

# ANTHROPOLOGY & EDUCATION QUARTERLY

---

## Articles

Navajo Mothers and Daughters: Schools, Jobs, and the Family  
*Donna Deyhle and Frank Margonis*

Constructing and Staffing the Cultural Bridge: The School as Change Agent in Rural Appalachia  
*Alan DeYoung*

"Two Worlds Together": Contradiction and Curriculum in First Nations Adult Science Education  
*Celia Haig-Brown*

## Reflections from the Field

## Reflections from the Field

Doing Eve's Work: Women Principals Write about Their Practice

JOLLEY CHRISTMAN  
*Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania*

JOANRUTH HIRSHMAN  
*Lingelbach Elementary School, Philadelphia*

ARLENE HOLTZ  
*Wilson Middle School, Philadelphia*

HOLLY PERRY  
*Academy for the Middle Years, Northwest, Philadelphia*

RITA SPELKOMAN  
*Retired, Philadelphia School System*

MOLLIE WILLIAMS  
*Dission Elementary School, Philadelphia*

In January 1991, our journal group of five Philadelphia elementary- and middle-school principals and an educational ethnographer began to meet twice a month at one of our homes to share dinner, conversation, and journal entries about our professional practice. We did not know then that our writing group would become essential to our lives and our professional practice or that we would come to see this kind of work as educational reform.

"The group," as we have come to call ourselves, grew out of the Writing Leadership Institute, a four-day seminar sponsored by the Philadelphia Writing Project for Philadelphia School District administrators. We begin our meetings with dinner, where we catch one another up on our lives and share what we have heard about goings-on in the large urban district in which we work. After dinner, we read from our journals. We discuss each entry—contributing related experiences, asking questions, debating. We also respond to the writing itself, each of us connecting to the voice in the journal. One of us serves as recorder during the journal discussion and enters notes into a notebook of our meetings. At times, we have focused our talk and/or writing on an article or book; we have also experimented with more structured kinds of talk like the reflective conversations and descriptive reviews that Pat Carini has developed in her work at the Prospect School (see Carini 1974). But such occasions are infrequent.

Reproduced by permission of the American Anthropological Association from ANTHROPOLOGY & EDUCATION QUARTERLY 26:2, June 1995. Not for sale or further reproduction.

We had been meeting about twice a month for a little over a year when we presented this article as a paper at the 1992 Ethnography in Education Research Forum, at the University of Pennsylvania. In this article, we share some of our journal entries and reflections on that writing; finally, Jolley discusses the connections between our work and that of educational ethnographers.

*Holly Perry is the principal of Academy for the Middle Years, Northwest, a desegregation magnet program and an early member of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Holly literally dreamed and wrote our group into being.*

In preparing my contribution to this article, I thought back to the beginning—before “the group” was formed—to my first journal entry at the Writing Leadership Institute. We were assigned randomly to journal groups and given time to write. The power of writing and sharing in a small group overwhelmed me: People whom I thought I knew I came to know in new ways in those brief days of the institute. I wanted to find a way to continue. “The group” was formed as a result of a Philadelphia Professional Growth Partnership grant.

I had no idea the importance this group would take on for me when I wrote the grant. Our conversations, written and spoken, help me make sense below the surface of the job called principal. In the beginning, our group wrote in parallel fashion, each of us writing essentially alone, then reading our entries, and then responding with our separate understandings about the writer’s topic. During those early meetings, it was rare that one of us would challenge another’s meaning. Since then we have gone deeper, bringing more of who we are to the group as we struggle together to keep essential balances in our personal and professional lives. We have begun to write in response to one another and to explore each other’s salient themes as we think about our own work. An excerpt from my November 11, 1991, journal entry:

Tonight I feel like I understand what Rita has been talking about when she has raised concerns and resisted structuring our group too forcefully. I find myself scrambling to get a handle on something for the ethnography forum. Jolley says we will be focusing on each other’s writings in order to help hone them into papers appropriate for conference participation. I don’t know a procedure for this task. Do I do an analysis of what I have written here and there, over the past year? Should I go back and look at what I’ve written to teachers in their lesson journals? I’ll just select one of my pieces about “time” in school.

Later in that same journal entry, I discussed how each of us approach our journals in a different way, noting that my writing often consists of reflections on school life. I enjoy letting the words run, as in the selection below.

I think life passes so quickly, particularly in middle school, that it is so hard to hold on to the fact that the children I work with today, in six years will be young adults. Somehow, when these children graduate from eighth grade, they pass, in my mind, to a realm where chronological time has scant meaning. I don’t really imagine them as grappling with life beyond the boundaries of the years they are with me. It is, therefore, astonishing to hear they are sophomores, juniors, graduates of Penn State, Ursinus, Tuskegee. They are cost analysts with pharmaceutical companies! Sometimes, when they come back to visit, there is only a faint trace of the chubby, soft edge of early adolescence.

I am thinking about time and time cycles in schools. A partial list:

periods	seconds	holidays
mornings	years	Fridays
afternoons	units	Mondays
days	seasons	paydays
weeks	full moons	off paydays
months	requisitions	open enrollment
semesters	curriculum	elections
quarters	heating	book fairs
trimesters	distribution	greeting dates
passing	minutes	graduation

I wonder if certain feelings and moods go with certain cycles. I’ve looked at old folders of meeting notes and found the same concerns raised annually. What a rambling piece of writing!

The group liked this entry. We all laughed as I read my list. “It’s almost a poem,” someone said. Rita asked, “Didn’t you know the best time of the week is Friday night, and the best day of the year is the night of the last day of the school year, before summer begins. It’s the best Friday night ever—even if it’s Tuesday!”

*Mollie Williams is the principal of the Disston School, a K–8 school in the northeastern section of Philadelphia. Mollie’s journals are filled with themes familiar to any female principal, but the themes particularly resonate for women principals in the early years of their administrative careers.*

In thinking about the ethnography forum and what my part would be in it, I listed some themes that I felt recurred in my writing:

- the parent-child relationship;
- the need to reserve time for my own interests and the inability to reserve that time;
- role playing—which side (male/hard; female/soft) to show; to whom, and when;
- doing what you *have* to do;
- trust.

