Curriculum as Inquiry

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The perspective of curriculum as inquiry involves theoretical and practical shifts in how educators view teaching and learning within school contexts. As educators examine their beliefs and actions, they take control of their learning and work with their students in creating more democratic learning environments. Within these environments, students have the time to explore and find the questions that are most significant in their lives as inquirers.

> We get to figure out what we know and what we want to do. We are trusted to learn, to talk, and to share. We are expected to ask more questions and find out more.
>
> AMBER, *age 10, Gloria Kauffman's classroom*

> I did work out of workbooks. I was hoping for a good education. I could tell I was not getting what I wanted. I was wild all the time. I was getting in trouble. I was worrying too much about my friends. Now I like to move around and work with others. I need others to understand me and my ideas. When I work with others, I learn. I need to learn. I share my ideas even if they are not good. I ask questions. The atmosphere in this class has changed my thinking. Others have started to want to learn. I knew if I would try, I would get somewhere.
>
> JENNIFER, *age 10, Gloria Kauffman's classroom*

While educators have debated at length about the value of democratic classrooms and inquiry-based curriculum, students

such as Jennifer and Amber who have lived in these classrooms speak powerfully about the new potentials in their lives. Some students initially resist a curriculum based on inquiry and democracy because it involves learning new ways of thinking and acting in the classroom. Over time, however, they come to value and demand such a curriculum because it builds from their own ways of knowing and living in the world. This curriculum, therefore, can never look the same from classroom to classroom, nor will it realize the same potential in all students.

Voices such as Amber's and Jennifer's, however, persuade us to continue our struggles to create democratic classrooms based in inquiry. We realize that such classrooms challenge educators to make major changes in current school structures and in beliefs about learning and curriculum. This struggle must therefore include a consideration not only of democracy and inquiry but also of the process of change and how this process affects curriculum when education is viewed as a democratic institution.

In this chapter, we begin with a consideration of the attributes of change within and across shifts in paradigm and the relationships between collaboration, change, and diversity. We then use these understandings about the change process to explore the implications of adopting the perspective of curriculum as inquiry. One of the questions we want to address is whether inquiry approaches to curriculum are simply a different term for theme units or actually reflect a different theoretical and practical approach to curriculum. Does curriculum as inquiry change what we do in schools, or simply put a new label on what we are already doing? Throughout this chapter, we share our personal experiences and stories of change as educators, realizing that many of the changes we have experienced parallel those of other educators.

Examining Our Beliefs and Actions

For us, *curriculum involves putting a system of beliefs into action* (Short & Burke, 1991). When we engage in inquiry about curriculum, we examine and reflect on our beliefs as well as our actions in the classroom. In thinking about the changes in curriculum that we and other educators have made, we realized that

sonic of these involve changes in actions within the saint paradigm of beliefs, whereas others involve changes in actions and beliefs that spread across paradigms. That is, sometimes we build on our current beliefs to further develop our teaching practices and the learning environments we are creating with students. Other times we rethink our beliefs and make difficult shifts in both our beliefs and our actions. Both kinds of change are essential to our lives as teachers, but they involve different challenges and ways of thinking about teaching.

A work of children's literature, *Dear Willie Rudd* (Gray, 1993), helped us understand why these distinctions in the questions we ask and the changes we make as educators matter. The book opens with a woman rocking on her front porch, lost in thoughts that are causing her to feel tension. Miss Elizabeth thinks back fifty years to when she was a young girl and Willie Rudd was the family's African American housekeeper. She realizes that Willie was not treated fairly but knows that she cannot make amends to Willie, who is no longer alive. Finally, she writes Willie a letter, telling her all the ways in which she would treat her differently and letting her know that she loves her. Miss Elizabeth attaches the letter to a kite and releases the letter and kite into the night sky. She then returns to her porch and continues rocking.

We have found that change for us begins with similar feelings of tension. Something isn't right but we are not quite sure what it is. Over time we begin to get a sense of what is bothering us and so we take action. What often happens, however, is that our first steps stay within the same paradigm of beliefs and, like Miss Elizabeth's, lead to a surface change in actions. Miss Elizabeth has rearranged her memories and relieved her feelings of guilt. The question left unanswered, however, is whether she is willing to make more substantive changes in her beliefs and actions. Will she alter how she thinks and acts with others? Will she continue to reflect on her beliefs and seek out others in order to continue her inquiry?

We are *not* criticizing Miss Elizabeth's first steps toward change. They resemble our own first steps. They may not go far enough, but they are a beginning and they count. The issue is whether her learning stops because she believes she has answered

her questions and achieved a deeper change in her beliefs and prejudices. Are writing the letter and letting go of the kite her only actions? If she sees herself as now acting without prejudice and feels no need to take further steps, then we have concerns.

These same issues are present when educators mistake their initial changes in action within the same paradigm of beliefs for substantive changes across paradigms of beliefs. When they make this mistake, they are prevented from inquiring into and making the deeper and more substantive changes that are needed to transform themselves and society. They need to keep inquiring, not assume they have *the* answer.

These issues are always present in our inquiries as educators. To understand these issues within educational inquiry, we share several stories of change from our own experiences that highlight changes in action within and across different paradigms.

