

Many Voices

One crucial role of the Center for Education is to bring together the many voices of the schools, of the classrooms, and of the community. This issue of CenterPiece recognizes and celebrates the power of the many voices we encounter every day in our work with children and teachers in the schools, and with parents and leaders in the community. Highlights of this issue include articles about Vivian Paley and Deborah Meier, who will both be speaking at Rice University in the upcoming months. We invite anyone interested in children and schools to come hear them speak.

We also have excerpts from our Houston Annenberg Challenge Evaluation, a report that brought together a talented and insightful mix of methodology and expertise.

Ron Sass Named Harry C. and Olga Keith Wiess Professor of Natural Sciences



This fall, Ron Sass, Center for Education Co-director and professor of Chemistry and Education, was appointed Harry C. and Olga Keith Wiess Professor of Natural Sciences in the School of Natural Sciences at Rice University. Dr. Sass adds this honor to the many distinguished awards he has received during the course of his academic career, including the highly-prized Brown Teaching Award (four times), the Minnie Stevens Piper Professorship (1999), the Salgo-Noren Distinguished Professor Award, The Rice University Award of Highest Merit and the Rice University Alumni Association Meritorious Service Award

(2001). Dr. Sass is also serving as chair of the department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Rice.

Dr. Sass' research focus for the past dozen years has been the emission of methane and other greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. The international science community recognizes his research group as one of the very best and most productive laboratories in process level research, numerical modeling, and mitigation strategies of trace-gas emissions to the atmosphere from rice agroecosystems.

In recognition of his research, Dr. Sass was one of five American scientists and economists invited to participate in the International Agriculture Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Mitigation Project held in Washington, D.C., from December 2 to 3, 2002. This project is conducted under the Non-CO2 GHG Network which was established by the International Energy Agency's GHG R&D Programme, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the European Commission Environment Directorate-General to facilitate dialogue between experts working on non-CO2 GHG, including emissions, abatement and modeling. The objective of the meeting was to develop estimates of the feasibility and cost of the potential mitigation of agricultural greenhouse gas emissions, especially those related to rice, ruminants, and soils.

As Co-director for the Center for Education, Dr. Sass generously shares this expertise with children and teachers.

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Vivian Paley Will Give Keynote Address at the School Literacy & Culture Project's Fourth Annual Miniconference

By Bernie Mathes, Project Director, School Literacy & Culture Project

Vivian Gussin Paley, author, kindergarten teacher, and MacArthur Award Winner, will be the keynote speaker at the 4th annual miniconference of the School Literacy and Culture Project on Saturday, January 18, 2003. Ms. Paley's groundbreaking work uses the stories young children dictate to their teacher and dramatize with their classmates. Through this deceptively simple process, teachers and children around the globe are exploring the opportunities such stories provide for creativity, community building, and literacy learning. The Classroom Storytelling Project of the School Literacy and Culture Project is based on Vivian Paley's work, which was brought to Houston by Patsy Cooper, project founder and author of [When Stories Come to School: Telling, Writing, and Performing Stories with Young Children](#). Dr. Cooper will also speak at the miniconference.



Beginning with her first book, *White Teacher*, Vivian Paley has shared her own reflections on pivotal issues of childhood and teaching: what role does race play in creating a quality classroom, what is the responsibility of the teacher and the school to create a democratic environment, how do young children create meaning in their school lives? Vivian Paley's books provide a model for teachers who struggle to understand the children they teach and to create a fair environment for all children. By audio taping children's conversations with each other and with her, Paley carefully examines children's understandings of their world, exploring how children exclude each other from play, how they analyze power (Is the tooth fairy more powerful than Santa Claus?), how they make sense of the inexplicable. (Bad guys must be punished somehow, so the children declare that they don't have birthdays.)