As I thought about the list, I saw that each theme contains a “wall” that I construct to protect my soft underside. These walls are the boundaries that protect me from constant and intolerable hurt.

An excerpt from my March 4, 1991, journal entry:

Went to work, planned my morning, nothing went right. All my plans were shot. I can't find time for me!!

An excerpt from my February 11, 1991, journal entry:

Breadwinner versus mother: how do we reconcile these two opposing forces? Kia has decided to display the same attitude that I suspend students for. Do I suspend her from the house? From my life? Do I roll with it, remain calm, reinforce positive behaviors when I am so angry I don't want to talk to her? Is it really what the principal as an ethnographer should deal with? How do you keep personal and professional lives in sync?

An excerpt from my March 18, 1991, journal entry:

Once again time has run out . . . Each day I'm further away from achieving my self set goals. I plan, I organize, and I'm still behind.

What I'm realizing is that my inaction in problem areas has contributed to my being behind and not having enough time for myself. A lot of my time is spent feeling angry because something is bothering me. That keeps my mind in a state of tension that keeps me from relaxing and involving myself in more pleasurable activities.

At home, I told Kia that she could not go to the movie. Sounds like no big deal but my reasons had to do with her not completing some chores. I didn't even allow her to do them quickly, so that she could go, because I realized that even that was a source of anger for me. I was very calm when I reminded her that our relationship was built on give and take. Thus far, she had been taking and I was willing to give if she carried her own weight. She was grumpy as could be that night, but I felt fine. I was relaxed, and that is one way of having time for me.

At work, one person in particular was not doing her job. I had even reminded her that she was not meeting her responsibilities. She smiled and said she knew and would do better. She didn't, I didn't act further, but the anger was eating away at me. It wasn't until I acted that I began to feel relief. Once that burden was off my shoulders, I could relax and then expend less energy and get the same work done. Even the paperwork, as a result of my action, is not a threat to my relaxed state of mind.

So, for me, having time for myself doesn't always mean setting aside 3-4 p.m. on Tuesday. Having time for myself means doing what I have to do to ensure that my mind is not in a prolonged state of tension. When I am relaxed, I can better handle my responsibilities and can better prioritize what needs to be done, so that I feel less pressure.

I believe that I can do just about anything I set my mind to do. But there is a price for that confidence. It can mean alienation from others when I have to make decisions for the common good and not go along with the self-interests of the people involved. There are the nagging and worrisome afterthoughts that come when I wonder if I have made the right decision and then must realize that I am human and not everything.

I do will be perfect or correct. As I reviewed my journals, I saw the same questions appearing in different forms.

- Was the decision the right one?
- Did I hurt or offend someone in making that decision?
- Can I live with the feelings of hostility that those affected will have toward me?

- Was I trying to lord it over anyone that I am "the boss"?
- Does my role as "the boss" affect my personal relationships?
- Why does it seem that "friendships" are so hard, or perhaps impossible, in the workplace?

My life is a continuum. The edges between the job and home are blurred. I cannot "suspend" the child from my life, but I can step back and briefly distance myself from the horrors of an adolescent daughter. The wall goes up so that I can protect myself, and the constant battle is to keep the wall from staying up too long. I am coming to realize that the struggle is to not so distance myself and depersonalize my connections that I just do not care. I have always felt that you must give in any relationship and take the chance of being hurt. If you fail to give, you never know what the relationship might be. Now I am scared. I want to care, but I do not like being hurt. I am building walls, tearing them down, struggling not to rebuild them. What a contradiction!

I also find that I need a support system that understands what the major part of my day is like. This is where the journal group comes in. An excerpt from my January 31, 1992, journal entry:

Today I have been thinking again about something that was said at our last meeting. I had reacted very strongly to a selection that I felt should not be read at the forum. As I examined my feelings, I saw that I have become protective of "the group" and our feelings. I am afraid that we might expose too much, that a group member might be hurt.

We've often talked about the trust level in the group and the fact that we feel free to share our thoughts honestly. Every thought is not for every audience. In this often-crazy world, there has to be a safe place to reveal the pieces of our real selves that are reflected in our actions in the work world. Friends tire of hearing our stories because they really don't live the kind of work days that we do, and are unable to offer the support that is needed. "The group," formed around a common occupation, is essential to helping me keep sane in a very demanding and lonely job.

*Arlene B. Holtz is the principal of Wilson Middle School, located in the northeastern section of Philadelphia, a predominantly white community whose schools are desegregated by busing in African American students. Arlene is also an educational ethnographer, having completed her doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania, and a gifted storyteller.*

The most significant journal entry that I wrote during our first year as a group told the story of Takia Richards, a seventh-grader whom I had arrested for bringing a knife to school. The journal entry made explicit

to me some important changes that I had experienced in my conceptualization of the principalship.

Excerpts from a 1991 journal:

Takia Richards entered my office on Thursday afternoon shouting a stream of threats and profanity at Mr. O'Connor, the red-faced assistant who threw her into a chair. He told her, "Shut up!", which had no effect on her, and he handed me a six-inch florentined brass object.

"It's a butterfly knife," he told me. "Open it up."

Gingerly I released the catch and pulled back on the brass casing. A six-inch blade, sharpened on both sides, emerged.

"She was carrying it open beside her thigh in the yard," he said.

He explained that once she realized that he had seen her with it she threw it into her girlfriend's pocketbook. He produced a small black shoulder bag, with the thin strap broken. He explained that her girlfriend would not release the bag, "so I ripped it off her shoulder."

Throughout this explanation Takia continued to shout a stream of invectives at everyone until I told her, "Shut up!"

My tone and the attitude of my body communicated that this was nonnegotiable, and she snapped back into the chair, folded her arms, and mercifully stopped talking.