Examining Educational Inquiry through Change Stories

The first story involves change in our questions about spelling in the classroom. For many years, spelling has meant teaching isolated words, chosen for their graphophonemic patterns, through spelling lessons, workbooks, and the weekly spelling test. Discontent with that approach led us to reject textbook lists and to begin selecting spelling words from classroom theme units or from student writing.

This shift, however, did not involve a change in the questions we were asking. It was not until we moved away from asking questions about how spelling words get chosen to asking questions about the purpose of spelling within the authoring process that our inquiry was pushed to a different level of understanding. This shift allowed us to explore the role of spelling within the authoring process and to *see spelling as a realization of language* (see Figure 2.1). Spelling lists and isolated word study gave way to a focus on spelling strategies and the role of editing in the authoring process.

A second change story relates to the role of parents in the curriculum. Our oldest model of parent involvement is that of schools reporting to parents through sending home report cards

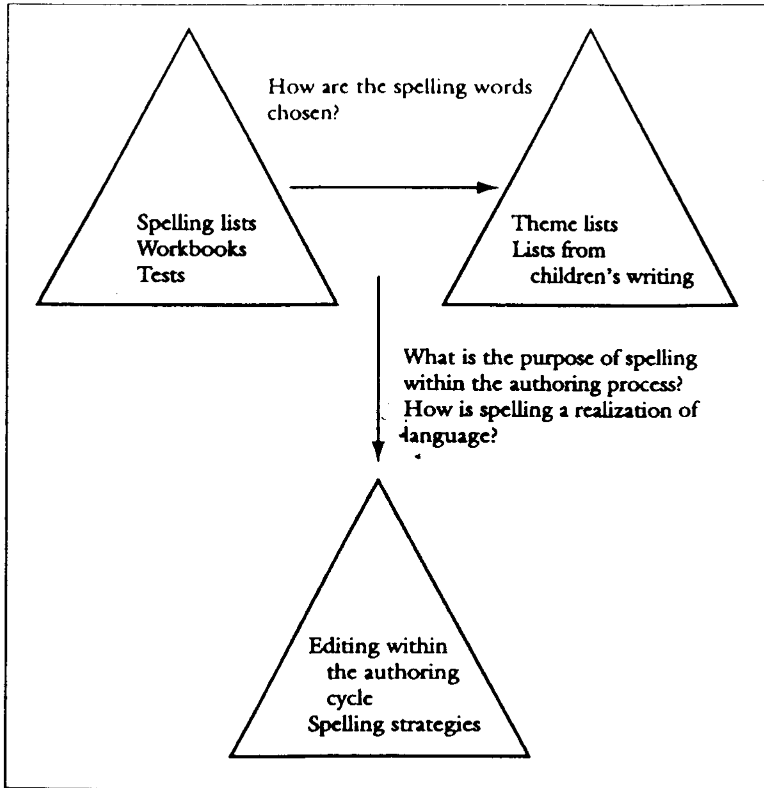

FIGURE 2.1. *Changes in understandings about spelling.*

and announcements and inviting parents to attend school plays or assist on field trips. These teacher-parent relationships are those of a professional reporting to an amateur, with teachers remaining in control of the standards.

A recent shift that is fairly substantive in its physical form but not in its function is the move toward narrative report cards and more parent participation in classroom learning events. This shift involves the same relationship of professional to amateur with the teacher in control and asks the same question of how teachers can report to parents. It's more friendly and welcoming, but operates within the same belief system.

For the paradigm to shift, we needed to initiate a *three-way conversation* between teachers, parents, and students (see Figure

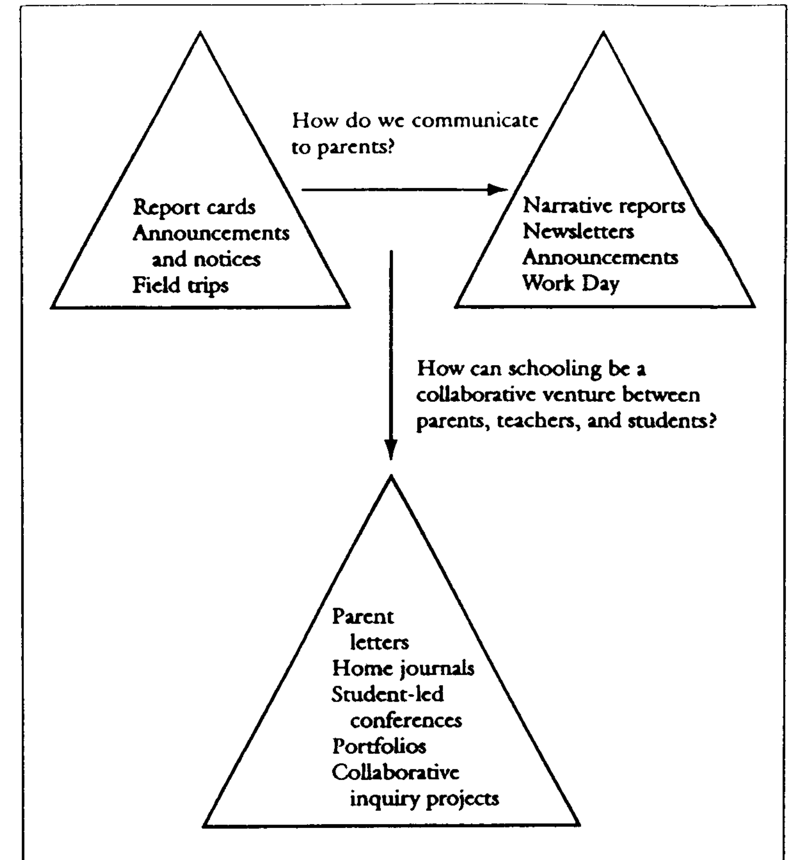

FIGURE 2.2. *Changes in the role of parents within schools.*

2.2). Instead of parents remaining outside of the main relationship between teachers and students within the curriculum, they have begun collaborating with teachers and students within the curriculum. This collaboration gives parents some ownership of classroom events and a share in the risks as they participate in classroom life.