Vivian Gussin Paley has published eleven books, including *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, in which she tells how, in consultation with her own and older students, she decides to institute a rule that no child can exclude another from play. To quote Paley, "Turning sixty, I am more aware of the voices of exclusion in the classroom. 'You can't play' suddenly seems too overwhelming and harsh, resounding like a slap from wall to wall. How casually one child determines the fate of another." Through many of her books Paley considers the role of the outsider, the children or adults who don't fit easily into their current environment. In *Kwaanza and Me*, Paley courageously challenges one of her deepest beliefs, the value of racially diverse classrooms, as she talks with African American students and parents who felt like outsiders in multiracial settings.

Above all, Paley seeks fairness in her classrooms. "We can be known only in the unfolding of our unique stories within the context of everyday events. Our goal is more than fantasy. It is fairness. Every child enters the classroom in a vehicle propelled by that child alone, at a particular pace and for a particular purpose. Here is where the fair study of children begins and where teaching becomes a moral act." (*The Boy Who Would Be A Helicopter*, 1990)

Winner of the 1998 American Book Award for Lifetime Achievement, Vivian Paley shows us what teaching can, and should, be. At the January miniconference, Paley will discuss the role of fantasy play in children's literacy learning. Educators from Houston and London will lead breakout sessions on literacy and storytelling for both preschool and elementary teachers.

Please contact us by phone at (713) 348-5333 or by email at slc@rice.edu if you are interested in attending the conference.



The School Writing Project Embraces the ‘Seriousness of Play’

by Priscilla Fish, Associate Director, School Writing Project

We played hooky. We didn’t teach class that Friday; we didn’t fix supper for family. Thanks to the Center for Education, Terri Goodman and I were in Washington D.C. for the Coalition of Essential Schools Fall Forum. What an odd sensation for two teachers, required to sign in and out of each day and each meeting at school, to be cut loose. To be trusted.

We followed our natural School Writing Project tendency to participate actively in the conference and to talk heatedly about problems in schools related to the growing pressure to test. We got excited about ideas to create community among faculty and among students in smaller settings. We traded ideas about how our class might take a new shape in the weeks to come and what insights we particularly wanted to share with our colleagues at home.

This was play – our active response to the freedom to interact, to gather, to sample, without having to take a test or, worse yet, give a test. Our recess was invigorating as we realized again the truth of Camus’ insight that “man aspires to the seriousness of play.”

Within the safety of this time and place set apart, we could talk with people we had just met about issues too dangerous to discuss openly in our real world: “What does it mean for people of one culture to be educating people of another culture? How can a teacher, in sympathizing with a student’s hard life, enforce that young person’s feeling of inadequacy? How can we have a conversation not about racism, but about race, about how race plays itself out in our school.”

In a workshop entitled “A Common Intent to Understand,” directors and teachers from a group of Boston pilot schools led activities to encourage these questions, to challenge and deepen our understanding of race and diversity.

“Lean into discomfort,” Manuel Fernandez said, reminding us that for some students, discomfort is a constant from the moment they leave home in the morning. In schools where we celebrate diversity with food, fashion and festivals, we must begin to deepen the conversation. But how?

“Interrupt,” Fernandez said. “We tell kids all the time they need to take a risk. How can *we* not take that risk? If we don’t, we stymie our own development.”

These Boston people were too trustworthy, however, not to remind us of the more complicated world outside this conference where many people do not welcome the person who questions the assumption, who dares to deepen the talk.

“Don’t try this alone,” they warned. “You need a support group of colleagues. Don’t try this in personal conversations. You need first to create a safe structure for the conversation.”

Within the safe framework of this workshop, we shed our cloak of cozy confidence that good intentions could effect change. Because the participants respected each other, no one pretended simple solutions. As Deborah Meier, vice chair emeritus of the Coalition of Essential Schools, reminds us, “Living without answers is unsettling, of course, but when we’re not required to immediately pretend to master uncertainty, and probably only then, we can make the slow intellectual leaps required of all children today. The trustful relationship with the world that this acceptance of uncertainty allows is at the heart of learning.” What we ask children to do, we must do first.