At this point, Kneesha, the girl who owned the pocketbook, entered my office crying. Her house leader had her arm around her and explained that she was innocent. Kneesha and O'Connor immediately began shouting at each other over the details of what occurred. At this point I felt no particular care or concern for either of the girls.

As I write this now, I wonder what I was thinking as it all unfolded. I'm a principal, an educator. This was police work. I have no stomach for it. For crying out loud, my strengths were supposedly language arts, curriculum, and middle-school organization. This was as far from all that as I could get. I asked the house leader to sit with Kneesha to calm her down. "She was innocent," the teacher said. "She's an honor roll student. She's very upset."

Now honor roll carried some weight with me, and those words caught my attention. I really looked at Kneesha.

I saw a frightened child, not a criminal. I realized she was afraid of me. Her fate lay in my hands. I looked at her. I really looked at her. Four feet, five inches, dark-skinned, well-dressed, frightened. A child. At first I missed the child I reached out and touched her shoulder. "Trust me, Kneesha. I'll protect you. Had I made a promise I couldn't keep?" I wondered. I felt like crying. That's the wrong emotion, I thought. I shut it off.

Once again, I asked Takia to tell me what happened. She started with a lie, stating she had found the knife in the schoolyard.

"That's a lie," I flatly stated.

"Don't you be callin' me no liar," she shouted at me.

"Everyone finds the weapon," I said. "That's the story they all tell. And it's a lie."

"I ain't no liar!" she snapped.

All this time I had been standing. Now I sat across from her and briefly held my head in my hands. I spoke softly. "Takia, we're about to begin the rest of your life. You just did something very bad, very wrong. What matters now is what you do from here on. You will be arrested—" She started to talk, but my raised hand silenced her. "You will be arrested. You will be handcuffed and taken out of here. But your life will go on."

"At some point there may be a hearing. I'll be called. The judge will ask me, 'How did she behave? Did she tell the truth?' Let's start over with the truth." Takia looked down and began to cry. "I want to ask you something first, she said."

"Okay."

"Will you don't let anything happen to Kneesha? She didn't have nothin' to do with this. I put it in her pocketbook. She maybe didn't even know what it was."

I shook my head yes.

"Say it," she shouted. "Promise."

"I promise, Takia. Nothing will happen to Kneesha." I felt worried by my promise. I said, "The police may question her. I can't stop that, but she won't be arrested."

Takia shook her head. I knew she didn't trust me. Why should she? Neither of us trusted the other, but at least she spoke up for her friend. This impressed me. Takia began, "I brought the knife . . ."

Despite my authoritarian demeanor with this child, I managed to see something in her character that I value: she was loyal to her friend. What is more, for reasons unknown to me, she was willing to trust me, with her trust based on my word, my promise.

Takia tells me the "truth." She was threatened by girls from another school on the way home and brought the knife for protection. I had been very clear with my students about the rules prohibiting weapons in school, and so I dialed 911 to summon the police. I also called Takia's mother. There was no answer. I winced. I wished she could at least have her mother to meet her in the police station. I also called Kneesha's mother and asked her to come to school.

I had concerns about the way the police would handle this matter. The school was located in a white neighborhood, and I was dealing with two black girls. The new police captain told me that "all our trouble started when they began busing in those kids." I had heard white police officers make racist comments. And I had never seen an African American police officer in the district surrounding our school.

Two white officers arrived in my office. Neither made eye contact with me.

"So what do you want?" the cop asked. "I guess we'll take both girls."

"No," I said. "Not both. Just one."

He looked at me. "Look, we'll let J.A.D. [Juvenile Aid Division] sort it out."

"No," I said. "You either take one, or no one."

"You tryin' to tell me my business?"

"No," I said. "I'm the principal, and I'm reporting that we confiscated a knife from this student." I pointed to Takia. "She threw it into this girl's pocketbook. She had nothing to do with it." I sat beside Kneesha and put my arm around her tightly. "You can't take her. If you do, I'll withdraw everything."

"All right. All right," the cop said. "Stand up," he said to Takia, "and put your hands behind you." As he snapped the handcuffs on her, she began to cry.

"I'm not hurting you," he said meanly. "This would hurt." He did something I couldn't see which made Takia arch her back. "I'll leave 'em loose, but don't fight me."

Takia spoke. "I'm scared, Dr. Holtz. I'm scared. You didn't tell me it would be like this."

Something inside me broke, some silenced emotion I had held in check. Finally, I saw Takia as a child who was frightened and somehow linked to me as her only support in a terrifying world.

"Frisk her," the cop told me.

"What?" I said.

"Frisk her!"

"I don't frisk my own student."

"Either you do or I will." He walked toward us.

"Please do it, Dr. Holtz. Please you do it." Now she cried, uncontrollable tears. "Please do it. I don't want him to touch me."

I looked at her face. I didn't know what to do. Now she led me.

"Unzip my jacket," she told me. "Inside there's a pocket with a pen."

"Take the pen," the cop said.

"That's all I have."

"Frisk her!"

"Please do it."

I felt all her pockets. Up her legs. Her sides. For those few moments I felt almost locked in an embrace before some perilous journey.

"I'm scared," she told me.

"I know," I said.

He yanked the cuffs and led her out. "Watch your attitude," I whispered.

When it was over, I felt exhausted. I left the office and started walking through the school. I returned to find Kneesha and her mother there.

"I'm glad you're here," I told her. Before I could speak further she interrupted me.

"What do you plan to do about this pocketbook?"

I looked at it. "I think it can be easily repaired," I said. "Mr. O'Connor's first concern was to get the knife out of harm's way."

"He could have asked politely."

"Well, I think he did ask her, but she clutched the bag and wouldn't give it to him."

"Then he could have gotten someone else to speak to her."

"There was an open knife in the pocketbook," I said. "He secured it for safety concerns."

"You can tell my lawyer that."

"What?"

"Oh, I intend to sue you."

"Me, what for?"

"Did you reprimand Mr. O'Connor?"