The question of how to teach students to read and make sure they comprehend has dominated approaches to reading in schools. When we began teaching, we answered this question by using basal readers, ability groups, round-robin reading, workbooks,

and emphasizing the sequential teaching of reading skills. The shift to literature-based reading programs led us initially to make changes in materials and methods but not in our underlying beliefs about how to teach children to read.

We replaced the basals with literature anthologies and lists of children's books categorized by grade level. To make sure that students were comprehending, we assigned particular topics in their literature logs and graded their responses. Ability groups were replaced by heterogeneous literature discussion groups, but we still controlled the content by asking open-ended questions that directed the groups' discussion. Other teachers control the discussion through a cooperative learning format in which responsibilities and roles are divided among group members. Thus we shifted away from one right answer, but not from teacher control: there were still preferred procedures to follow and preferred interpretations and themes.

When we changed our question to how literacy functions as an inquiry tool in lives of learners, our focus moved from how to teach students to read to *reading as part of the ongoing personal and social inquiry in children's lives*. We moved beyond reading "because it's good for you" to reading because it allows students to pursue questions and issues of significance in their lives (see Figure 2.3). Instead of making sure that students have comprehended, we focus on providing opportunities for readers to construct and explore their understandings with others through conversation, story, and dialogue. Through collaborative inquiry in literature circles, readers explore different perspectives and actually *think* together, not just cooperatively work together. Everyone, including the teacher, participates by listening carefully to others and working together toward understanding.

The changes in writing have paralleled the inquiries of educators in the previous areas. In writing, our primary concern used to be teaching students *how* to write, a focus that entailed grammar lessons, handwriting practice, and skills workbooks. Learning these separate skills, however, did not ensure that students could actually write to communicate, so we explored ways to get students involved in writing through using creative writing and story starters. Students were given a topic and a set of procedures or steps to follow to produce a particular piece of writing

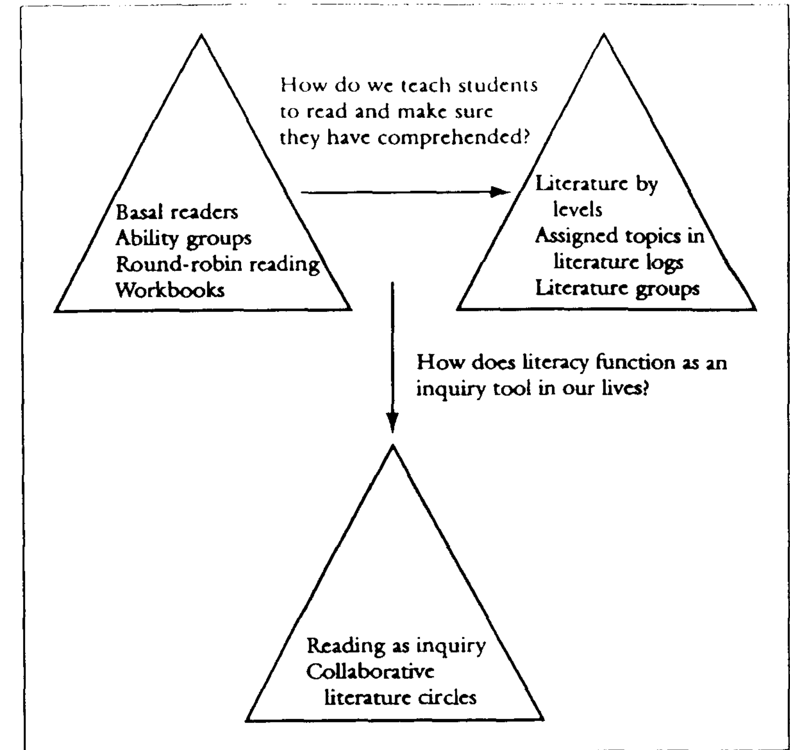

FIGURE 2.3. *Changes in our understandings about reading and literature.*

within a certain time span. But our question of how to teach students to write remained the same.

The work of Donald Graves (1983) and Lucy Calkins (1986) encouraged us to ask new questions about how we could support the authoring process so that *writing is a tool for thinking and communicating within school contexts*. These questions led us to explore writing workshop (Graves, 1983), writers' notebooks (Calkins, 1990), and the authoring cycle (Harste & Short, 1988) as curricular structures and engagements to support authors in constructing their own texts for authentic purposes (see Figure 2.4).

