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Opening Remarks *By Barbara Blazej*

*Let ordinary people meet by the millions across the borders.
Let them create a universal network of love and friendship.*

Hagen Hasselbalch, in *Earth Prayers From Around the World*

As I sat with my dying friend Sophie last night, I read this prayer to her and thought about how much she has inspired me during our thirteen-year friendship. Although she couldn't respond to me physically, I knew that her heart was smiling at the hopefulness in these words. Sophie's life, actions and being always embodied the sense of global interconnectedness that Hasselbalch describes:

*Let billions of human beings cooperate to create a good future
for their children and grandchildren.*

*Let us survive
In peace and harmony with Mother Earth.*

Especially during these times of global conflict, it's important to hold the vision of how we might live together in peace on this earth. To honor Sophie's vision that encompassed the whole world, at this time of her passing, I would like to reflect a bit on what it means to feel connected to all life, everywhere—to be a truly "global citizen" of the 21st century.

As a starting point, I turn to *Maine's Common Core of Learning*, a wonderful document completed in 1990 that was then followed by the Maine Learning Results. The commission that created the Common Core report was charged with "defining the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all Maine students should have upon their graduation from high school...essential for meeting the demands of life in the twenty-first century." The report goes on to group these skills, attitudes and knowledge into four related areas, one of which is particularly relevant here: Personal & Global Stewardship, described as follows:

Responsible citizenship requires awareness and a concern for oneself, others, and the environment. It involves interactions not only within the self and family, but between the self and friends, the community, the nation, and the world. It includes the knowledge and care of all dimensions of our selves as humans, an understanding of the group process, and a willingness to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Stewardship also includes...an appreciation of pluralism and human rights.

It's important to examine why this notion of global citizenship and stewardship is so crucial today, perhaps more than ever. For one thing, our actions today in one part of the world can and do have global consequences. The 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl, in the former Soviet Union, for example, scattered radioactive fallout around the world. Global warming, rain forest destruction, ozone depletion—regardless of where these begin on earth, we know they have an impact that is felt worldwide. Our own war on terrorism and war in Iraq, as well as the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, involve populations in numerous countries—as voices of support and

continued from previous page

opposition, as financial backers and those who boycott and protest, as refugees, as combatants and victims. We may be thousands of miles away from the Middle East geographically, but our lives are clearly intertwined with the people of that region through war (and hopefully peace one day!), economics, government policies and history.

The Internet, satellites, multinational corporations, trade, travel, communications: all of these, for better or worse, have created a world community to which we all belong. Current and especially future generations will be at a clear disadvantage if they do not have a deep understanding of these global dynamics and connections.

Julie Andrzejewski and John Allesio, faculty members at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, agree that teaching about global citizenship has several immediate and long-term benefits:

Who could deny the importance of a safer, healthier, more peaceful, more just and sustainable world in which to live?...Studying global problems and the various strategies for addressing them can generate a renewed sense of hope and optimism. Practicing active citizenship whether through personal changes, service learning, grassroots organizing, or a myriad of other activities, can provide meaning to the curriculum. Students will feel comfortable interacting with diverse groups of people. Students and teachers alike can see that they can make an impact to make the world a better place...Students will understand more clearly what citizenship means and feel ready to make significant contributions for humankind in a sustainable environment.

So what are some of the characteristics of a global citizen and how do we promote these particular skills and attitudes in our students and ourselves? In addition to helping our students gain a basic understanding of US and world history, geography, culture, politics and current events, preferably from multiple perspectives and sources, we can model and encourage students to be **open-minded, nonjudgmental and respectful** towards diverse people within the classroom, community, nation and world. We can explore the importance of diversity (species, cultures, viewpoints) from the physical environment through human history and international relations. To ensure that our students are capable of making their way (nonviolently, we hope) through conflicts that inevitably arise because of our global diversity (in understanding, values, needs, cultures, histories, etc.), we can give them a solid grounding in basic **conflict resolution skills**, including deep, active listening, perspective-taking and empathy, negotiation and mediation. And we can highlight and practice other attitudes essential for global citizenship: **curiosity** and **excitement** to explore the world and our place in it, and to understand how we are connected to all “others” around the world; a sense of **compassion** and **motivation** to work for social justice and environmental sustainability locally and globally; a willingness to take **responsibility** for our choices and actions; and the **courage** and **flexibility** to embrace change, to consider new concepts, ideas and experiences, to question our own reality, and to make mistakes and learn from them as we go. Two excellent online resources that cover many aspects of teaching global citizenship are:

Cool Planet for Teachers (Oxfam International), which includes a comprehensive view of what it means to be a global citizen, as well as classroom activities for students of all ages and access to Oxfam’s free 80-page Curriculum for Global Citizenship. <http://oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet/teachers/globciti/citizen.htm>

The Earth Child Institute (Global Education Associates), a resource for working with children from three to thirteen, with hands-on activities, interdisciplinary curricular ideas, etc. <http://www.gloaleduc.org/ErthChld.html>

On a very personal level, and I know Sophie would appreciate this imagery, I like to think of this sense of connectedness as “ubuntu” from the Nguni languages of South Africa: “My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours,” explains Archbishop Desmond Tutu. “We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’” For social beings who depend on others for our growth, development, well-being and our very lives, this African worldview of ubuntu gives great meaning to the concept of global citizenship. On

continued from previous page

this one planet that we share (our “Spaceship Earth” from Buckminster Fuller), we are linked to others around the world from the past through the future, from a common need to preserve and protect the environment to a shared hope for safety, community, freedom, dignity, inclusion, and peace.