"Reprimand him? No. Mr. O'Connor, I think, did his best. It was an unfortunate—"

"Oh, I'm sick of listening to you. Tell it to my lawyer. You have no appreciation for our children's feelings."

I felt slapped across the face. What was this whole day about?

"Tell your lawyer to call our lawyer," I said. "I don't talk to lawyers."

I resumed my walk around the school, but no longer saw anything, except anger and frustration. Ironically, my thoughts turned to Takia. I realized I felt worried about her.

After hearing me read this journal entry, Mollie reread the end where Kneesha's mother tells me, "You have no appreciation for our children's feelings." Mollie said, "This is about race. I see race issues throughout this piece." Without waiting to hear a word of what happened, Kneesha's mother passes judgment on my actions because I am white and the children are black. Her reaction is the worst part of the day for me.

The relationship between Takia and me shifts in the journal entry. In the beginning I am clearly the adult, the authority figure. Yet, an interesting shift occurs when the police officer asks me to frisk her. She leads me. She becomes the adult, and I become the child.

This journal entry begins on a level of mistrust and even scorn between Takia and me. I resent her potential for violence which jeopardizes the other children in the school. She begins to redeem herself when she speaks up for Kneesha. I promise her that nothing will happen to Kneesha if she tells the truth. I also lead her to believe that I want to help her get through this ordeal in a manner that will enable her to maintain some sort of self dignity. What she did was wrong, but not beyond redemption. The attitude and behavior of the police leave me feeling that I betrayed her. They treat her with contempt and meanness. I felt upset by this because in betraying her I betray my own principles.

It was only in our journal group that I began to feel forgiveness for how I handled the matter. Holly said, "Arlene is trying to choose in the moment what is best for the children and, all in all, doing a good job, but still feeling so bad, so bitter, somehow off the mark. It reminds me of situational ethics. The importance of understanding the context, the situation, in order to understand the decisions we make." It is only in our group that I find acceptance and safety in which I can explore events such as those I described.

I entered the principalship with the idea that what mattered most was what happened inside classrooms. I saw the problems associated with "discipline" as roadblocks that I had to negotiate in order to get on with the important work such as improving instruction. The events in this journal entry forced me to reconsider this attitude. By the end of the

journal entry. Takia really matters to me. I entered the principalship with the mistaken notion that I could delegate this kind of work to someone else. I cannot. I should not. What happens to Takia is as important as what happens to the honor student. Each child matters.

*At the time of these journal entries, Joannruth Hirschman was principal at the Lingelbach Elementary School, and Rita Spelkoman was principal at Cook-Wisschickon Elementary School for 18 years before her recent retirement. Under Joannruth's leadership, Lingelbach gained national recognition for the success that she and her staff had in reinventing how Chapter 1 services might really support children. Rita is our matriarch; her life, her work, and her writing have shown us much about going the distance.*

We present selections from our journals in point/counterpoint fashion. This rendering begins to capture how we respond to one another over time—how listening and responding to one another not only deepens our friendship, but also more closely connects each of us to our own experience and, as Holly has said, takes us deeper beneath the surface of this job called principal.

An excerpt from Rita's January 1991 journal:

I keep thinking about MaryAnn. She called last Thursday. Being MaryAnn, and being 18, she found a way to "overdramatize" the fact that her father is dying of cancer. We talked for a while. I kept thinking, why did she have to call now? I must get to the nursing home to see my mother. I won't be there for the next two days because of professional commitments. MaryAnn kept describing her dad.

Images swirled in my head. Little MaryAnn in her wheelchair. Pale, sad, worn, forlorn Mrs. A, who is only 40 years old and looks so used. Wonderful, warm, gruff, caring, frightened of the principal, Mr. A. First-grade MaryAnn—so cute, such a tiny wheelchair. Years pass—beseeching, urging, arguing. Please, MaryAnn needs to live in her real world, to experience life with a serious handicap, to adjust, to cope, to move on. We can't continue to pretend. There is anger, there is forgiveness. Now, death approaches.

Echoes of confidences:

"I hate my father."

"Her mother won't tell you, but she's making our life together hell. . . . I can't take much more."

"MaryAnn is my only child," says she. "He has children from his first marriage. . . . MaryAnn is my only child." Unspoken: MaryAnn is my cerebral palsied, wheelchair-bound only child. We were supposed to make her walk. Mrs. A. *willed her to walk.* MaryAnn has never walked.

MaryAnn called on Monday. "Miss Spelkoman, I have something to tell you. My father died on Saturday. I did what you suggested. . . . I took advantage of what I knew and said good-bye. I told him how much I love him, that I forgive him. He looked right at me and smiled. He hasn't done that in weeks. He knew. . . . Thank you. I feel good.

From Joannruth's December 1991 journal:

Christman et al.

*Doing Eve's Work*

223

Differences between male and female administrators. . . . are they significant? What is their genesis?

Today, I met Anna, Rita's mother. Rita and I walked into the day room of the nursing home to greet Anna, who was eating dinner in a geriatric wheelchair. I watched Anna being fed thickened strained food by a nursing assistant, and carressed her mother's shoulder down onto her arm, and I was transported back in time.

I looked at Anna and saw my mother-in-law, my father-in-law, my mother, my father, and my grandmother, in the order in which they were in nursing homes at sad ends to busy, productive lives. I watched and again lived through the anguish of attempts to have a mother speak, react, demonstrate emotion, show recognition—care.

Rita wheeled her mother in my direction giving instructions as to a child to say, "Good night." Anna stated, "Ich dankt dir zair far kimming. I thank you very much for coming!" With her next breath, she informed Rita that she wanted to see her own mother. How well I remember how I felt when each aging member of my own family expressed the same wish. What a fear that the wish to see one's mother was an omen to the end being near.