And so, as this *CenterPiece* goes to the press, Connie Floyd, director of Cultural Conversations, and Sehba Sarwar, a veteran School Writing Project teacher and now director of Voices Breaking Boundaries, are preparing to join School Writing Project teachers for our fall reunion meeting focused on recognizing and affirming cultural differences within our schools. Given the trust that comes from our shared experience within the School Writing Project and the experience of both Connie and Sehba in encouraging people of diverse histories and cultures to find a personal voice and to listen with more appreciation, too, we will have a memorable meeting.

This respect for diversity, for letting it play itself out in the classroom, provided the keynote for another rich workshop at the Fall Forum. Using Shakespeare as subject and impromptu performance as strategy, presenter Connie Borab began with a principle key to School Writing Project work: “I believe that as I tap into the students’ expertise on their lives and craft the connections to themes in the literature, students

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In Search of Tomorrow In Children's Books

By Patricia Cooper, Consulting Director, School Literacy & Culture Project

When my three-year-old niece, Una, arrived for a Thanksgiving visit, my college freshman daughter greeted her, "Una, how are you? I haven't seen you in a long time." Naturally, Una asked why. My daughter answered, "Well, I don't live here anymore. I go to college now." Una looked up at her and somewhat knowingly sighed, "We're all growing up."

Given the inevitable end of childhood, it seems only fitting, if not essential, that growing up be a dominant theme of children's literature. That's the good news. The bad news, of course, is when purveyors of children's literature insist on literature for the sake of lessons learned, but without regard for literary merit.

No doubt that Una knows about growing up because "You're a big girl now" is the background noise in any toddler's life. But she also knows about growing up because she is an inveterate consumer of children's books, from which she and other young "readers" learn that all children ("except one" to quote J. M. Barrie on Peter Pan) grow up. Whether they've celebrated a birthday in *Little Gorilla* or started school in *Dog Goes to School*, made friends in *Play With Me*, or merely said goodnight in *Goodnight Moon*, they have absorbed the message that life is about nothing if not moving on.

Given the inevitable end of childhood, it seems only fitting, if not essential, that growing up be a dominant theme of children's literature. That's the good news. The bad news, of course, is when purveyors of children's literature insist on literature for the sake of lessons learned, but without regard for literary merit. Worse is when children's books come under attack for so-called inappropriate content without consideration of whether these books, offensive content and all, have the potential to guide readers from childhood to adulthood. Books for adolescents, from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to *Catcher in the Rye* to *The Outsiders*, offer well-known challenges to the system, but books for younger children have attracted their fair share of

attention, too. In recent days, *the Harry Potter* series has been criticized (and like its older counterparts banned in some school districts) for its promotion of witchcraft and fantasy. In 1964, *Where the Wild Things Are*, written for three to six-year-olds, stirred up a lot of controversy because of Max's rude behavior towards his mother, not to mention his threat to the family dog. Reviewer A. O. Scott sympathizes with the 12-year-old heroine's resistance to the fairy tale ending of most children's books in Donna Tartt's *The Little Friend* because they sacrifice character to closure. "There is, after all," Scott writes, "a vast, wholesome body of juvenile literature whose purposes is to ease the passage of the protagonist (and, by implication, the reader) into the flat pastures of adulthood." (*New York Times Book Review*, 2002). I couldn't agree more.