Recently we have been exploring other sign systems such as music, art, movement, and mathematics as tools for thinking and

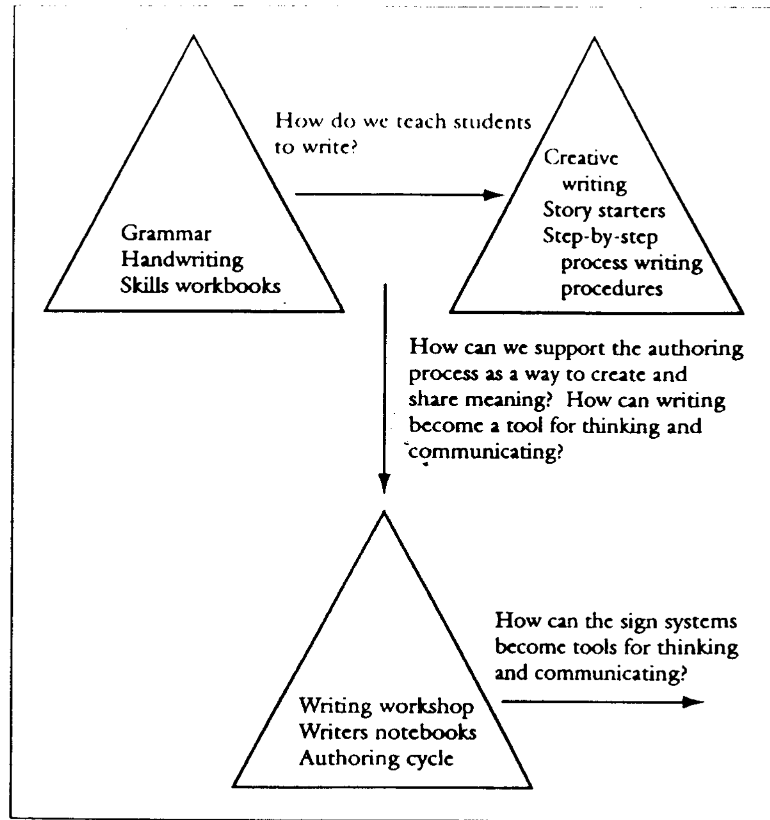

FIGURE 2.4. *Changes in understandings about writing.*

communicating in schools (Short & Harste, 1996). We have assumed that these explorations are within the same belief systems as those which underlie language and the authoring cycle, and have acted as though the same universal meaning-making processes underlie each of these systems. While we have made these assumptions in order to move ahead with our inquiry, we are aware that our work with sign systems may involve a move to another belief system at some point.

As we examined these change stories, we realized that when we shift paradigms, new relationships, constructs, and constituencies become possible that were not available within our previous paradigm. The availability of new potentials and relationships

in particular became evident as we considered the relationship between reading, mathematics, social studies, and the other subjects that have composed a traditional curriculum as a discrete and independent set of knowledge. We have come to new understandings of these subjects as knowledge systems and sign systems that interweave to provide the parameters and structure of knowledge and to form the basis for inquiry. In trying to examine these relationships, we found it helpful to return to *three visual models of the reading process* which were developed many years ago. These models helped us rethink our beliefs about curriculum, knowledge, authoring, and the integration of content and process in the classroom. They have helped us explore curriculum as inquiry.

Exploring Curriculum as Inquiry

Carolyn sketched out the three best-known models of the reading process in order to highlight how each model emphasizes individual systems and components within the reading process (see Figure 2.5). The first model, *the phonics model, is* based on letters that lead to families of words that eventually build to word definitions. The second model, *the skills model, is* what our generation experienced as elementary students. The same systems operate in this model, but the emphasis changes. Instead of choosing words based on their family patterns, they are chosen because of their frequency. Readers are taught a range of word-attack skills instead of depending solely on graphophonemic correspondence, and their focus goes beyond word meaning to story comprehension.

The third model, *whole language,* views reading as a process that cuts across the cueing systems of meaning, syntactical structures, and surface structures (for example, graphophonemic correspondence). In this model, the pragmatic context becomes a necessity for illustrating the importance of the social context within which the learner is reading. This model illustrates the uninterruptable and embedded nature of the systems of language and their relationship to each other.

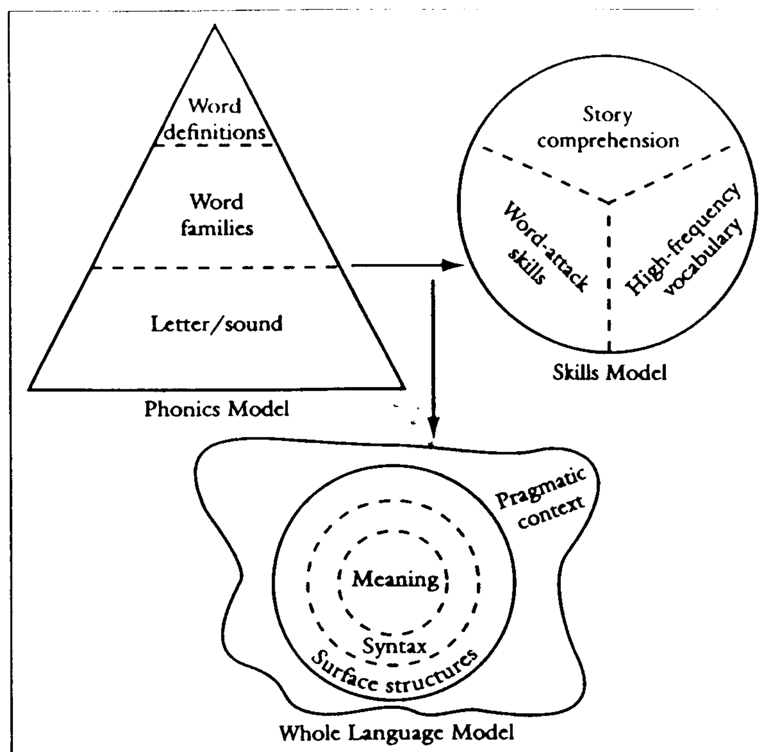

FIGURE 2.5. ***Models of the reading process.***

These understandings and visual models of the reading process gave us a way to rethink our beliefs and models of curriculum as inquiry. The model that has dominated schools for many years is *curriculum as fact* (Figure 2.6). When we were students, we spent our time studying different content areas where a common core of predetermined knowledge was broken into parts.