The sum of all of these life experiences causes me to reflect. I was the sole caretaker for my grandmother, my mother, and my father. I shared responsibilities for my mother-in-law and father-in-law with my two sisters-in-law. But I was the only one of the three living less than an hour away. I never questioned my role. I visited every day with each of them. I tried at first to keep my parents and grandmother at home until logistically it was no longer possible. I made all of the decisions for doctors, second and third opinions, and specialists. I battled with doctors and nursing home administrators and "uncare" givers. I battled with insensitive relatives, friends, and unscrupulous individuals. Were all of these experiences, feelings, and insights my true training for the principalship?

Organizing, managing, and distributing time and resources were lessons learned. How to juggle teaching, children, a weekend husband, washing clothes for children and extended family, replacing clothes in drawers and closets, bringing clean clothing back to the nursing homes, searching for clothing removed from nursing-home rooms by patients suffering from geriatric dementia, cleaning, chauffeur-ing, shopping, checking homework, trips to the library, and so on ad infinitum.

The warp to the woof were the emotions, feelings, and realizations. I learned from my deepest depths about how insensitive individuals behave toward the helpless. How easily even small amounts of power are fuel for abuse. Have I now programmed myself to meet and greet every parent and to address needs personally because of these experiences? I know that I want to ensure that all families are treated as I would want to be treated. I need and want to personalize the institution called school. Human beings have a right to be treated with respect and dignity.

In another session the group returned to the theme of caretaking in our writing. During that discussion Holly said, "Relational issues appear so often at the heart of what we're saying. But why do we choose not to act as good little girls? Good little girls stay in the garden. Why are we

eating of the tree of knowledge? Why did we decide to do that?" We later examined our journeys beyond the garden in the following entries. From Rita's February 1992 journal:

Time for what? for curriculum? for instruction? for current students and staff? for the future as well? Time for friends, for family, for love, for me? . . . Where is it? When is it? Will it ever be? I guess there will never be enough. The garden has very high walls. It is a daily struggle to escape.

From Rita's November 1991 journal:

Today, as I sit down to my journal, I am surrounded by thoughts of Elsie A. Mary Ann's mother. I last saw her ten days ago as she lay in her coffin. I can honestly say that she appeared to be at peace and free of her immense burdens. Had she too left the garden? I picture her floating free, walking beside her able daughter.

Today I am confronted with the utter madness of dealing with the aftermath of a senseless murder. I never knew the victim. The killers were my 7 year olds—two of them. At least they were seven when I saw them last. *Now* they are grown men of 20 or so. Where did I fail? Elsie had her chance at life. They never did.

A day like today is endless. The group will understand. Do male principals need or want a group of their own? Can they just leave the garden at will?

From Joanruth's January 1992 journal:

No female can step out of the garden, because the garden is a fantasy. The garden only lives in the minds of those who wish it in efforts to control and feel powerful or through a desire to be controlled.

"You are the only female administrator in this group; therefore, you are the recorder. You take the notes." "Why do you want to be a principal? You have a husband; he has a job." The tapes run through my head. Determination is viewed as aggression and unladylike, or is it just threatening?

What boundaries? My mental garden has no boundaries except for those I deliberately choose for myself.

The first time that I decided that I would absolutely *not* straighten the kitchen, make the beds, and leave a *Leave It to Beaver* house in the morning, my three children became fearful. They left the house before I in the morning and returned home from school before I did. I found them sitting outside, waiting for me. They announced, in a state of alarm, that we had been burglarized. The house was a mess; it had been ransacked! I carefully explained to the frightened trio that I was no longer the maid.

Stepping out of a mental garden is a matter of control, the individual control of one's life.

*Jolley Christman is founder and president of Research for Action, which works with educational institutions and community organizations to use inquiry processes to build coalitions and to create agendas for action that are*

*purposeful and socially just. She is also an associate faculty at the Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania.*

What is the relationship between the issues that arise in our journals and the issues that ethnographers confront doing and writing about their fieldwork? In his 1991 address to the ethnography forum, Fred Erickson situated what had been going on at the forum in recent years within the larger context of current challenges to the traditional ethnographic perspective of authoritative outsider who tells the other's story. Fred argued that the future work of ethnography must encompass both "Adam's tasks," the traditional work of anthropology, and "Eve's tasks," the emerging vision of anthropology as simultaneously "forgiving and emancipating." Adam's tasks involve competent thick description, credible interpretation that includes the ethnographer's careful scrutiny of his own perspective and the postmodernist recognition that his voice is but one among many.

One of Eve's tasks is exposing the power discrepancies that exist between observer and observed in any research situation. Feminist theorists have always been sensitive to power issues and relationships in fieldwork. Judith Stacey asks, "Can there be a feminist ethnography?" (1988), a question that emerges from her belief that the rapport, admiration, and friendship that so often develop between women researchers and their informants only mask the inequality and potential for betrayal in such relationships. And so Stacey questions whether feminism can support any ethnography of the "other." Fred discussed a second task for Eve: deep reflection into herself to reveal, name, and ultimately forgive the many and diverse voices found there. His point was that the voices of all "others" exist within us, and only by listening to and naming them can we move past them and on to purposeful action.

What is the relationship between the issues that arise in our journals and the issues that thoughtful ethnographers currently confront in doing and writing about their fieldwork? Our journals and our reflections about them have much to say about the work of Adam *and* Eve; about recognizing all of the voices within us, taking a stand, and developing a stance toward our work.

When I looked back over the notes of our meetings, I saw that we toiled with Adam and Eve in our discussions about whether to present at the ethnography forum, whether to make our work more public. Arlene was determined that we be heard: "The forum was a great day for me last year. But the voices of principals were absent. The forum needs our voices." Holly wondered, questioned: "What is a process for reviewing and researching our journals? Who are we writing for? What kind of writing is appropriate? Poetry? Stories?" Mollie wanted a record of our work together and a public sharing of some portion of that work. But she worried about finding an authentic voice that might still guard essential privacies. Could we be real? Could we tell the truth? Rita was protective of our time together and its purpose: "We'll be turning the

group over to something else. It won't be journaling any more. It will be writing for the ethnography forum." These are the concerns and voices of educational administrators and ethnographers who are "out there," pushing the limits, working at the edges of their respective professions to connect research to practice.

