

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*Lead me from darkness to light!*

—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

*I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out.*

—The Apocrypha

**Is education really possible in schools?** To educate, *educare*, originally meant to lead out—specifically to lead one from darkness into the light. The ancient Indian word for teacher, *guru*, means the one who shows the way from darkness into light (gu = darkness; ru = light). **Who is able “to educate”? to enlighten? Have we lost sight of the true meaning of teaching? Is the teaching process merely a training procedure?**

Even with the onslaught of school reform and much needed attention being given to improvement and “restructuring” of the education process in general, the ever popular method of teaching in many public schools remains a relatively rigid, formal approach to the basics. Subject matter is still most often taught in inflexible blocks. Facts and skills are further isolated to be mem-

orized and learned in a somewhat stifling and often boring manner. **Is this education? Can enlightenment actually occur in a school setting?** Almost a century ago John Dewey championed the idea that schooling need not be so tedious. Dewey (1900 and 1902) depicted the "old education" as a result of distorted ideas about learning and teaching. Dewey (1938) argued for experiential learning, replacing drill and practice with spontaneous discovery and excitement.

The lack of adventure and excitement in so many schools is a problem today as it was in Dewey's time. The Progressive school movement of the early 1900s did not have the profound effect that many in the movement had hoped. Many bandwagons passed by to turn the heads of the masses. The current "Back to Basics" banners are waving high and catching the eyes of many. The trend implies efficiency with regard to time and effort. Many school systems are looking for the most "bang for the buck." It is important to demonstrate as much "growth" as possible for each dollar spent. Such "growth" is most often measured by an increased gain on annual test scores.

There is no doubt that relevant, imaginative learning and teaching require a great deal of self-investment on the part of all concerned. Followers of Dewey had no idea how hard it would be to teach as he wished. Dewey, himself, confirmed this manner of teaching as arduous (Edwards 1966). Yet there are many teachers who tirelessly invest themselves with their classes year after year to make learning exciting and meaningful.

The Deweyan philosophy lives in the hearts and minds of many educators and is practiced in schools today by those who know the joy of learning. This concept of teaching implies the need for teachers' use of their own imaginative capacities while interacting with students to engage them in truly enjoyable and relevant learning.

**What is so special about these good teachers who evoke such charged and excited responses from their students?**

There is much research focusing on the teacher as the pivotal entity within the educative process. Teacher thinking research and studies of teacher knowledge comprise a wide body of provocative literature (Brophy and Rohrkemper 1981; Clandinin 1986; Clark and Peterson 1986; Connelly and Ben-Peretz 1980; Elbaz 1983; Finch 1978; Garcia 1987; Goodlad and Klein 1970; Haley-Oliphant 1987; Jackson 1968; Janesick 1982; Marcelo 1987; Richards and Gipe 1988; Richert 1987; Russell and Johnston 1988; Seidman and Santilli 1988).

Freema Elbaz (1983) assumes that "teachers hold a complex, practically-oriented set of understandings which they use actively to shape and direct the work of teaching" (p. 3). D. Jean Clandinin (1986) feels that the experiences of teachers and the images that teachers hold of these experiences offer important contributions to the field of educational research. In her opinion it is paramount that the teachers' perspectives take precedence over the view of the researcher. It makes a lot of sense to look at what "good" teachers do and to ascertain how they do it in order to improve the profession in general.

I became interested in focusing on a specific type of teacher thinking and knowledge. I examined teachers' use of imagination and intuition in daily classroom activities. I explored the practical knowledge of teachers who have been recognized for excellence.

The specifics of imagination and intuition have been studied with regard to how teachers can foster these modes in students (Barell 1980; De Mille 1976; Feldhusen, Treffinger, and Bahlke 1970; Meyers and Torrance 1965; Noddings and Shore 1984; Sinatra and Stahl-Gemake 1983; Smith 1966; Sutherland 1971; Torrance 1964; Torrance 1981; Torrance and Meyers 1970;

Vaughan 1979). Yet little research exists which explores the practical role that the teacher's imagination and intuition play in the everyday planning and implementation of classroom activities.

