

U.S. copyright law (title 17 of U.S. code) governs the reproduction and redistribution of copyrighted material.

University of Minnesota Interlibrary Loan

Trans. #:500124



ILL : 60585218



Article Location : TC Wilson Library LB1033.5 .S87 2007

Borrower : VFL

Date : 12/7/2009 11:52:31 AM

\*MNU,EMU,CSL,NOC

AUTHOR : Kassabgy, Nagwa.; Elshimi, Amani.

TITLE : Sustaining excellence in 'communicating across the curriculum' ; cross-institutional experiences and best practices /

IMPRINT : Newcastle ; Cambridge Scholars, 2007

Article : Bendik-Keymer;'Bringing schools to life; cross-class questioning and dialogue'

Volume : Issue : Month : Year : Pages : 86-100

ARIEL : 192.231.124.251

FAX :

Copyright Compliance : CCG

Patron : Keymer, Jeremy

System ID : OCLC 173239370

NOTES :

Default

MaxCost: \$25IFM

Loaned To:

VFL - Noreen Reale Falcone Library

Le Moyne College

InterLibrary Loan

1419 Salt Springs Road

Syracuse NY USA 13214-1399

Loaned From : Documents to U : 15 Andersen Library, Univ. of MN 222 - 21<sup>st</sup> Ave S. Minneapolis, MN 55455

ARIEL REQUEST

5

BRINGING SCHOOLS TO LIFE: CROSS-CLASS  
QUESTIONING AND DIALOGUE  
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

JEREMY DAVID BENDIK-KEYMER

"The most important attitude that can be formed is the desire to go on learning."

—John Dewey, 1938<sup>3</sup>

**Aliveness and school**

Students communicate all the time about school: they swap stories on professors and classes. They do this anywhere they meet, even if the comments are just a line about the week. Faculty members also communicate about school—over lunch, at parties, via e-mail with people far away. There is a great deal of communication about school across the curriculum. Sadly, this communication can serve Machiavellian strategy or tabloid-approximating gossip. But the live environments are the ones where people continue the class's learning outside classroom time, illuminated by what Plato called the *spark* of inquiry (Plato, 1987). In this paper, I want to examine one method that should contribute to making schools alive. This method is to lead classes to question until they want other classes to teach them what they do not currently know.

Imagine classes stepping outside themselves and asking other classes questions, because the questioners' inquiries have led them beyond disciplinary boundaries. The center of this essay is an example from American University of Sharjah. An environmental ethics class wanted to answer a question about the nature of society. It asked a sociology class for answers. After this experience, both classes wanted to learn more. In the first part of the paper, I relay this example. Then, I discuss six lessons it offers. The first five of these explore the relationship between dialogue and autonomy. The sixth opens up a novel sense of "communicating

---

<sup>3</sup> See Dewey (1997, 48).

across the curriculum". In the last part of the paper, I offer two suggestions for implementing cross-class questioning. Overall, I want to show one way a curriculum that is intrinsically communicative can bring a school to life.

### **Environmental Ethics asks Environmental Sociology a question**

I regularly teach a course called *Ethics and the Environment*. The course examines the ethical challenges of the environmental crisis and the ethical dimensions of our life with nature. Because it is a philosophy class, we spend our time examining justifications. We don't spend much time on facts, but assume evident truths. This is the way mainstream philosophy works.<sup>4</sup>

Arguments, however, draw on facts, and our arguments draw on facts about the environment. Because so much concerning the environmental crisis is unknown or contested, we find ourselves making the soundness of arguments hypothetical on the truth of facts. Our arguments remain suspended in the air of still-to-be-determined facts.

Let me illustrate how with the example of an argument about global warming. The argument has four premises and a conclusion.

- (1) If large-scale, anthropogenic<sup>5</sup> climate change will be massively destructive of life on Earth;
- (2) if it will also be a great, undeserved threat to poor people in some parts of the world;
- (3) if our sense of thoughtfulness opposes wanton destruction of life;
- (4) and if our sense of justice opposes undeserved threats to the powerless;
- (5) then we should halt large-scale, anthropogenic climate change.