So, mindful of the historical pitfalls in asking too little or too much of children's literature, I should hesitate to admit that in my teacher education classes I regularly debate the literary merit of books or the appropriateness of their content for young readers. I don't. It seems to me that future teachers should consider the difference between Judy Blume and E. B. White, between *Harry the Dirty Dog* and the Naughty Naughty Pet series (don't ask), even if banality and bathroom humor well beyond the potty years may not actually harm development (though I'd hate to have to argue how they help). But the books which I actively campaign against squandering school

But books which insist upon laughing at, not with, childhood, books which provide a relentless parade of obtuse and even cruel adults, books which make growing up less and less an escape from the powerlessness of childhood, do their readers no favor. These books will not help children avoid the "flat pastures" of adulthood. They will only direct them there faster for fear of the alternative.

money or children's time on are those which compromise a safe passage to adulthood. There is such a thing as too much uncertainty and

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How Did Houston Annenberg Challenge Reforms Affect Children's Learning?

By Linda McNeil, Codirector

The Annenberg Challenge for Public School Reform matched \$20 million of Annenberg dollars to more than \$40 million in local contributions to support five years of school reform efforts in Houston. The key ingredients of the Annenberg Challenge were teacher learning, breaking down isolation between schools and their communities, and making the learning environment more personal so that teachers know well the students they teach. Evaluation researchers from the University of Texas, the University of Houston and Rice University documented the numerous reform activities. The Rice team studied four reforming schools in depth.

Our evaluation was guided by a single question: how have the reforms affected children's learning?

Every school's reform efforts present a very complex story. To understand that complexity, we knew we needed a team. We needed researchers with years of personal experience in schools, researchers with varied expertise, researchers who could create within the research team the kind of learning community Annenberg was hoping to foster in its reforming schools. Eileen Coppola brought expertise in school administration and organization as well as an understanding of faculty cultures and technology. Judy Radigan, a psychologist, and Ruth Silva, whose expertise is in teaching and curriculum, kept the focus on students and the ways they were experiencing reform. Linguists and second language researchers enriched our understanding of the

diverse understandings children have of schooling. And Elnora Harcombe's work in the Model Science Lab with teachers' learning in science added to the team the capacity to look in depth at a school subject of critical importance. For each of our four case study schools, we were able to look inside the school – and inside classrooms – to build the record of reform activities. Then, working as a collaborative team, we were able to see the reforms in the context of the big picture issues – funding, district organization, state policies, community assets and cultures – and at the same time keep pushing the analysis to our central question: *How are the reforms affecting children's learning?*

Researchers new to the Rice Center for Education and the schools they studied are profiled on pages six and seven of this issue.

What did we learn? What can these reforming schools teach us?

- *The Annenberg-funded schools show teachers' hunger for professional community and professional voice, for connection to research and to national practice in their fields;*
- *They show teachers' capacity for leadership and ingenuity – most schools' reforms were designed and carried out by teachers.*
- *They show how eager teachers are for a workplace that honors and enhances their role in the intellectual life of the school.*
- *One of these schools shows what productive learning can take place when there is congruence between the*

educational philosophy internal to the school and the district's purposes for the school.

- *We also learned that reform models that emphasize the processes of reform over the substance of schooling have very limited potential to change teaching and learning.*
- *Reform makes little progress when it does not have the capacity to redress years of unequal funding, when it does not have whole-hearted district support, when it does not connect at a deep level with the people and cultures of its community.*
- *Reform activities that are not grounded in a deep understanding of the content of schooling and in the ways children learn are unlikely to improve children's learning.*
- *Localized reforms that truly center on the children in a school, that draw on the resources of those children's families and community, that build from teachers' growing knowledge about their subjects and their children lose much of their power if they are mandated to conform to standardized schooling. Debbie Meier writes powerfully about this conflict in the New York City small schools in *In Schools We Trust*. We found, as she did, that*

. . . we were often in awe of the extraordinary hard work – extra work – that teachers and principals were willing to exert in order to take full advantage of these new funds – and the permission – for changing their schools.

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Houston Annenberg Challenge Evaluation:



Eileen Coppola, Ed.D., Harvard University

Eileen Coppola focuses on improving the quality of public education through the study of policy, administration, and school organization. She has recently conducted research on how schools create cultures that promote teacher learning, and on state accountability and testing policies. Dr. Coppola has trained as a school and district level administrator, specializing in the educational issues of urban areas, and worked as a teacher and technology coordinator in New York City. She is a 2002-2003 Spencer Foundation Post-doctoral Fellow. She is the author of Computers, Pedagogy, and the Culture of School, Teachers College Press (forthcoming).