Like Adam and Eve, our journals also have much to say about exercise of power and authority. Our journal group is feminist activity, good old-fashioned consciousness-raising, because naming and understanding our experience as the "other," *women* principals in a still-male-dominated profession is an acknowledged, central purpose. But there is a haunting and significant subtext in our writing. Just as Judith Stacy asks "Can there be a feminist ethnography?", there are uncomfortable contradictions in our work, many voices within each of us. "Can we be feminist principals? Can we exercise the power and authority of our positions as principals within a context of connection to and care for the other?"

Finally, like Eve, these reflections speak about creating a space where we can examine and forgive within institutions that too often ignore and blame. In telling the story of hostile and dangerous Takia, Arlene captures the moment of her connection to and transformation into "the other." First, she identifies with Kneesha, the honor-roll student. Then Arlene transforms as she becomes the child, and Takia her teacher. But as Holly pointed out, connection, transformation, and conversation end when Kneesha's enraged mother arrives ready for battle with a spent principal. Later in the life of our group, Joannuth's anxious memories of turning beloved and helpless family members over to institutions that so often show how little they care, reconnect us to Kneesha's mother's anger. Can we be feminist principals?

Can we bring our experience as "other" to the many difficult and threatening interactions that we have with wounded teachers, parents, and children? And as Holly asked when we discussed Arlene's story, "Can we forgive ourselves when we miss the mark" so that we can waver to the experience and move on to more thoughtful, more purposeful practice? Eve's work is real work. Eve's work is hard work, even for Eve.

---

**Jolley Christman** is the president of Research for Action and is an associate faculty in the College of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. **Holly Perry** is principal of Academy for the Middle Years, Northwest, in Philadelphia. **Joannuth Hirshman** is principal of Lingelbach Elementary School, in Philadelphia. **Arlene Holtz** is principal of Wilson Middle School, in Philadelphia. **Rita Spelkomman** is a retired principal of Cook-Wissahickon Elementary School, in Philadelphia. **Mollie Williams** is principal of Disston Elementary School, in Philadelphia.

### References Cited

- Carrini, Patricia  
1974 Observation and Description: An Alternative Methodology for the Investigation of Human Phenomena. Monograph. Grand Forks: North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation.
- Stacey, Judith  
1988 Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography? *Women's Studies International Forum* 11(1):21-27.



## "Insider" Narratives of Transformative Learning: Implications for Educational Reform

GARY L. ANDERSON AND ELIZABETH SAAVEDRA  
*The University of New Mexico*

In February 1992 at the Ethnography in Education Research Forum at the University of Pennsylvania, one of the authors noticed that several principals were going to present their research. Being a former principal and veteran of educational administration conferences, he went, prepared for the usual bragging session about how these principals had "turned their schools around" through their commitment to the latest restructuring scheme. What he found instead were a group of women principals talking about how their work affected them emotionally, how it intersected with their personal lives, and what it was like to be a woman in a field dominated by men. Although he had taught a course on the school principalship for years, these narratives took him back to his own experience as a principal and tapped into his own repressed feelings about the job. He was struck by the extent to which university researchers like himself—even qualitative ones—had failed to explore the inner lives and daily dramas of school practitioners.

The narratives of these women principals are radically different from the prescriptive practitioner narratives that appear in practitioner journals. Their appearance in an academic journal provides an opportunity to reflect on what kind of knowledge about educational practice is legitimate and who has the right to produce it. They become, in a sense, disruptive voices (Fine 1992) that force us to come to terms with our feelings about school practitioners, our "cultural informants", speaking for themselves. Before addressing the principal narratives directly, we would like to discuss what this kind of inquiry means for readers of *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*.

The shift in academic research in education from an exclusive reliance on positivistic research to an increased acceptance of naturalistic research has been extensively documented. In educational administration, it is not uncommon to find naturalistic studies of principals and teachers around issues of leadership and supervision. Anthropologists will recognize Wolcott's classic study, *The Man in the Principal's Office: An Ethnography* (1973). Academic traditions of phenomenology and interactionism have also produced the occasional academic foray into the lifeworld of school administrators (Blumberg 1984; Burlingame 1979; Greenfield 1986; Gronn 1983; Mitchell 1990). Regardless of how sensitive these accounts are to local realities or how thick the resulting descrip-

Anderson/Saavedra "Insider" Narratives

229

tions, they remain accounts of educational practice which are constructed by outsiders.

In response, practitioners are beginning to provide their own accounts of educational practice. In spite of calls to privilege the insider's perspective in naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba 1985), nothing has really prepared naturalistic researchers for assertive informants insisting on raising their own unmediated voices. At conferences where practitioner and academic researchers come together—such as the 1992 ethnography forum—the tension in the air around this issue can be cut with a knife.

### Insiders Speaking for Themselves

Although the limitations of academic researchers representing the lives of others has been extensively documented, problems associated with insider research have gotten less attention. We know that, while the insider's construction of reality is more "experience-near" (Geertz 1983) than the outsider's, it nevertheless remains a reconstruction and not reality itself. The advantage of being nearer the experience described can also be a disadvantage, as one increasingly loses "perspective." Moreover, the right of school practitioners to construct reality might mean that they construct it in accordance with their own vested interests, leaving out the constructions of students, parents, and communities. Practitioners, in their rush to empower their own voices, can, often unwittingly, silence the voices of others (Anderson et al. 1995).

Furthermore, most models of practitioner research and reflection portray a lone teacher or administrator reflecting or doing research in isolation. Regardless of how sophisticated the models of practitioner reflection and inquiry are (Schon 1983; Shapiro and Reiff 1993), isolated practitioners are deprived of the input that critical collaborators can provide.