The smallest unit of curriculum in this model is a fact, so isolated facts and procedures are the basic building blocks. We memorized dates, people, events, facts, and formulas. In mathematics problems and science experiments, we followed exact procedures that could not be varied and led to one right answer. Over time we learned sets of facts that were then combined into concepts. Because we learned each topic and each subject area in isolation from everything else, we never got to the point of form-

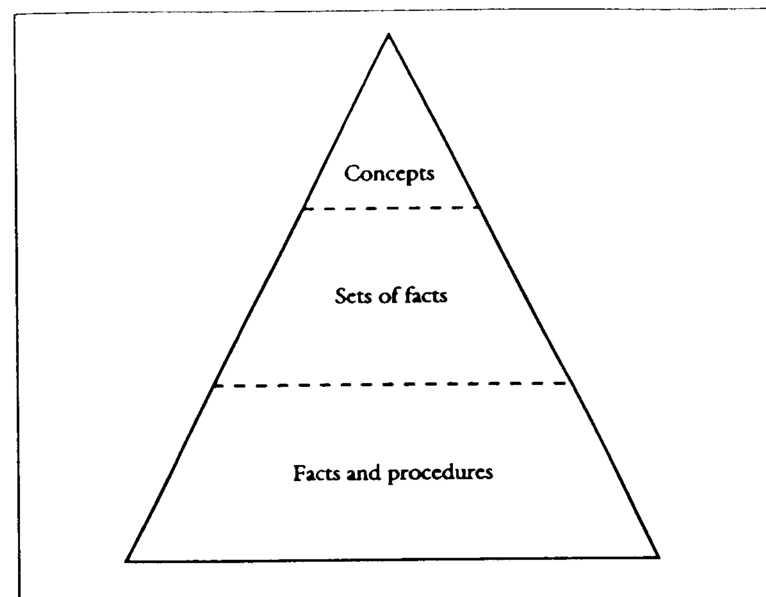

FIGURE 2.6. ***Curriculum as fact (Short & Harste, 1996).***

ing broad generalizations that cut across the different subject areas.

Our focus was on "covering" the topic, and we did so by reading the textbook, filling out worksheets, giving teachers correct answers in class discussions, and taking tests to see if we had mastered the information. Research consisted of copying facts from the encyclopedia into a little booklet and handing it in to the teacher. We covered lots of facts and memorized many details that were forgotten the day after the test. We covered few topics in any depth and ended up with superficial knowledge and no desire to keep learning-we were *done* with that topic. School was something to endure, not a place of significant learning.

Our frustrations as students with textbook approaches to content areas led us as teachers to explore theme units. This approach of *curriculum as activity* then dominated our teaching for many years (see Figure 2.7). Sometimes we chose activities because of the facts that could be learned; other times we chose activities according to particular skills and procedures that we felt students needed. Still other times we chose activities because they

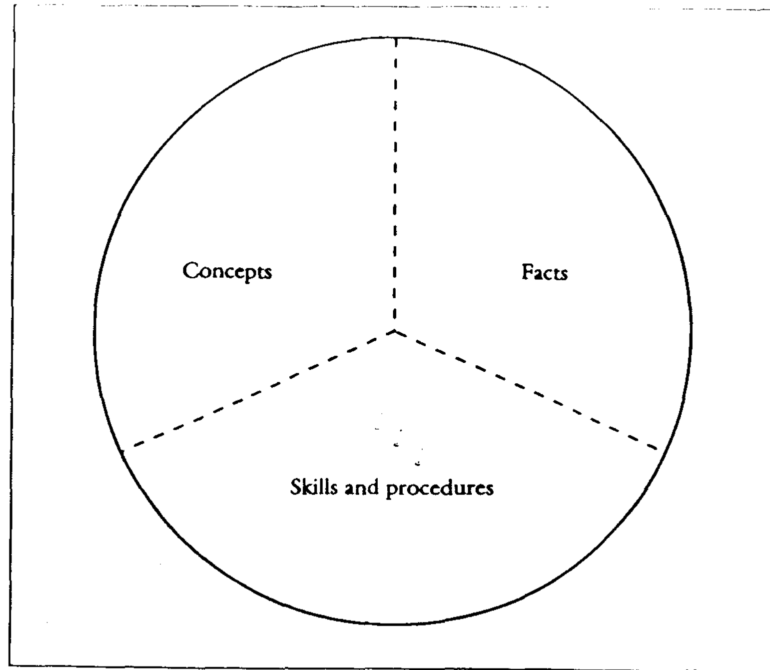

FIGURE 2.7. *Curriculum as activity (Short, 1993).*

supported the development of certain conceptual understandings.