Judy Radigan, Ph.D., University of Houston

Judy Radigan is devoted to researching the lives of children and equity for them in the public education system. She is currently a research coordinator at Child Advocates and a research consultant for an instructional technology grant at University of Houston. She is also a lecturer in Education at Rice University and in Cultural Studies at the University of Houston. Judy has over 20 years of teaching experience in the public schools, and has won several awards for outstanding teaching. She has worked on the research team for the Spencer Foundation Study "Achievement Factors among Best Latino, Asian and Anglo-American High School Students in Houston: An Ethnographic Study of Learning Environments and Strategies across Language and Cultures."

Longview High School*

By Eileen Coppola

At Longview High School, five years of Annenberg-funded reform have fostered development of a school culture that recognizes the fundamental importance of strong communities at all levels of the school's work, including students, teachers, and parents.

For students, an advisory group that meets weekly throughout their three years on the main campus provides a stable, small community of peers and a specific adult in the school whom they come to know well. The advisory's curriculum includes discussion of issues facing teenagers, such as friendships, peer pressure, drinking and drugs, and sexuality, as well as ongoing support for success at school.

A summer program called "Camp SOAR" knits strong ties between Longview and the community it serves. For a month each summer, it serves families of middle-school aged children by providing fun and educational programs for no charge. Computer courses for adults are offered at night in the technology lab, providing opportunities for parents or others to build work and personal skills. Each spring, an exciting multicultural fair offers visitors a taste of the great variety of national cultures at Longview, through performances, crafts, food, costume, and sharing. In the special Capstone program, a voluntary project undertaken by seniors, members of the community become part of the work of students and attend presentations of their projects. All these programs draw school and community closer together.

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Port High School*

By Judy Radigan

As a reforming school, Port High School began and ended its reform efforts under Annenberg dependent on its internal faculty capital and the energies of its principals and teachers. Grant funds, cross-school activities, and related programs and events provided by Annenberg helped at the margins of this school but did not help this school move off the margins to become a school with a strong academic purpose and capacity.

The two programs funded by Annenberg, Critical Friends Groups (CFG's) and Project Re-Connect, made contributions to the work of the teachers and to the already concerned members of the school community. CFG's offered opportunities to have serious discussions about students and their academic needs across the campuses of the feeder pattern served by Annenberg. Additionally, alliances formed in CFG's at Port High School encouraged teachers to come together to propose and develop new academies that will be in place for the 2002-2003 school year. The teachers who were already strong academically were given greater leadership roles and organizational support under Annenberg.

Project Re-Connect enabled a determined group of parents in the feeder pattern of Port to become more comfortable with the English language so that they could communicate with their children's teachers and principals as they met in classes. They saw the school as a source of learning for themselves and their children.

Thus far, however, Project Re-Connect, while helping the school become a more valued resource for parents, has not managed to help the school see parents as a vital resource to the school.

**School names are pseudonyms.*

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What Did We Learn From These Reforming Schools?



Ruth Silva, Ph.D., University of Houston

Ruth Silva is a Visiting Assistant Professor at the U.S. Department of Education Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence at the University of Houston. Her research interests include critical methodology, post-structuralist theories in teacher roles in the classroom, and instructional supervision. Dr. Silva has worked on the research team for the Spencer Foundation study "Achievement Factors Among Best Latino, Asian and Anglo-American High School Students in Houston: An Ethnographic Study of Learning Environments and Strategies across Language and Cultures." She has been a teacher and school administrator in Australia.



