Immersion Institute in 2001. She writes about her family's struggle to survive when she lived in the Mexican border town of Las Flores.

After my family and I left Guanajuato, we settled in Nuevo Progreso, Tamaulipas, also known as Las Flores. Life in Las Flores was very difficult economically. The money my father provided was not enough to make ends meet. It was because of this that my sister and I were forced to sell paper flowers "en el centro." My mother learned how to make paper flowers from my neighbor. My sister and I would go to school from eight until noon, and after that we sold paper flowers until five o'clock. It was too humiliating at first, but I soon realized that it was no crime. I had nothing to be ashamed of; it was what I had to do to help my mom make ends meet.

I have learned to value my education. I have learned to value everything that my parents have done for me and given me. I find myself in search of answers to many of my questions. But more than anything I find myself longing to relive the beauty of my childhood.

During her senior year at E-E High, Olga Cardoso lobbied the Texas State Legislature to change its law regarding undocumented students. The state subsequently passed House Bill 1403, allowing Olga and other undocumented students access to public colleges and universities in Texas. Fortunately, Olga became a legal resident the summer after graduating from E-E High. She attends Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, and intends to become an immigration lawyer.

José Cruz

When José Cruz's mother was nine months pregnant and residing in the Mexican border town of Reynosa, Tamaulipas, she decided to cross the Rio Grande

River into McAllen, where she would give birth to her baby José. Three days later, she took her newborn back to Mexico, where they rejoined their family. The Cruz family eventually crossed to the United States shortly before José enrolled in middle school.

I would like to speak a little bit about my family. Although we are very poor monetarily and we lack the luxuries that other students my age may have, I have to stress that my family has had a great influence on me. Every time I speak at a national, state, or local conference, it is not I who speaks; rather, it is my father's wisdom and my mother's humility that speak. It is the laughter of my brothers and the sparks of friendship of my two sisters. It is the stories shared by my grandfather, and the struggle to live and laugh of my grandmother. Everything that I stand for, everything that I am is my family. Those are the roots of who I am and that is what I portray. It is the feelings and the *sentimiento* of my family that speak through me. I am just a vehicle through which their words are spoken.

To many people, their roots seem to be unimportant. I am glad that all of my classmates learned to value the importance of family, of their roots, and not be ashamed of who they are. As people read this, I would like to encourage them to converse with one another, to speak with their *abuelos*, their *tias o tios*, to be one with their friends and family. The importance of conversation has been a forgotten art, an art we used to practice with pride. Fortunately, I have always conversed with my parents, aunts, and uncles. The stories they tell are most valuable. It is not whether they are making up their stories, or whether they are boring. It is the history they share, and the richness of the experience of sharing that is important.

The thing I learned the most at Edcouch-Elsa High School through my work with the Llano Grande Center was learning from each other. I presented at four conferences in just one semester and learned that many people have many misconceptions. Although the conversations regarding oral histories have made me a better public speaker, what I learned most at conferences is about how differently people think. I believe that an oral history is largely about knowing how to understand each other. That is why people who do not understand each other cannot have a good conversation, or have a good oral history. We should understand the importance of one another and know that each one has a valuable history to tell.

As we are placed in this system where competition and change are introduced, unfortunately the thing we learn most is to assimilate and feel ashamed of what we have. I had always been ashamed of what I was, of what my parents owed, of the food that I ate, and of speaking the language that I speak. I don't feel that way any more. I have changed, and I believe I have

also seen a change in the community in general. I credit much of my transformation to my work with the Llano Grande Center.

José attends Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, and plans to pursue a profession in the medical field.

Cecilia Garza

Cecilia struggled through her first years at E-E High. She spent time in school suspension, was repeatedly reprimanded by school leaders, and was about to "fall through the cracks" when she found the Llano Grande Center. When she became part of the work of the center, she emerged as a leader of the community oral history project. Cecilia turned herself around and graduated from E-E High in good standing.

It wasn't until I began doing oral histories that I learned the immense value that a person's story has—even more so when I had the opportunity to interview my grandfather.

As other students and I interviewed him, it was as if I was getting a history lesson on World War II all over again, only this time I realized that my grandpa played an important role in it. I had no idea that he was part of the Normandy Invasion. I had heard of D-Day, but I never paid as much attention as I did in that interview. My grandfather has wonderful stories to tell but I never bothered to ask until then.

Since that interview, I saw my grandpa's eyes light up. He was no longer scolding me: He was acknowledging the hard work that our class was doing. Now every morning that he takes me to school we talk about the weather, about his cows, and every now and then he'll take a detour to show where the old Mexican school used to be or anything else I should know. I'm glad that now I've learned to appreciate my grandpa's words because I had always taken them for granted.

However, I did not go without punishment for my ignorance. My grandmother is no longer able to speak, so I can't talk to her the way I used to or even the new way that I learned. It's too late for those conversations; all I can do now is read the expressions on her face and reassure her that I love her. If people learn to value others' words and understand the power that the story has to strengthen relationships, perhaps they will not miss out on all the special encounters they could have had, such as with me and my grandmother.

Cecilia Garza attends Columbia University in New York City and looks forward to becoming a public school teacher.

Closing Reflection

Personal and community narratives are central to the work of the Llano Grande Center, just as narratives of transformation have been integral to the history of the North Dakota Study Group. During my first meeting with Vito in 1997, I remember he asked Orlando Castillo, one of my students, "Orlando, how have you changed as a result of your work with Llano Grande?" Orlando responded, "I have found who I am, Vito. That's how I have changed."

In the winter of 2000, Perrone invited students and teachers from the Llano Grande Center to become members of the North Dakota Study Group.

8

The Long-Term Benefits of Getting Splashed *An African-American Progressive Educator's* *Experience with Progressivism*

HOLLEE FREEMAN

Membership in the North Dakota Study Group (NDSG) for me represented membership in an elite group of educational activists. Well-known reformers—such as Vito Perrone, Deborah Meier, Jay Featherstone, Elsa Weber, and Mara Sapon-Shevin—helped shape conversations with new educators, like me, around themes of educational change and social justice at each yearly meeting. As a third-year teacher on a mission to make my teaching meaningful for the mostly Dominican students with whom I worked, I was at home at the NDSG. I soaked up the conversations like a sponge yet always felt slightly outside of the omnipresent legacy that appeared in flesh and bones at the meetings. Still, for me, attending the NDSG as a member of the Muscota New School, a small progressive school in New York City, was emotionally and intellectually liberating. Along with the racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse group of teachers from Muscota, I found ways of translating the experiences of NDSG to my classroom of seven- and eight-year-old students.

In effect, my classroom practice was revitalized yearly. I continually focused on issues of social justice, equity, and access in each curricular area and I had a joy for teaching and learning that has since been unmatched in my professional career. Confronting issues, such as social justice, democracy in education, and progressivism, at the NDSG meetings enabled me to grow into a highly effective teacher with explicit values that I continue to maintain throughout my career. At Muscota, we engaged in child studies, reflective practice, peer review, and other activities that allowed us to see children as they are rather than as what we hope they might be. These practices were reinforced for me at the NDSG and I was grateful.