Ironically, before educational administration (and teacher education) became a field of academic study, knowledge about educational practice was primarily disseminated through practitioner narratives. Older administrators passed down the folklore of the field as they mentored (for good or ill) younger administrators. Superintendent and principal "war stories" became the curriculum of university coursework, to be replaced later by administrative texts that eschewed narrative forms of knowledge for propositional knowledge increasingly derived from social science theory. As in other fields within education, this shift from apprenticeship models of practitioner preparation to models based on the dissemination of academic knowledge has produced new hierarchies of knowledge that are currently being contested (Anderson and Page 1995).

## Transforming Practice and Creating New Knowledge through Dialogue

How do we produce knowledge that is based on insider understandings of educational practices while not simply reproducing current practices? How do we create spaces in which practitioners can come together (with or without "outsiders") and engage in transformative learning rather than reproductive learning? Because reform movements are increasingly encouraging practitioners to engage in what often turns out to be mock participation in decision making and "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves 1990), an understanding of how transformative learning takes place in "authentic" groups is essential. In her extensive experience and research with teacher study groups, Saavedra (1994) has identified certain conditions that must be met for school practitioners to engage effectively in transformative learning through a process of inquiry. We will describe these conditions and discuss how the principals group provides an illustration of how they can be put into practice.

1. *Dialogic context.* There must be an intentional effort to create a democratic setting in which all participants' voices are heard and valued.

2. *Identity and voice.* Although one brings a voice to the group, one's voice/identity is also constructed within the group through dialogue. The study group must provide a location in which participants can become consciously active in the (re)construction of their identities and voices.

3. *Ownership of goals of the group and direct access to sources of knowledge.* Current in-service and restructuring models convene practitioner groups to discuss agendas determined elsewhere and present knowledge about practice to practitioners that is mediated and predigested by others. In transformative groups, practitioners must be able to negotiate their own goals and be in control of deciding what knowledge about their practice they wish to access and how, that is, library searches, action research, reflective journaling, and so forth.

4. *Disequilibrium and conflict.* An inevitable and necessary condition of transformative learning is disequilibrium and conflict. Usually when practitioners begin critiquing their beliefs and practices, they are faced with clashes between conflicting paradigms, ideological commitments, and personal histories. These conflicts occur cognitively in each individual practitioner, within the study group, and in the relationship between the individuals and their institutions. Embracing the disequilibrium and conflict as learning opportunities is essential for transformative learning.

5. *Mediational events.* A mediational event occurs as individuals translate their understandings, interpretations, and practices to their peers, offering to their peers differing perspectives and strategies that will assist in mutual transformation. This process involves utilizing one's own capabilities and knowledge, and working collaboratively

with another to accomplish what one cannot do alone. This is what Vygotsky calls the "zone of proximal development," the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the potential development as determined through problem solving in social collaboration with peers.

6. *Demonstration.* Demonstrations provide practitioners occasions in which they can actively interact in an authentic activity, in essence observing interpretations and acts of learning. Demonstrations can vary from presentations during study-group sessions to sharing of research activities, journal entries, and reflections and responses to experience. Demonstrations are more than planned activities; they are events in which a particular individual invites others to view and experience past or current events collaboratively.

7. *Generation.* Generation is a result of reflective action that leads to shifts in knowledge, belief, and future action. The generation of new knowledge can take place during mediated events through demonstrations or through reflection on actions taken within practice settings themselves.

8. *Agency.* Finally, as practitioners transform, develop new beliefs, practices, and relationships with their own contexts, they construct a critical awareness of social processes and practices in such a way that what is made clear is not simply how the forces of social control work, but also how they can be overcome and changed individually and collectively.

Our intent in providing these categories is not an attempt to privilege propositional knowledge over the principals' narratives. As we intend to show, the categories that we describe are clearly embedded in the narratives themselves. By making the categories explicit we hope to make clear that meeting together in groups does not automatically lead to transformative learning. Reform movements are already appropriating practitioner research and practitioner study groups for their own externally determined ends.

### Principals Engaging in Transformative Learning

Although the principals had only met for a little more than one year, an atmosphere of trust and safety had been formed in which all voices were heard and valued. Group goals were negotiated with the "outsider," anthropologist Jolly Christman, although it would be interesting to know more about what impact, if any, the outsider had on the direction that the group ended up taking. Mollie indicates that:

[during those early meetings, it was rare that one of us would challenge another's meaning; since then we have gone deeper, bringing more of who we are to the group as we struggle together to keep essential balances in our personal and professional lives. We have begun to write in response to one another and to explore each other's salient themes as we think about our own work. [this issue, p. 214]

Clearly these principals are engaged in the important work of constructing voice and identity together and learning how to "challenge each others' meaning." A group's ability to embrace difference and the conflicts that negotiating difference can bring can often determine the success or failure of a group. Too many groups view conflict as negative and consequently get frustrated with members of the group when the inevitable conflicts occur. Some groups are successful at keeping conflict at bay by promoting norms of civility that keep authentic issues off the agenda. This is the fate of many school restructuring groups in which a diverse group of stakeholders are brought to the table, only to outdo each other at conflict avoidance (Malen and Ogawa 1988). Demonstration and mediational events are key to the group's collaboration. The journal entries that are shared often represent mini-case studies of authentic practice situations. Arlene Holtz's story about Taka and Kneesha is a case in point. This demonstration of a critical incident during Arlene's workday provided an event for collaborative reflection. Mediation occurs when Molly stresses the role that race played throughout the event. While Arlene was not totally unaware of the racial subtext, Molly foregrounds for Arlene the extent to which race forms a context for much of what happens in her school. This then becomes grist for further discussions in the group about race and schooling in urban settings. Although Mollie, the only African American in the group, is burdened by having to "educate" her white colleagues about race, this mediational event may make it more likely that in the future and in other contexts the white principals will take this role.

This mediational event also provides Arlene with the kind of affirmation that she needs to "begin to feel forgiveness for how I handled the matter" and to feel reassured that she did the best she could under the circumstances. The group provides a collaborative space in which she can make herself vulnerable. It also generates the insight that these "discipline" issues that many principals view as an unpleasant but routine part of their work are really as much about teaching and learning as what goes on in the classrooms.