Premises three and four are moral premises. But premise one is a factual premise, and premise two is both factual and moral.<sup>6</sup> As a result,

---

<sup>4</sup> A small minority of philosophy classes spend time in a laboratory or out in the street doing surveys

<sup>5</sup> i.e., caused by humans

the entire syllogism depends for its soundness on the truth of this fact about climate change: that large-scale, anthropogenic climate change *will* be massively destructive and drown the flood plains of poor farmers who did not substantially contribute to that climate change. This fact, however, is contested, although it is seen as probable to very probable (IPCC, 2001). The argument, accordingly, waits on the fact.

Now in my *Ethics and the Environment* class of Spring 2005, the class found itself circling back to a question related to facts. We thought we had shown, convincingly, that it is irrational for people to pollute the environment at the rate people have been doing for the past half-century, mostly in North America and Europe, and we tailored our ethical position and its justification to that irrationality. However, we couldn't be sure of our position without understanding the irrationality. One of the dangers of ethics is to construct an ideal that does not speak to who we are and so is either unrealizable or imprecise enough to misguide ethical attention. We had to know what could explain the apparent irrationality of people remaining locked in consumption and pollution patterns that make no good sense for them or their descendants. Here, we sought not just a particular fact, but rather a social scientific explanation of a factual pattern, involving an interpretation of people's motivations. This factual pattern was complicated enough and drew on enough sources that we could not easily research the matter ourselves. After all, we didn't know even with what hypotheses to begin.

Suddenly, we were out of our waters. Moreover, we couldn't go on with our genuine inquiry without an answer to our question. Not only did we need to make sure our position wasn't too ideal or imprecise, we also knew that an ethical person seeks solutions. If we are in trouble, knowing what we should do to respond requires knowing why and how we are in trouble.

It just so happened that Professor Meenaz Kassam's *Environmental Sociology* was also being offered that semester – and at the same time as our class. A clearing came in the clouds. Our question was basically sociological. Maybe her class could school us in the subtleties of behavioral irrationality around consumption and pollution?

As it turned out, hers could. What happened was something I wish I could repeat every semester. Our classes met twice to discuss the question we had. In the process, Professor Kassam's class wanted to know what we thought our responsibilities should be regarding pollution and

---

<sup>6</sup> Premise two is factual because it raises the question of whether global warming will threaten many poor populations in the world. It is moral because it raises the issue of *undeserved* threat, which is a matter of justice.

consumption. We ended up swapping viewpoints and addressing each other's questions and blindspots.<sup>7</sup> When we were through, both classes wanted to learn more. Moreover, they specifically asked, in either the teaching evaluations or in conversations after the courses ended, for more cross-class questioning.

That is the story, simple and not too grand. But like many things that go relatively incognito in life, the example carries a great deal of creative possibility, once you think about it.<sup>8</sup> I have illustrated the specific question my class had in some detail so that we keep in mind the complexity with which we work in higher education. This complexity brings our disciplines up to the boundaries of other disciplines and asks us to go over them. Students, once they are caught up in genuine inquiry, want to do so. Moreover, when they do, a great deal of excitement can be generated in the learning process. The question I think we should be asking is why.

**Lesson one:** *Classes have much to learn from each other.*

The collective mind of another class works through a particular disciplinary angle. The process one undergoes in translating a question from one's own discipline into the terms of the other class's discipline and then working the answer back from that discipline into one's own is

---

<sup>7</sup> According to Professor Kassam's class, the main reason we remain stuck in consumption and pollution patterns is that our economic system gives us strong incentives to do so. Our economy is currently mis-regulated and plays to short-term gains, without addressing externalities (e.g., pollution into the global commons). The quarterly report and the lack of international environmental standards make the economy tick in a way that provides strong incentives to wasting now in the global commons and making someone else pay later, even though the payer might be me or my descendents. Competition for high profit margins and investor attention pressures people embroiled in capitalism to race headlong into a crisis that could be avoided by recalibrating market economies to internalize environmental costs.

My class thought we clearly have a responsibility, then, to do something about our current economy. For example, we could "green" our market economies -i.e., make them pay for ecological limitations. The reason for engaging in some such modification is that massive ecological destruction is enabled by the current permissiveness of our economies. The destruction is irrational given what human beings commonly think matters in life - e.g., health, their offspring, nature's beauty, variety or history.