References:

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Commission on Maine’s Common Core of Learning. *Maine’s Common Core of Learning: An Investment in Maine’s Future*, 1990.

Balancing Respect and Responsibility in the Middle Level Classroom

By William M. Galloway

When middle level teachers are invited to reflect on what they value most in their career as educators, they often tell stories about specific moments in their interactions with students that represent personal transformation—a positive change in terms of the students’ strength and confidence in themselves and in the students’ deep sense of connection with others. Indeed, these two factors contribute significantly not only to the definition of success for teachers, but also to improved learning and achievement for students.

Becoming more intentional in creating opportunities for growth through connections with others occurs at different levels, including curriculum design, teaching practice, local assessments and, most importantly, personal interactions with students, colleagues and parents. This article will begin to look at specific ways in which educators can become more intentional in their efforts to enhance the learning environment at the middle level through a skillful balancing of respect and responsibility.

Before looking at specific examples of balanced respect and responsibility in practice where growth through connections with others is supported, further clarification is required as to what respect and responsibility mean in the classroom context.

In terms of respect, I am referring specifically to the kind of moral growth that occurs when students begin to see each other in new ways, when students move beyond initial assumptions and stereotypes to a genuine understanding of others in the way that others want to be understood. This capacity to hear and respond to others with respect is dependent in large part on the opportunities created in the classroom for genuine dialogue, compassion and empathy. Over the course of a school year, teachers know well the way in which students grow out of a defensive safeguarding of identity to a place of greater connection and concern for others. In this way, engaging openly with others, seeing oneself as part of and connected with their peers, and making the link between classroom and community all give meaning to the asking for and offering of respect.

With regard to responsibility, I am referring to the very real sense of ownership in the learning process, in terms of having a say in what is learned, how it is learned and in what ways the curriculum content is made personally relevant and meaningful to a student’s own life. Student-centered learning and responsibility require a level of engagement throughout the educational experience that is characterized by increased levels of confidence and clarity that grow out of the decision-making process in which students are involved. In this light, the teacher’s role is defined in terms of the student’s learning and focuses on facilitating a process of unfolding—a mentor and guide rather than a judge or jury.

continued from previous page

In addition to the teacher's willingness to create opportunities supportive of respect and responsibility in the classroom, there is the skill and art of balancing the two, supporting both the students' capacity for self-interest and in equal measure, their yearning to connect with others. Conflict and crisis in the classroom arise when respect and responsibility are out of balance. This "slippage" occurs, for example, when the students' participation in decision-making about learning is displaced by a teacher's agenda; or when a student's self-interest is expressed in behavior that negatively impacts others in the learning environment. The art of balancing the two elements manifests itself in the way and to the extent that the teacher can identify and respond effectively to the cues expressed by students that pertain to an asking for or offering of respect and responsibility. This interpretation of classroom interaction requires a retuning of the senses such that behavior deemed insubordinate can be understood as a request for change, a desire for balance, understanding and deep connection. The skill of balancing respect and responsibility involves a moment-to-moment focus on what is needed and asked for in the potential and process of human fulfillment.

With a clearer sense of purpose, what then does this all look like in practice? Please consider the following examples of classroom or school wide practices with the understanding that purpose drives practice—that the way in which the teacher conducts the following practices will be shaped by the values that drive it.

- **Round Table Dialogues:** With no more than 8 students meeting two or three times a week, Round Table Dialogues provide opportunities for students to see one another, and the teacher, in new ways. Discussions are meant to deepen the students' understanding of the issues for themselves through conversations with others. The teacher's role is focused on helping the students learn to live with and from the differences that exist, rather than trying to reach agreement.
- **Community-Based Learning:** To further understand the connections students have to their own community and to make personal meaning out of curriculum content, students choose local issues to study and work with community members as resources to develop public policy reports, engage in community activities or support local initiatives for change.
- **Mysteries Curriculum Design:** Based on the work of Rachel Kessler at the Passages Institute of Boulder, Colorado, Mysteries Curriculum Design involves the students in the process of curriculum design by asking them to reflect deeply on the questions they bring to the classroom about themselves, other people or the world around them. From these questions, teachers arrange the curriculum to create opportunities for students to explore more deeply those subjects that matter most to them.
- **Assessment of Respect and Responsibility:** With input from students, teachers, parents and community members, schools develop local assessments focused on respect and responsibility as defined by the community. This process not only clarifies the goals of human interaction in the school, but also provides the means by which students, teachers and community members can receive constructive feedback for growth.
- **High School, College or Community Mentors:** Providing middle level students with role models in their own community supports high academic achievement, clarifies personal goals, and connects young people with their community in positive ways.
- **Mediation and Restorative Justice:** A community-wide program provides opportunities for victims and offenders to learn from conflict and reconnect to the community that has been impacted by them. Beyond traditional suspension or expulsion, this approach includes school and community members in a process that addresses how students can be reintegrated into the community, rather than alienating them further from each other and their network of