While I am continually interested in different ways to expand students' imaginations and tap into their intuitive abilities, I am going to focus more on the ways that teachers themselves utilize these modes when involved with this complex task we call "educating." I studied eight teachers who were recognized for excellence through awards and recommendations (Jagla 1989). The teachers ranged in amount of experience from two years to thirty years. Two were high school teachers, one a college teacher and the others were elementary teachers of primary, intermediate, and junior high. The teachers taught in urban and suburban settings. I interviewed each teacher extensively and observed them in their classrooms. Each interview was recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were guided by major questions and ideas, however, they were loosely structured in an exploratory style (Lincoln and Guba 1985). This style of interviewing encouraged the teachers to determine the relevant aspects that needed to be brought out. Some broad-based questions were used as guides, however, the probing questions that occurred throughout the interview were equally important. Such probes were based on each teacher's input. Some of the guide questions included:

What does imagination mean to you? What is meant by imaginative teaching?

What does intuition mean to you? How do teachers use intuition when working with a class?

What links do you see between the use of one's imagination and intuition? In what ways are a teacher's use of imagination and intuition in daily classroom activities linked?

How do you use imagination in your daily classroom activities?

What have been some of your most imaginative teaching moments? What was it that made these moments imaginative? What role did intuition play in these imaginative moments?

How do you use imagination in planning and implementing curriculum?

Is being resourceful similar to being imaginative?

How do different student groups affect your use of imagination?

Do particular subjects lend themselves to more imaginative teaching?

How important is it to put things "into context" for students? Is this being imaginative?

In what sense is "interaction" (among people, ideas and/or the environment) important to imagination and intuition?

Are imaginative teachers necessarily intuitive?

Are intuitive teachers necessarily imaginative?

Do you feel that you are more imaginative or more intuitive in your daily classroom activities?

Has your use of imagination and intuition changed as you have gained more confidence with experience?

How can the use of imagination and intuition be fostered through inservice and preservice teacher education?

The interviews were the beginning step toward a dialogue with each teacher. The interviews were conducted with much care and respect for the valued time and commitment each teacher made to this process. This pivotal point was a time for dialogue and free-flowing conversation. This allowed both myself and the other

teacher involved a time to jointly reflect on the phenomena in question and deepen our understanding of our own thoughts on the matter. We collaborated on interpretation and representation so as to remain true to the intended meanings. I came to the interviews having already begun the conversation process with myself. The teachers came to the interview in the midst of some related conversation. This "conversation" in the wider perspective had begun without us and will continue even though the encounters, for the purpose of this study, have concluded (Carson 1986). We entered into a particular segment of what Michael Oakeshott (1959) has called "the conversation of mankind."

The observation time was prearranged. I spent the whole day as a participant observer in the classroom of most of the teachers. By availing myself to the classroom setting I was able to analyze "actions-in-context" (Garfinkel 1977) to aid reflexive understanding of common situations for the teacher. It has been argued (Garfinkel 1977) that everyday occurrences will be looked at in a new light when observed by another. This way I was able to call attention to the teachers' various relevant commonplace activities. ". . . on each occasion that an account of common activities is used, that they be recognized for 'another first time' . . ." (Garfinkel 1977, p. 247).

In essence, the day's visit not only gave me a better situational understanding of the phenomena being questioned, it also encouraged the teacher to reflect on the questions in a new light. This led to a common ground of understanding. This heightened awareness on the part of the teachers, the increased situational understanding on my part, and the common ground of understanding shared by the teachers and myself were all afforded through this important step.

I gave a copy of the transcript of the initial interview and a copy of my observational notes to each

teacher for further input. The teachers were given a chance to peruse the data and reflect on any new insights, meanings, understandings, and answers regarding the phenomena being questioned.

*Mirrors should reflect a little before throwing back images.*

—Jean Cocteau in *Des Beaux-Arts*

Another collaborative meeting was then scheduled. This session was one-on-one as with the initial interview. I do not like to refer to this session as an interview since its intent was to be nondirective and unstructured. This last encounter was simply a “conversation” with each other, an open-ended time to allow for free-flowing discussion of the phenomena, emergent themes, metaphorical analogies, interpretations and whatever came to mind. Terrance Carson (1986) views the conversation itself as a “mode of doing research.” As was the case with the initial interview, the conversation was tape recorded and later transcribed to aid in analysis.