<sup>8</sup> The notion of the relatively incognito -of the heart of meaning overlooked by a status conscious society- is important in Kierkegaard's (1987) philosophy. I believe it is important for higher education as well. There are numerous pressures -prestige-based or economic- that drive educational systems to overlook what really matters to students as learners (see also Rousseau, 1979 and Freire, 2002).

intensely educational. More formative than sharing information is processing a whole new way of seeing.

For example, to explain what an ethical claim is to a sociology class requires translating what an ethical norm is. However, sociology also looks at norms. The normative for a sociologist is what is statistically regular in a kind of human behavior (e.g., buying household cleaners). It is not what is desirable, but what is simply done as a matter of course for most people in that kind (e.g., the purchaser of household cleaners). An ethicist, however, focuses on what is normative in the sense of desirable. For her, what is normative with respect to, e.g., buying household cleaners is to buy non-toxic, biodegradable compounds. That is for the good. But it is not normative in the sociological sense, because at this point in time, few purchasers of household cleaners mind environmental health. Thus, in the process of bringing philosophy to bear on a phenomenon treated also by sociology – consumption patterns- we have to face the sharp division between what is done and what ought to be done, a division in the way we conceive of some of the core concepts of our disciplines. This makes us think about the possibility of ethical behavior and the sources of ongoing, non-ideal action. A student who walks away from a class where all these topics have been discussed has just had her mind opened.

So, the sharing of viewpoints across the curriculum is highly educational, and the education is made relevant by the fact that a shared, interest-driven<sup>9</sup> question anchors the alternation between one viewpoint and another. That is the first thing I learned. But it wasn't all.

We asked *Environmental Sociology* to school us, because we wanted an answer to a complicated, factual question. That is, we wanted a set of explanatory hypotheses or well-regarded explanations of patterns of facts we observe around us every day. As a philosophy class, we simply weren't equipped to handle these matters, but a sociology class was. So not only did we learn a new viewpoint and learn to work out our own through reasons comprehensible to another, but we also learned information.

Lastly, we came closer to real, not make-believe, learning. After all, we learn in a make-believe way when we stop questioning at a curricular boundary. This isn't to say we professors are lacking in seriousness when we stay within our discipline. On the contrary, we are serious just in so far as we don't speculate wildly without training. But nonetheless, our structural condition is pre-tend when it keeps us from following our minds. We hold out –“tend”, from the French *tenir*, to hold- our minds,

---

<sup>9</sup> i.e., driven by a genuine question in which students are interested.

but only in a *preliminary* way, because we don't follow through on the questions when our classroom's disciplinary walls stand in the way. Yet our minds do not work that way—they go across the boundary and want answers to pressing problems or to interests stirring in our minds and lives. To actually satisfy those questions is what learning is all about. Thus *Environmental Sociology* had much to teach us, because we were after a real answer, not a pretend one. Not only did it teach us information, but it also let us complete our inquiry.

To sum up, classes across the curriculum have much to learn from each other. They can learn different viewpoints. They can learn information, and they can help each other complete inquiry—perhaps the most important process to master in an education.

**Lesson two:** *In the example, the classes become more autonomous.*

In the process of having its questions lead it, my class became more autonomous. Many realizations happen when we go across the curriculum to another discipline for help. First and most importantly, we work out how the disciplines are relevant to each other. My class found there is a reason sociology is a discipline unto itself, supplementing and sitting alongside philosophical ethics (just as philosophy supplements and sits next to many other disciplines). When they saw that, the entire *structure* of their education started to make more sense. The structure can have a useful purpose, one that serves needs or desires we—real inquirers—might have. This is the first way in which cross-class questioning brought out the students' autonomy: it made the structure of the disciplinary divisions in the curriculum a reasonable extension of their agency.

Secondly, in the process of following their minds, students learned how to see what a question demands. For instance, it demands asking the discipline of sociology for an answer. A large obstacle to autonomous learning is not knowing how to raise questions and how to find answers. Yet cross-class questioning taught the art of questions on the spot as my class had to explain to Professor Kassam's class why they were visiting, what they didn't understand, and what they wanted to know. The process of working out their question and translating it to their expected answers helped them learn how to handle questioning and the way a question sets up a hypothetical range of answers. For instance, it sets up a range of sociological answers, whereas a different question—e.g., why do humans persist in imperfection?—might set up a range of theological answers.