### Transformative Learning as Educational Reform

The group members indicate that they have "come to see this kind of work as educational reform" (this issue, p. 213). This is a powerful notion, since practitioner study groups are generally seen as a quaint, "soft" activity that takes place at the margins of reform, almost a luxury in these days of school restructuring councils, IEPs, Curriculum Planning Committees, and the myriad other after-school activities that clutter a practitioner's work week.

But as Jolly points out, just as groups of women found strength and transformation in the 1960s through "consciousness raising" groups, school practitioners are finding strength and transformation in journal and study groups. Just as a social movement of empowered women

grew out of apparently innocuous groups, a reform movement, led by empowered practitioners could result from informal gatherings such as this principals' group. Groups like this one represent a challenge to empowerment schemes directed from the top. Empowerment that serves the name is not given by outside agents but is constructed through critical dialogue that results in the transformation of practitioners and of the institutions they construct together.

We would like to conclude with two observations. First, there is another set of insiders and outsiders that are missing in this cycle of narrative inquiry—the "insider" students and their "outsider" communities. School practitioners who embraced participatory decision making as a way to empower themselves have too often balked at using it to include diverse voices and that lead to transformative learning? Or just as the women's movement opted for women only groups, is it perhaps important for each school constituency to reserve the right to create "safe" spaces in which to be authentic and deepen their thinking together before embracing other constituencies?

Second, although these principals have taken care to set up all of the conditions for transformative learning, they are in the early stages of the process. Transformative learning is a process that deepens with time. Trust builds, insights deepen, themes too threatening to touch on have a way of surfacing when the group is ready to deal with them. Most importantly, the group becomes a source of intellectual and emotional strength from which to take transformative actions within the practice context. These actions become demonstrations for reflection, mediation, and the generation of new knowledge, leading to a greater sense of agency. The struggle of transformative learning lies in how each context is interpreted, reinterpreted, and then acted upon.

### Can Feminist Practitioners Change Schools?

George Counts's book *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* (1932) was written as a challenge to the Progressive Education Association. These feminist principals, who advocate a social order based on caring, authenticity, and connection are asking similar questions: Dare feminist practitioners build a new social order in schools? Can administrators engage in a "power with" approach to authority in a "power over" world? How do we raise authentic voices in the context of institutions that blame and silence? Mollie's question "Could we tell the truth?" is eloquent in this regard (this issue, p. 226). Arlene asks, "Can we be feminist principals? Can we exercise the power and authority of our positions as principals within a context of connection and care for the other? (this issue, p. 226). These principals are seeking nothing less than a total reconceptualization of their administrative role.

These "individuals-in-community" are ready to test the waters in their schools, institutions that blame and silence. Ferguson (1984), critiquing

Gilligan (1982), warns that institutions that are hierarchical and bureaucratic work actively to distort a feminist discourse of caring and connection:

Assertiveness is always risky for the powerless. The impulse toward helping and caring is held hostage to the need to please; under conditions of unequal power, the need for approval is a politically rational need, not a psychologically weak one. As long as women are subordinate to men, the virtues of female experience will be turned to the requirements of surviving subordination: the capacity to listen, to empathize, to hear and appreciate the voice of the other, and so forth, will be used as strategies for successful impression management. [Ferguson 1984:168]

Under current bureaucratic and hierarchical conditions, principals' reputations depend on their skills at impression management. There is little room for authenticity in such a system. As these principals go about the task of opening up authentic spaces in their schools, new grist for reflection will be created. Those who have reason to fear authenticity will resist such efforts. There will be casualties. But journal groups like this one will document these struggles, and their reflections will be extremely valuable. In fact, their reflections will be maps to an authentic reform movement created through the transformative actions of insiders creating authentic spaces for caring and connection within institutions that blame and silence.

Gary L. Anderson is an associate professor in the College of Education at The University of New Mexico. Elizabeth Saavedra is an assistant professor in the College of Education at The University of New Mexico.

### References Cited

- Anderson, Gary L., and Bonnie Page  
1995 Practitioner Knowledge and the Uses of Narrative. *In* *The Knowledge Base in Educational Administration: Multiple Perspectives*. R. Donnayer, M. Imber, and J. Scheurich, eds. Pp. 88-107. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Anderson, Gary, Kathryn Herr, and Ann Nihlen  
1995 Studying Your Own School: An Educator's Guide to Qualitative Practitioner Research. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.
- Blumberg, Arthur  
1984 *The Craft of School Administration and Some Other Rambling Thoughts*. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 20(4):24-40.
- Burlingame, Martin  
1979 Some Neglected Dimensions in the Study of Educational Administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 15(1):1-18.
- Counts, George  
1932 *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* New York: Arno Press.

- Ferguson, Kathy  
1984 *The Feminist Case against Bureaucracy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Fine, Michelle  
1992 *Disruptive Voices: The Possibilities of Feminist Research*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Geertz, Clifford  
1983 *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gilligan, Carol  
1982 *In a Different Voice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Greenfield, Thomas B.  
1986 *The Decline and Fall of Science in Educational Administration*. *Interchange* 17(2):57-80.
- Gronn, Peter  
1983 *Talk as the Work: The Accomplishment of School Administration*. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28(1):1-21.
- Lincoln, Yvonna, and Egon Guba  
1985 *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Malen, Betty, and Rodney Ogawa  
1988 *Professional-Patron Influence on Site-Based Governance Councils: A Confounding Case Study*. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 10(4):215-270.
- Mitchell, John G.  
1990 *Re-visioning Educational Leadership: A Phenomenological Approach*. New York: Garland.
- Saavedra, Elizabeth  
1994 *Teacher Transformation: Creating Contexts and Texts*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona.
- Schon, Donald  
1983 *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Shapiro, Stewart, and John Reiff  
1993 *A Framework for Reflective Inquiry on Practice: Beyond Intuition and Experience*. *Psychological Reports* 73:1379-1394.
- Wolcott, Harry  
1973 *The Man in the Principal's: An Ethnography*. New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Wilson.