In developing thematic units, we took a topic such as kites or the Civil War and listed activities relating to different subject areas such as mathematics, science, social studies, art, or reading. Underneath those subject areas, we listed activities that would lead to the acquisition of particular facts, skills, and procedures. Other activities were listed because *they* were fun, not because they were tied to any fact or concept. Later, we webbed topics such as kites by concepts and subtopics such as wind, Japanese folktales, kite making, paper folding, celebrations, and weather.

These units were more interesting and engaging for students and allowed us to replace the textbook with well-written fiction and nonfiction. When we looked more closely, however, we realized we were still covering topics and supplying facts, just in more interesting ways. The units still compartmentalized knowledge by subject area or concept. Our goal was an integrated curriculum, but what we had created was a correlated curriculum. While

the activities were related to each other because they were all on the same topic (for example, kites), they did not build on each other or support students in pursuing their own questions.

In addition, the topics of the units often seemed trite and the connections between activities and the topic forced. We felt as though we were engaged in activities at the expense of critical and in-depth knowing of larger conceptual issues. Even though students had more choice, they were primarily engaged in gathering sets of facts on narrow topics and questions.

As teachers, we spent a lot of time inventing activities and creating the curriculum. Because the units were limited by our own knowledge of the topics, student research stayed safely within what we already knew; students were assumed to be discovering what was already known. We remained within a deficit model of learning in which we assumed the unit would teach students what they didn't know and take them from a more confused to less confused state (Dewey, 1938). Although the package was more attractive, we were still developing the curriculum and delivering it to kids.

The tensions we felt in our use of theme units remained vague until we realized that we had changed our actions as teachers but not our belief systems. Our movement away from the belief that we needed to "cover" topics began when we examined the ways in which we go about learning and inquiry in our own lives. Just as our assumptions about reading and writing changed once researchers looked at how people actually read and write outside of school, so our beliefs were challenged once we asked ourselves how *we* lived as inquirers in the world.

Exploring Our Understandings about Inquiry

One of our first insights was that inquiry is a process of both problem posing and problem solving (Freire, 1985). Inquiry involves becoming immersed in a particular topic, having time to explore that topic in order to generate questions that are significant to the learner, and systematically investigating those questions. Educators have acted on the assumption that research begins with a question. Students are asked to immediately identify what

they know and what they want to know about a topic and then quickly choose a subtopic and gather facts. They are able to stay close to what they already know and believe. Although they may end up with interesting information, they are not pushed to consider questions of broader and deeper significance because there isn't time to explore and find those questions. Inquiry is not just a matter of finding a problem, but of having time to find a problem *significant* for that learner.

We knew from our own inquiry that finding the question often is the most difficult aspect of our research and occurs quite late in the process. We begin with an area of interest that we explore, and the specific question grows out of that exploration rather than preceding it. Sometimes we do begin with questions, but those questions change, and we discover new questions and issues through our explorations (see Figure 2.8).

Creating a visual model of curriculum as inquiry allows us to see that inquiry is an entire process that cuts across three knowledge sources-personal, system, and signs (Harste, 1993)-just as reading is an entire process that cuts across the cueing systems. It is not separated into different subject areas with separate activities, facts, procedures, and concepts to be added up to cover the topic.

At the heart of inquiry is *personal and social knowing,* the knowledge that learners bring from their personal experiences of living in the world and being part of specific cultural groups and social contexts. Inquiry can only begin with what learners already know, perceive, and feel. All voices need to be heard, including those with whom teachers might disagree. The inquiry process allows learners to reflect, critique, and take further action, but they need to begin with their current beliefs.

The second knowledge source is the *knowledge systems* such as history, biology, and economics. These knowledge systems were constructed by humans as a way to structure knowledge to make sense of the world, just as grammar emerged as the structural system of language so that humans could communicate. They developed because a group of scholars shared a set of questions and a domain of intellectual inquiry and over time created a set of questions about the world, ways of researching those questions, and a continuously evolving body of knowledge.