After the transcriptions were completed and copies sent to the respective teachers, I took each transcription and thoroughly combed through it to cull out pertinent aspects. At this time I made initial attempts to place these remarks into categories. These revised versions of each transcript were sent to the respective teachers for their further perusal and approval. A few teachers made only minor corrections, while others reflected further and reworded entire sections. It is from these revised transcripts that all teachers’ quotes have been selected.

I include myself in the process. My own experiences as an elementary and junior high teacher originally sparked my interest into teachers’ use of imagination and intuition. My experience as a college teacher and as an administrator in school districts has given me further insight. At one point, I actually sat down at the

word processor and “interviewed” myself. That is, I reflected on some of the questions that I had been asking the teachers in the study. These notes have been woven together with the other teachers' words.

### *Organization of the Book*

Literature that portrays Images of Artistic Teachers is considered here in Part I. “Artistic teachers” (Rubin 1985), exemplary in their art have much to offer, not only to their immediate students, but to the broader educational community in general. Imagination and intuition have been found to play significant roles in the daily operation of “artistic” teachers' classrooms. The metaphor of teaching as art has bearing on the overall topic.

The terms imagination and intuition are examined in Part II: Expressions of Imagination and Intuition. In the Definition of Terms chapter, imagination and intuition are defined historically, colloquially and in reference to particular teachers. The Further Understanding in Context chapter provides meaning which is deeply embedded in the teachers' everyday use of imagination and intuition. Teachers' own recounting of examples in story form are an attempt to surface this embedded meaning.

In Part III: Thematic Threads Unraveled, some of the threads of understanding that weave through the phenomena of teachers' everyday use of imagination and intuition are examined. Many themes are examined separately to enhance the comprehension of the complex elements involved. The ultimate purpose for isolating some of these “threads” or ideas for scrutiny is to enhance meaningful understanding of the phenomena in question. Often by breaking down a complex concept and examining more comprehensible portions, the ulti-



mate understanding of the phenomenon is increased. In chapter 5, *Free to Be*, I explore the idea of freedom in education as it relates to “Spontaneity and Openness,” “Confidence and Experience,” and “Familiarity.” Chapter 6, *Compare and Contrast*, looks at the similarities and differences found in the ideas woven throughout discussions of teachers’ use of imagination and intuition as they relate to “Particular Subjects or Groups,” “Resourcefulness,” “Variation and Possibilities,” “Randomness versus Structure” and “Intuition and Imagination—Necessarily Wedded?”. I envision how *The Classroom Comes Alive* in chapter 7 by pondering the themes of “Interaction,” “Connections and Context,” “Storytelling” and “Emotion—Excitement, Love and Caring.”

Chapter 8, *Cultivating Teachers’ Use of Imagination and Intuition*, in Part IV explores ways of fostering imagination and intuition with teachers. Since I highly value teachers’ use of their own imaginations and intuition when teaching, it is logical for me to investigate how this can be promoted and enhanced.

Chapter 9, *Enhancing Students’ Imagination and Intuition*, reviews some of the excellent literature available on the subject of encouraging students to use their imaginations and intuitive processes. It makes sense that those who are interested in promoting the use of imagination and intuition with teachers would also be concerned with such encouragement for students. Obviously the ideas go hand in hand.

The final chapter of *Pursuing the Elusive Image* offers some *Implications and Further Reflection*. The primary function of this concluding chapter is to kindle further insights within the reader regarding teachers’ everyday use of imagination and intuition.

This book may evoke more questions than it answers, but its intent is to spark interest in these topics rather than to be a definitive statement. Any look at such esoteric phenomena in teaching is highly individualized,

and each reader is invited to ponder the themes and ideas as they may relate to your own teaching experience. It is my hope that as you read through the chapters you will visualize your own classroom situation as it has been or can be. I hope you ask yourself many of the questions to see if any of the insights presented here match your own. The art of teaching is not divulged through books, courses, or discussions. It is lived in the hearts and souls of inspired teachers who invest their talents in the true education of tomorrow's children.