Finally, in the process of answering my class's question, Professor Kassam's class became authorities who had to work out for themselves their own understanding of their perspective. This freed them, because it



made them teach. We deeply learn something only when we teach or live it. Teaching is an exercise in self-directed learning. As we teach, we relate our own understanding with the knowledge, ignorance, comprehension or miscomprehension of the learners. In the process, we note gaps in our own knowledge and develop an overall feel for a lesson's substantial points. These both integrate the knowledge into our own lives and give us a handle on how to know.

Thus, the cross-class questioning made my students more autonomous. It did so, because cross-class questioning makes the disciplinary structure of the curriculum an extension of the students' purposes. It teaches students how to raise a question and frame a range of answers, and it gives them the chance to teach themselves.

**Lesson three:** *Dialogue and autonomy reinforce each other.*

The heart of cross-class questioning's benefit comes from the interrelation between dialogue and autonomy. There are a number of ways the two interrelate. First, dialogue involves autonomy. When we ask a question out of our confusion or blankness, we take responsibility for our positions. Sometimes, we are even courageous. It's not easy to be vulnerable, but no self-guidance arises without facing our limits. In asking questions, we use our agency to become clear. Bringing things into focus is a form of self-guidance. In this way, dialogue reinforces autonomy.

Moreover, comprehending answers also involves autonomy. When asking others questions, we wait for answers from people with different perspectives than our own. As others answer us, we have to digest what they say and translate it into terms we fully understand. If we have any trouble doing this, we need to ask a question in reverse, and this again frees us as questioning did before. Coming to terms with ignorance is a basic form of self-guidance.

Second, dialogue enables autonomy. When we understand others' answers fully, we become aware of their positions being different from our own. This enables us to understand the learning situation in which we and others are. We learn from a position with a whole set of assumptions that make possible certain kinds of perceptions and misperceptions. Understanding that is an important precondition of being able to learn by ourselves.

In these two ways, then, by involving and enabling autonomy, dialogue reinforces autonomy. At the same time, autonomy reinforces dialogue. The relation goes the other way, too.

Autonomy in education is learning by ourselves.<sup>10</sup> When we learn autonomously, we engage in real inquiry, because the origin of autonomous learning is figuring out what we truly want to know. Moreover, when we want to know something, we have to conceive a question and are likely to ask others what they think. Thus, letting our studies be guided by what we want to know should help us question in an authentic way. "This is what we<sup>11</sup> want to know. Who has the answer? Do we know how to find the answer? How did others who tried to answer similar questions find what they did?"

"You there, you folks over there,<sup>12</sup> you've been studying sociology and consumption patterns. We just don't understand why our society uses chemicals and pollutes the way it does, given what we know about the long-term effects of these chemicals and the pollution. We want to figure out the explanation of that irrational behavior. Can you guide us?"

In other words, letting ourselves inquire into what we want to know leads us, through the structure of questioning, to look for and listen to answers. Autonomy reinforces dialogue, just as dialogue reinforced autonomy (see also Freire, 2002). This is actually one of the oldest points in the philosophy of education.<sup>13</sup>

**Lesson four:** *The dialogue shows us how the curriculum can evolve and how to work autonomy into the curriculum.*

Cross-class questioning doesn't work only on the micro-level, where we increase student autonomy. It also works on the macro-level, where we shape a curriculum responding to student needs and desires. It helps everyone involved with the curriculum shape one where people learn how to learn by themselves. How does cross-class questioning do this?

First, when we see student curiosity, we discover where education works for students. Over time, we can see the patterns of questioning they make. These patterns, in turn, show us *curricular paths* –for instance, between ethics and sociology. These curricular paths are results of

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps *with others*, but out of our own impetus and using our own abilities.

<sup>11</sup> i.e., *Ethics and the Environment*, Spring 2005.

<sup>12</sup> i.e., *Environmental Sociology*, Spring 2005.