Elnora Harcombe, Ph.D., Yale University

Elnora Harcombe, scientist and science educator, directs the Model Science Laboratory Project for retraining urban middle school science teachers, at the Center for Education at Rice University. She is the author of the newly released Science Teaching/Science Learning: Constructivist Learning in Urban Classrooms, Teachers College Press, 2001. Dr. Harcombe is nationally recognized for her research which links teachers' learning to constructivist thinking in the sciences and for creating a model program, including a year-long residency, for engaging teachers in learning aimed at increasing children's understanding.

Knight High School*

By Ruth Silva

Knight High School's contextual arrangement is that of a professional community of learners. Within this community it is committed to creating a personalized learning environment for each student in partnership with the community within and without the school.

Knight High School (KHS) is a school that began life with a carefully researched picture of what it wanted education to mean and be for the students in its care. It began life along a reforming path. This path was grounded in, and sustained by, a well-defined set of core beliefs. To support these beliefs they sought and gained funds from a grantor whose imperatives closely matched their own philosophy of action. These combined beliefs acted as scaffolds which successive and different individuals put into action, for example, the change in leadership in the fifth year of its existence. Although there were changes in faculty and staff during this time, the change in leadership was crucial. It could have either facilitated the schools progress along the reform path, or changed its direction altogether. The fact of the existence of a strongly-held set of core beliefs which gave KHS its reforming character, and the fact that these beliefs were supported by the district as much as by the school-based faculty, were strong influences on the new principal. Furthermore, the presence and nature of Houston Annenberg Challenge (HAC) funding in the school's reform efforts and its

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Science Instruction

By Elnora Harcombe

My part on the Houston Annenberg review team was to observe science instruction in several schools to determine the impact of the reforms on student understanding of science. I visited many classrooms where the teachers were working hard to engage students in learning science, as shown in these two observations:

The students in this seventh grade class were enthusiastically drawing and cutting out life-sized representations of internal organs in the study of the human body. Each group created a different system to be combined with systems created by other groups on a large paper "Barbie Doll." The groups were eager to show off their work. All was very impressive. I began talking to the students and asking questions.

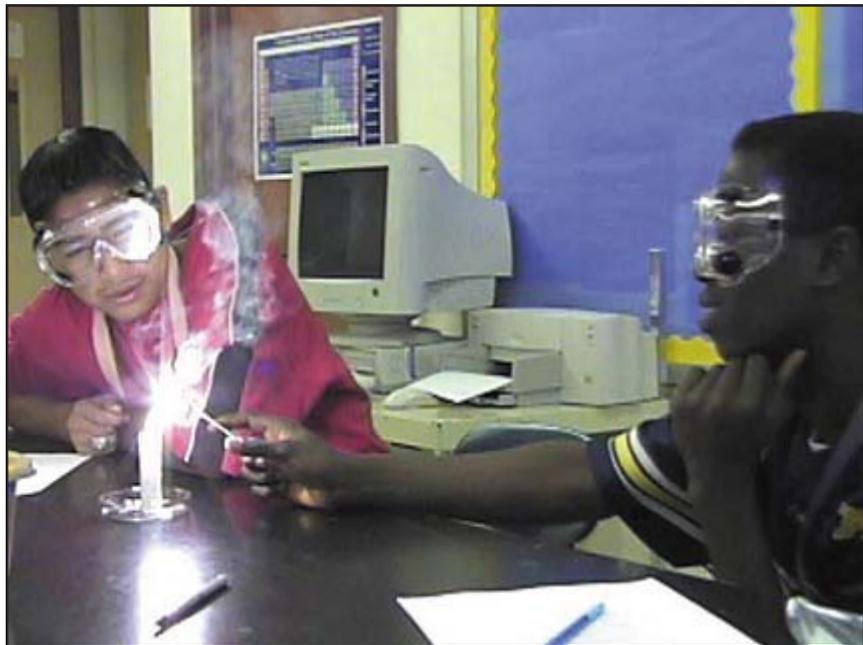
The students entered the room smiling and eager. The class had already been introduced to substitution reactions and the activity scale. Now they were going to try different substances to see how it made sense. The pace was easy going, the atmosphere invited questions and discussions, and everyone seemed engaged. Students were allowed to make their own discoveries and then reconfirm them through exchanges of ideas with the full class. Students readily explained things to their peers. The teacher always provided additional information about commercial uses for the reaction. Student comments indicated that they understood and could apply the concept of substitution reactions.