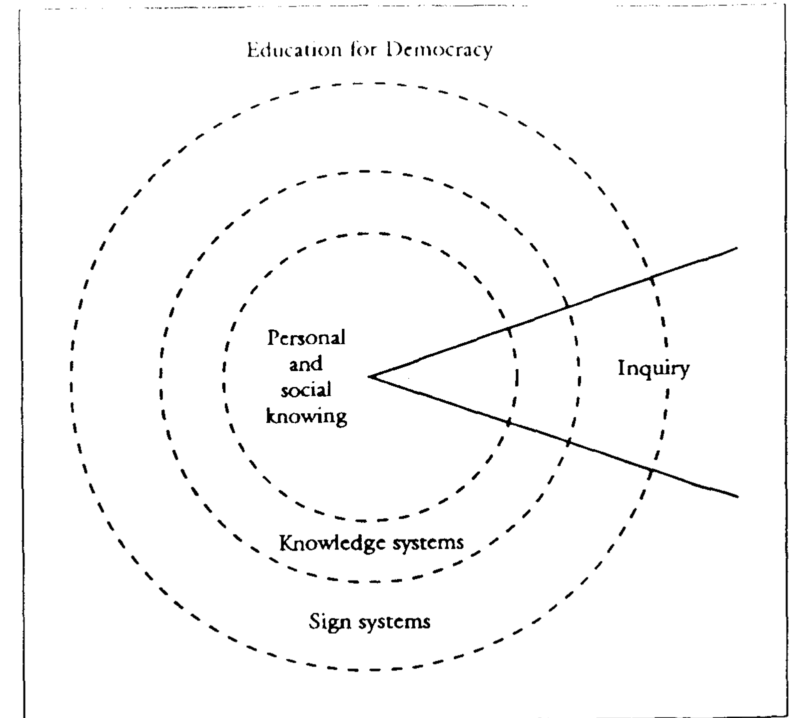

FIGURE 2.8. *Curriculum as inquiry (Short & Harste, 1996).*

We see two major differences between knowledge systems and the content areas as traditionally taught in schools and universities. The first concerns what is considered significant. The content areas in schools have taken the broader knowledge systems and reduced them to isolated skills, facts, and concepts. What is significant about knowledge systems, however, is not the specific pieces of information but the alternative perspectives each system provides about the world. Each knowledge system looks at the world through a different lens and asks a different set of questions about the same event. These systems also provide us with different methods of research and different tools to use in those investigations.

The second major difference is that content areas are taught as separate entities. Instead of teaching each area separately and developing science units and social studies units to cover particu-

lar lads and concept,, inquiry involves the simultaneous use of multiple knowledge systems. The focus is on bringing multiple perspectives from within and across many knowledge systems to an issue or topic, not on using the topic to teach a particular subject area.

The third knowledge source is sign systems, which are alternative ways of creating and communicating meaning with others, such as language, mathematics, music, art, movement, and drama (Eisner, 1982; Leland & Harste, 1994). All of these systems are basic ways of making and sharing meaning, but they allow humans to know and communicate different meanings about the world. Outside of school, multiple sign systems are commonly used simultaneously. 1h schools, however, one system at a time is taught, often separate from the thematic focus of the classroom. Inquiry involves having all sign systems available so that students can use the ones that best meet their own purposes at any point in time (Berghoff, 1993; Clyde, 1994). This realization has led us to question the writing workshop because of its exclusive emphasis on students constructing meaning through language. We are interested in a studio time during which students can select the sign systems most appropriate for their meanings and their inquiries.

Through inquiry, students come to new understandings that are temporary rather than final answers. Students do not cover the topic; instead, they begin a lifelong inquiry, and so their understandings and questions continue to grow and deepen in complexity over time. We believe that progress in inquiry is marked by new questions to ask, because answers last only until learners have time to ask new questions and until more compelling theories are generated. Learners don't inquire to eliminate alternatives, but to find more functional understandings, create diversity, and broaden their thinking. They don't go from more confused to less confused; they move on to new questions that are more complex and reflect deeper insights. These questions cannot be framed ahead of time by teachers and experts: students have to be involved from the beginning. Educators have learned how to build curriculum for and *from* students; the challenge they now face is how to negotiate curriculum *with* students.

Inquiry involves a major shift in thinking. Instead of using the theme as a rationale for teaching reading, writing, and content, the knowledge systems and sign systems become tools for exploring and researching students' questions. The major focus is on inquiry itself, not the traditional subject area distinctions that have dominated the curriculum through both textbook and theme unit approaches. This shift involves using many of the same materials and activities that were part of theme units but for different purposes and within a different theoretical frame. This shift is a difficult one to make, and we continuously find ourselves moving back into previous ways of thinking. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide specific descriptions of classrooms based in inquiry, some of our initial explorations in classrooms are described in Copenhaver, 1993; Short & Armstrong, 1993; Crawford et al., 1994; Short & Harste, 1996. .

Education for Democracy

This model of curriculum as inquiry indicates that the pragmatic context of the school and classroom makes a difference in inquiry. The classroom contexts and social relationships that most powerfully support inquiry are those based in education for democracy (Edelsky, 1994). Inquiry is theoretically based on collaborative relationships, not the hierarchies of control common in most schools. While our long-term goal is to work toward changes in the overall structures of schools, in the short term we have worked at changing our own classrooms and our relationships with students. Because education for democracy is essential to inquiry, the phrase "collaborative inquiry" becomes redundant because inquiry is at heart a collaborative process.

Pat Shannon (1993) defines a democracy as a system in which people participate meaningfully in the decisions that affect their lives. It involves a participation and negotiation among equals in which participants are not just given a choice among options determined by others behind the scenes, but are part of the thinking behind the scenes.

We believe that education lot democracy involves these es sential properties: (l) assuming that people are naturally inquisitive; (2) realizing that (lie significance of learning lies both in *what you do* and *why' you* do it; (3) understanding that accepting a new alternative does not mean devaluing the contributions of current and past beliefs; (4) realizing that each individual has a personal responsibility for critiquing and envisioning; (5) taking responsibility for problem posing; and (6) valuing and seeking diversity, not sameness.

We are particularly concerned with valuing and seeking diversity so that difference is seen not as a problem to be solved, but as offering new potentials for a group of learners. The role of the school in society has often been viewed as producing a model citizen. We find ourselves in disagreement not with the goal of producing contributing citizens, but with the belief that this "model" citizen is monocultural, with particular characteristics that are the same for everyone. This view of a model citizen led initially to a "melting pot approach" in which schools made no adjustments to accommodate student backgrounds but insisted that all individuals be "ready" for schools. The curriculum was predetermined and students did all of the adjusting or they were left behind (Banks, 1991).