continued from previous page

support. Not meant to displace traditional discipline or punishment, Restorative Justice and Mediation go beyond retribution to address the sources and underlying needs of all parties that would otherwise go unmet and likely resurface.

For further information, please contact William M. Galloway at 594-3110. Will is teaching a 3-credit course entitled “Balancing Respect and Responsibility in the Middle Level Classroom” this coming summer—PAX 495, section 001, July 21-25, 2003, at UMaine, Orono. See back page for further details on how to register.

The Art of Listening

By Maureen Fraser Block

“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing
there is a field.
I’ll meet you there.”
Rumi

In difficult times when we feel divided by our differences, coming together with the intention of listening deeply to each other can be a powerful instrument of peace. It is a simple act with an astonishing energy not only to connect us as human beings but also to create opportunities to help shift our dialogue from contentious and confrontational to one that is charged with courage and compassion. Listening invites us to affirm each other, identify what is compelling to each of us, and to stimulate a new and co-created vision for the future. Listening can be transformative and healing and if, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has said, “violence is the language of the unheard,” then the practice of deep or compassionate listening is also an essential tool in cultivating non-violence.

In dialogue that is defined as a conversation that searches for understanding rather than solutions, listening is key to developing and deepening mutual understanding. It pushes us to learn about the perspective of others, particularly as history, place and people have shaped it. Listening to the stories of those we consider to be our enemies or a threat to us in some way is also an invitation to explore our common humanity. Bringing our full attention and a clear intention, we learn to look beyond our own positions (too often fueled by a perceived sense of fear, despair or separation) to an expanded awareness of the possibilities for reconnection and restoration of relationships.

By listening well we learn more about the human dimension of the issues that divide us as well as the values we share in common. These values have the potential to build relationship and become the energy for our becoming less adversarial while taking the time to hear and reflect on what is most meaningful and vital to each of us. Mary Pipher, who has authored many books on the power of human connection, says in her book, The Shelter of Each Other:

“Good stories have the power to save us. Reality is full of cautionary tales, heroes and difficult obstacles overcome through persistence. The best resource against the world’s stupidity, meanness and despair is simply telling the truth with all its ambiguity and complexity. We can all make a difference by simply sharing our own stories with real people in real times and places.

The best stories are stories that help us to see the complexities faced by others. We need stories to connect us with each other, stories to heal the polarization that can overwhelm us all and stories to calm those who are frightened and who hate.” (p. 271)

continued from previous page

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission provides us with one of the greatest examples in history of the healing power that deep listening offers. Many victims of apartheid speak of the difficult, yet transformative experience they found in being given the opportunity to come before the panel and international audience to tell their stories. Archbishop Desmond Tutu has described this time in history, as a time of "radical brokenness" and yet, these people, in detailing their stories of enormous pain and suffering, could attest to the very real power listening has to heal and restore the spirit of those that have been broken.

Learning to listen well takes time and practice. It requires a willingness to let go of previous judgments, biases, assumptions and expectations and slow down in order to be comfortable with silence and leaving space for "not knowing," that is, to stay open to the possibilities that exist beyond what anyone has already imagined.

Modeling and practicing compassionate listening skills with our children might help teach them to listen instead of argue, to look for commonalities instead of differences and to open their hearts and minds to cultivate increased understanding, responsibility and trust. By hearing each other's stories they would learn empathy and compassion and perhaps be willing to explore new and creative ways to reconnect and resolve their conflicts non-violently.

Listening is an art. It takes practice. In Chinese, the character for "to listen" includes ear, eye, undivided attention and heart. The implication of this beautiful symbol is that to listen one must look deeply to hear with a compassionate heart and mind.

Imagine the possibilities that exist for compassionate listening to reawaken meaning, satisfaction and inspiration in our lives. Let your listening come directly from your heart. Learn to listen in ways that communicates courage and compassion. Instead of needing to know all the answers, learn to listen for the questions that long to be asked.

Thich Nhat Hahn, the venerable Vietnamese Buddhist monk says, "Without understanding, compassion is impossible. When you understand the suffering of others, you do not have to force yourself to feel compassion, the door of your heart will just naturally open."

The art of listening opens our hearts and thus becomes one of the most powerful instruments of peace.