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Integrated Physics and Chemistry Focus of New Model Science Lab at Lee High School

By Elnora Harcombe, Director, Model Science Lab

The Model Science Laboratory Project is pleased to announce that we have expanded into the high school arena. We have begun an exciting year with four teachers in a second Model Lab at Lee High School called the “pH Lab,” or Science Partners for Houston. The professional opportunities are somewhat different from the middle school program. These high school resident teachers are selected from attendees of a semester course at the Rice University Center for Biological and Environmental Nanotechnology (CBEN). Each evening session combines a review of basic science concepts, which are then utilized by Rice researchers when they explain their projects and the future implications of nanotechnology. Teachers in the



Students at Lee High School’s new pH Lab burn magnesium to demonstrate synthesis reaction.

What IS Nanotechnology?

- Materials stronger and more flexible than steel made out of carbon;
- Drug delivery devices that target cancer cells without side effects;
- New materials that help bones heal and replace teeth;
- The next Industrial Revolution.

(Center for Biological and Environmental Technology)

class are eligible to apply for summer month-long internships in nano research labs on the Rice campus. Thus, teachers who enter the high school pH Lab as residents have already had extensive experiences in nanosciences.

The pH Lab is focusing on the 9th grade science course, Integrated Physics and Chemistry (IPC), because this is a gatekeeper course in the schools. In most of our city schools, around half of the students fail IPC. This causes retention of the students in the ninth grade and appears to be a major factor in plummeting graduation rates: only 46% of the entering freshmen stay to graduate. Furthermore, the current freshmen will be required to retain their IPC knowledge until they pass the state mandated graduation exam that will be administered during their junior year. This exit exam will likely cause a further drastic decline in graduation rates.

The teachers in the pH Lab are exploring alternative methods of conveying the science concepts, defined by the state and district curriculum documents, that will be more effective than the lecture and directed activity format that is commonly in use. Inquiry methods are not often employed in high school science classes because there is so much content “to be covered.” This first pilot group of pH Lab teachers has grappled with the difficulty of reorienting their perspective on teaching and learning. They are being rewarded for their efforts by enthusiasm and an increased barrage of questions from their students, as well as indications of improved learning.

We thank the Gordon and Mary Cain Foundation for encouragement of this high school effort. Our extension of the Model Science Laboratory Project is funded by a special donation from the Gordon and Mary Cain Foundation and a National Science Foundation grant to CBEN, as well as cost sharing by Rice University Center for Education and teacher course stipends from Houston Independent School District HU-LINC grant.



Science as a Way of Thinking in the School Science Project

By Wallace Dominey, Director, School Science Project

As everyone knows, learning the 3 R's, reading, riting (sic), and rithmetic (sic) is a necessary part of our educational system. Many argue that the primary function of our public education system should be to teach the 3 R's. But something appears to be missing. Examine the 3R's carefully. There it is, at the end of the 3R's: the 's stands for science.

Although all subjects add value to public education, science is perhaps the most essential, and under-appreciated component, of public education. Science is not essential because it comprises a great body of facts; instead, science is essential because it is, as Carl Sagan argued, a "way of thinking."

We often hear today that public school students lack "critical thinking skills." In fact most of these skills are "scientific thinking skills" and such skills are best learned in the context of science instruction. Science helps us understand the world around us through the steps of observation, hypothesis, experimentation, and conclusion. Science teaches logic and reasoning and a healthy skepticism for conclusions that are not supported by facts.