<sup>13</sup> It can be found in Plato's earliest illustrations of the path academics should take: his dialogues, in which the autonomous Socrates spurred people to think for themselves by questioning them. Even solitary inquiry has a dialogical form: the objects of one's experiments substitute for interlocutors in a human-human dialogue. Gadamer implies this point in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer, 1975, 333-341). Thought is intrinsically dialogical, and dialogue is intrinsically thoughtful (see also Edwards, Forman & Gandini, 1998)

dialogue across the curriculum from one discipline to another. They suggest tomorrow's working groups, team-taught classes, committees, and -when developed into entire lines of research that break new ground over generations- even disciplines themselves. At the very least, curricular paths attune a syllabus to student questions and reveal future topics.

Second, not only does cross-class questioning show us how our curriculum can evolve, it creates room at the heart of the curriculum to open the curriculum as a whole to the authentic, collaborative inquiry. Once a curriculum is designed to leave room for cross-class questioning, not only do students receive a strong message that their own questions guide the process of learning, but schools place a kind of laboratory for curricular development in the heart of each class. This builds autonomy into the curriculum by molding the curriculum around the self-guided learning of students interacting with teachers who provoke them to question. The curriculum signals and supports an important message: our school is committed to your questions.

*Lesson five: Overall, the example shows a way to bring schools to life.*

All in all, cross-class questioning has important implications for a curriculum, because it brings out student autonomy through dialogue. Amidst the many forms of communication in a school, dialogue is among the most authentic, because it carries and opens up the purpose of schools. Gossip, strategizing about school -these are not alive forms of discourse outside of class. They are what Heidegger (1996, 130-168) understood as modes of inauthentic discourse -forms of entanglement- because they close off the meaning of school. School is to be a place where people learn how to discover truth.<sup>14</sup>

When students feel a curriculum is an extension of their learning process, they are likely to come alive. They are at school all day -it is their purpose in life at the point where they are. To find that purpose really does free you is empowering and exciting. It is also a relief. Often, the abstract threat of the world after graduation brings out so much anxiety around school.<sup>15</sup> To see that you can go to school to become clearer about what you want and need to know, and to realize that the system you are in is not finalized but has whole areas open to discovery and change, these are wonderful ways to view your school. The purpose of school is alive in them, and the purpose is good for you. When students see their studies leading to authentic inquiry, not simply to tests and a stamped piece of

<sup>14</sup> Learning how to discover truth is only one purpose of school, yet is a main one.

<sup>15</sup> The threat is exerted through the market selection of graduates, accrediting curricula and - in many families - around grades.

paper at the end, they are likely to organize at least some of their extra-curricular discussions around such inquiry. After all, that is a way of participating in what, during this period of their lives, is their main daily activity and has proven to be developmental.<sup>16</sup>

I am not claiming strategy or gossip will stop simply because authentic inquiry is promoted. However, when students from two classes that have learned from each other start to talk casually, the likelihood of their touching on the experience of their cross-class questioning is high – especially if the overall learning culture of the school, backed by the administration, promotes inquiry. Moreover, when students start to see themselves as authorities in their own right, one incentive to strategizing their way around a curriculum to obtain status or a diploma is dissolved. What is the point? The way forward, the thing that is good for you, is to learn.

**Lesson six:** *Cross-class questioning is an important form of communicating across the curriculum.*

The previous lessons give five reasons why cross-class questioning deserves to be a part of studies aimed at improving communicating across the curriculum. Yet we can only see why when we understand how the form of a curriculum can be intrinsically communicative. Let me explain.

“Communicating across the curriculum” – a deepening of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement – refers to ensuring that people learn how to communicate – orally, visually, and in writing – throughout different parts of the curriculum; from, e.g., science to business to writing classes. When we discussed “communicating across the curriculum” at this conference, we spoke of putting writing instruction, public speaking experience and many other kinds of expressive abilities into a school-wide plan of action. We wanted to understand how developing our ability to communicate can be emphasized in any part of the curriculum and how all these different parts of study can be made into a whole learning-culture.

Cross-class questioning promotes communicating across the curriculum in this mainstream sense. After all, cross-class questioning involves all the oral skills involved in peer teaching. Moreover, it sensitizes students to vocabularies and assumptions, key elements of self-consciousness in word choice and argument.