In some schools, the current focus on diversity has led to changes, most notably the willingness to take into account the different life experiences that students bring with them to school. Starting from students' own life experiences, building on these experiences, and recognizing their cultural diversity has increasingly become part of the curriculum. While culture has been defined most frequently in terms of ethnicity or race, we believe that culture also includes gender, socioeconomic class, religion, language, type of community, and so on-the many ways in which we live and think in the world.

Diversity has been recognized not only in terms of the life experiences students bring to school, but also in how they learn. In some schools, teachers have adapted their ways of teaching and their expectations for how students will go about their learning. Students are encouraged to express themselves through art and drama, for example, and not just language. They are also able to function as bilingual learners, using the

language that best fits their needs and thinking for particular learning events.

The valuing of diversity currently breaks down, however, when outcomes are considered. Schools recognize and use the differences that exist between students to shape the same model citizen. Students are led to believe that schools value who they are, but then they are forced toward a mainstream model of a citizen; the valuing of diversity is used merely as a way to begin the conversation, but then students are funneled down to the same standards. Diversity is fine as *long as* students can speak standard English, write a persuasive essay, and pass the standardized tests. Although democracy is rooted in diversity, schools aren't comfortable with that diversity because it builds on strengths, and schools can't always predict what the variations will be or determine the exact outcomes, leaving educators feeling nervous and uncomfortable.

Schools have recognized and accepted diversity but have not respected or acted on difference as essential to learning and democracy. We believe that it is difference, not sameness, that makes a democracy strong. Through building on the different ways of thinking and living in the world that students bring to the classroom, schools can open new possibilities for those students' lives. Everyone's strengths need to be used to create new possibilities in classrooms. The focus should not be on compromise or majority rule, but on attending to and acting on difference in order to build a true democracy that values everyone's contribution and supports each student in developing his or her own potentials.

Taking Control of Our Inquiry as Educators

These change stories about our inquiries as educators are not meant to reflect an either/or position of wrong versus right approaches to curriculum. We do not believe that we have "arrived" at some kind of superior understanding. Along with other educators, our understandings are always in process. We do not take the deficit view that educators must make changes in their teaching because something is wrong with that teaching. Change is the result of a stance of continuous inquiry, and we view our-

elves and other teachers as professional learners.

For us, these change stories reflect the examination and transformation of beliefs and actions that are a constant part of our lives as teachers and learners. These stories are a reminder that we need to examine critically *both* our beliefs and actions. We need to pay attention to the tensions we feel about our teaching and take time to explore them. While most of our inquiry will involve examining our actions and exploring new potential actions based on our current beliefs, we remain open to the possibility that we may also need to explore different belief systems. We may need to take a leap to new beliefs and practices, so we continually critique our thinking and actions and acknowledge our feelings of tension and our sense that something is wrong.

There is great danger in believing that we have found the best way to teach and therefore becoming complacent. While most educators begin the change process by changing their teaching practice and noting what occurs, that change often leads to more substantial changes as their beliefs are challenged. If they believe that these first steps are all they need to take, they may miss the opportunity for inquiry that will lead them to even more powerful understandings. These change stories have made us more aware of where we are in our own thinking and provided us with strategies for continuing to push our thinking. By taking the perspective that curriculum is inquiry, we find ourselves in a state of continual learning and growth.

The stories of change also highlight the forces emanating from the publishing industry, from much of educational research, and from existing school structures to reform curriculum in ways that do not fundamentally change how schooling is done. These forces work hard to convince educators that adding a practice and a new set of materials constitute substantial change and reform in schools. The writing workshop is thus reduced to a set of precise steps for "how to do writing process." Literature approaches become a new set of literature anthologies with literature logs (workbooks in disguise) and cooperative learning groups or whole-class discussions. Literature circles become simply a replacement for reading-ability groups and a better way to teach reading, rather than collaborative inquiry by readers on life itself. Inquiry-based curriculum is reduced to asking students what they want to study and setting up a sequence of research steps while maintaining the dominance of traditional subject areas.

These forces make it *easy* to maintain the status quo and convince educators that they do not need to critically examine and question their beliefs as well as their practices. There is a need for teachers to seek wider options and not rely solely on the programs packaged and delivered to them. Many times the best of the current knowledge in the field is put together to create a set of procedures, activities, materials, and training workshops that is packaged for delivery. These programs are appealing because theoretically most educators agree with much of what they contain. The problem is that the packages close down alternatives-shut down the inquiry of educators. They represent a movement away from, not toward, difference. Educators need to control their own inquiry so that they can ask questions that really matter in their lives as educators, just as students need to ask questions that are significant in their lives.

We are incredibly nervous about inquiry. We have come to believe that curriculum as inquiry fundamentally questions how schooling is done. It changes our relationships with students, colleagues, families, the community, other educators, and society. It changes how we view knowledge and the role of knowledge systems and sign systems in schools.

Returning to Miss Elizabeth and her kite, we are convinced that we can't let go of that kite and go back to our comfortable rockers. We have to follow the kite to make sure we don't lose our vision of a democratic education. We have to act and work toward that vision, not release it and let it escape. Instead of letting go of her kite, Miss Elizabeth needs to learn to fly it.

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