Yet I was not emphasizing communicating across the curriculum in the mainstream sense when I chose my topic. There is a novel way of hearing

---

<sup>16</sup> On our drive to perfect ourselves and our world around what we find is good for us, see Rousseau (1979)

the expression. We might think not only about the content of the curriculum, but also about its form. In other words, we might add to our concentration on writing instruction, public speaking, story-telling, or visual communication by focusing on how the curriculum moves along from course of study to course of study, on what "across the curriculum" means.

Specifically, we could look at what it is for a curriculum to be intrinsically communicative. Such a curriculum would be born from communication. It would require communication to shape a path of study—a "curriculum"<sup>17</sup>—at all. Communication would open that path. Communication across the curriculum—from one discipline to another—would generate curriculum.

This is what I showed cross-class questioning doing. Cross-class questioning doesn't just weave in communication to the program. It weaves the program from communication.

In this way, attending to an alternative meaning of "across the curriculum", cross-class questioning brings out how communication across the curriculum can be concerned with the link between communication and the form of the curriculum. Communication across the curriculum can be intrinsic to the *forming* of the curriculum. We'd seem to have an important advance in communicating across the curriculum studies when curricular development rests in the communicative practice of students.<sup>18</sup>

Students forming curriculum as they go are central to modern philosophy of education, at least since Rousseau (1979, originally 1762) and certainly since Dewey (1997, originally 1938). The most modern<sup>19</sup> school systems in the world make curriculum the outcome of a dialogue between students, teachers, families, and the state, with the students at the

---

<sup>17</sup> From the Latin for "running"; i.e., running a course. "Curriculum vitae" — the way one's life has run its course; one's path.

<sup>18</sup> In the question and answer period after his keynote address (Anson, 2005), Chris Anson said that his view of the curriculum did not consider how the form of the curriculum can change with student dialogue. He said he'd be interested in seeing how a curriculum evolving with student interests can contribute to communicating across the curriculum. This paper is a partial response to his request.

<sup>19</sup> I assume the central idea of modernity is freedom, not, e.g., technocratic efficiency. There is an old tradition on this point, which spans the entire history of post-Kantian philosophy up to Heidegger and Sartre. Hence, school systems that call themselves "modern" because they have computers and other forms of technology are actually indeterminate. If their technology is not at the service of freeing students to become autonomous, they are not truly modern.

center (Edwards, Forman, & Gandini, 1998; Bendik-Keymer, 2005).<sup>20</sup> Such a curricular form is intrinsically communicative. When "communicating across the curriculum" is an expression also about the basic moves of the curriculum, its potential opens up.

### Implementing cross-class questioning

How do we implement cross-class questioning in a more or less programmed curriculum? Curricula made out of pure student-teacher autonomy –so called "emergent curricula" (Edwards, Forman, & Gandini, 1998) - are impractical, given existing relations between universities, employers of graduates, families, accrediting agencies, and the state. The market drives large-scale measures of the capability of job candidates so that employers can pick and choose from the sea of recent college graduates searching for work. Families, in turn, demand that universities provide success for their children. Universities have to know what comes out of their classrooms. Accrediting agencies step in, ensuring quality control. They demand plans showing what graduates will learn and how. States also have standards that may supplement accrediting demands –for instance, they may require that schools teach certain contents. The effect of all these pressures is to program curricula in advance. There doesn't seem to be much room for the spontaneity of cross-class questioning.

Yet for all the reasons mentioned in part II of this paper, we should find a way. Moreover, there are additional reasons to promote cross-class questioning. First, autonomy demands responsibility, and a goal of education is to form responsible adults (Rousseau, 1979; Dewey, 1997). Second, autonomy optimizes the chances of producing original, thoughtful, life-long learners who are unafraid to *think* when thinking is needed and existing modes of thought do not work (Rousseau 1979, Dewey 1997). Third, student autonomy and dialogue provoke teachers to be learners (Freire, 2002; Edwards, Forman, & Gandini 1998). Fourth, dialogue creates the conditions for a strong sense of community at school (Edwards, Forman, & Gandini, 1998; Bendik-Keymer, 2005). Finally, the flexibility and creativity of learning on the spot are sought in capitalism

<sup>20</sup> See also the forthcoming book (currently untitled, under contract with Teachers College Press) from Dan Scheinfeld on the Chicago Commons pre-schools and infant-toddler care centers. These schools in low-income communities around Chicago were funded by Head Start and adapt ideas from Reggio Emilia, Italy's municipal child-care centers. Scheinfeld's book presents up to date material on the idea of autonomy in the curriculum. I was a research assistant on this project from 1999-2002 at the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development.

today (Sennett, 1998), and classical liberalism demands individuality, which only autonomy can provide (Mill, 1975, chapter III).

If then, our curriculum is programed and yet there are at least twelve reasons to make room for cross-class questioning, we should look for innovations that work within our systems. I will propose two.

First, we can slate in a scheduled time during each semester where cross-class questioning occurs. This can be a week, or two weeks separated out at different points of the semester (e.g., middle and end). At the performance review level, use of these scheduled times can be rewarded, counting on merit and retention reviews as an innovative teaching technique encouraged by the school. Over time, then, the school will acquire the habit of cross-class questioning periods. These periods, however, will not detract from the overall cogency of an accredited course. On the contrary, a well-organized, innovative method should stand out with accrediting agencies from, at least, North American or North-American inspired systems.<sup>21</sup>

Second, in order to facilitate cross-class questioning during scheduled times, we can develop a *questions board* (in the student center and on-line), where classes post the questions they want answered in the weeks leading up to the cross-class questioning period. This board will clearly list all the classes being offered in a given semester, indexed multiply by topic and discipline. A teaching excellence center mentor or assigned student assistants can be in charge of helping those who post questions find a class that can answer them. The school can observe, too, how the conversations proceed, so that the board does not just coordinate the initial meeting, but also documents the learning conversation.<sup>22</sup> The documentation, in turn, will let all members of the school benefit from the curricular ideas opened up by cross-class questioning.

I personally feel that the most desirable way to install cross-class questioning is to reward it on merit and retention reviews, create a coordination device like a question board, and let people work out the timings of the dialogues themselves on an *ad hoc* basis as the semester proceeds. The reason why this is likely to work best is that it would appear to safeguard the spontaneity of questioning that is a hallmark of inquiry.

---

<sup>21</sup> I am not implying that such systems are the best in the world. Rather, I am imagining a plausible accrediting situation, given existing international education today and with an English speaking audience in mind. I do not know how cross-class questioning would be looked on by British boards.

<sup>22</sup> On the educational importance of documenting the progress of inquiry; see Edwards, Forman, & Gandini (1998).

As a result, it would seem less likely to make cross-class questioning go dead, always a risk in a programed setting. Keeping timing voluntary places us on the side of autonomy.

### References

- Anson, C. (2005). Warp and weft: reflections on the art of communication weaving. *Toward sustainable excellence: communicating across the curriculum*. Conference Presentation, the American University of Cairo, Nov. 11, 2005.
- Bendik-Keymer, J. (2005). School-family relationships: an argument for the parallel process model. In Arab Urban Development Institute (Eds.), *Urban children and youth in the MENA region: educational priorities* (pp. 9-22). Dubai: Arab Urban Development Institute/World Bank/Dubai Municipality.
- Dewey, J. (1997). *Experience & education*. New York: Touchstone Books. (Original work published 1938)
- Edwards, C., Forman, G., & Gandini, L. (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education*. Greenwich, CT: Ablex Publishing.
- Freire, P. (2002). *The pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. Bergman Ramos, Trans.). New York: Continuum Books. (Original work published 1970)
- Gadamer, H.G. (1975). *Truth and method* (G. Barden and J. Cumming, Trans.). New York: Crossroad Publishing Company. (Original work published 1960)
- Heidegger, M. (1996). *Being and time* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). New York: SUNY Press, 1996. (Original work published 1927)
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), working group II (2001). Summary for policymakers – climate change 2001: impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability. Geneva: IPCC sixth session.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1987). *Either/or*, v. II (H. and E. Hong, Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mill, J.S. (1975). *On liberty*. New York: Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1859)
- Plato (1987). The seventh letter (L.A. Post, Trans.). In E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Eds.), *Collected Dialogues*, the Bollington Series LXXI. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Rousseau, J J (1979) *Émile or on education* (A Bloom, Trans ) New York Basic Books (Original work published 1762)



Sennett, R. (1998). *The corrosion of character: the personal consequences of work in the new capitalism*. New York: Norton & Norton.

---