Without scientific thinking skills, reading, writing and arithmetic are mere tools in search of intelligent application. Readers can be misled by false causations, writers can produce irrational ramblings, and computations can occur without consequence. Our citizens must be fluent not only in the tools of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but also in science as a way of thinking. Absent science thinking skills, we are less able to make intelligent decisions in our every day life and we are less able to understand an increasingly scientific and technological world.

Should I eat irradiated fruits? Am I more at risk from West Nile virus at certain times of the day? What type of vehicle should I drive to maximize my personal safety or to conserve oil reserves? Should I call the psychic hotline? Whose stance on global warning has greater validity? Should I vote for politicians who oppose stem cell research? Our citizenry (and leaders) need scientific thinking skills in order to evaluate the science-related concerns that increasingly surround us.

Yet, we have failed to provide public education that fosters scientific thinking. The National

Science Board Subcommittee report, "Science & Engineering Indicators - 2002" indicates that 70% of Americans lack a clear understanding of the scientific process

(<http://www.nsf.gov/sbe/srs/seind02/c7/c7h.htm>). The report further documents the alarmingly high numbers of Americans who accept pseudoscience as truth, e.g., astrology, alien UFO's, and ESP/psychic powers.

One of the principles of a democratic society is an educated populace that is not subject to quackery or fanaticism. Can we really afford to have a generation of Americans make decisions based on psychic readings or astrology in place of a careful analysis of facts? The answer is "no." We cannot afford it, and thus we must ensure that scientific thinking skills are taught and taught well in our K-12 educational systems. This is, in fact, the mission of the Center for Education School Science Project.



Raymond Academy teacher Peter LeBlanc works with his 4th grade class to discover properties of construction materials.

For the past six years, the Center for Education's School Science Project has collaborated with Aldine ISD, a large urban school district north of Houston, to improve science instruction, including the teaching of scientific thinking skills. This collaboration, the Rice/Aldine Science Collaborative (RASC) has been very successful in changing how science is taught and in improving student performance on science achievement tests. Currently RASC serves seven elementary

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Through Race-Conscious Eyes: Reading *In Schools We Trust* by Deborah Meier

By Connie Floyd, Associate Director, School Literacy & Culture Project

In her book *In Schools We Trust*, Deborah Meier asks us to trust teachers, parents, students, and the relationships that can be established when the business of schooling is shared and negotiated by all involved. She reports from her experience in schools that educational success can be accomplished by students, learning in the company of adults, by teachers, trusting other teachers and by school adults, hearing each other's agendas and intentions. Meier knows whereof she speaks, having championed small schools in New York and now in Boston.

Meier makes the plea for trusting schools while observing that the dominant American attitude toward schooling is one of *distrust*. Teachers' judgment is questioned as well as that of principals and school boards. Meier writes that we have allowed people and organizations with no vested interest in the schools to make decisions which profoundly impact daily classroom practices. Then, to convince ourselves that school people are doing their jobs, we have allowed the over-testing of our students.

Meier certainly wants teachers and schools to be held accountable for educating our young people, but not at the expense of the students. She understands the need on parents' part, especially those who historically have been underserved, to know if their students are being taught and if the students are learning what is presented. Meier writes, however, that the testing and standardization movement will not give us the schools we need or want. She does not give us "the answer" but she does offer a picture of school success from her life in schools. It is not a complete picture nor one without flaws, but rather a human picture of what is possible when we trust people to do their jobs. As Meier writes, "It is a hard-won, democratic trust in each other, tempered by healthy, active skepticism and a demand that trust be continually earned. Trust is thus a goal and a tool."

I appreciate the honesty of this book. Meier does not wrap up her school's success in a pretty box and send it out to be replicated. School work is much harder than that and in this era of testing and standardization the ways in which we think differently, speak differently, and live differently, if not acknowledged and negotiated, can only serve to further divide us and breed distrust. Meier acknowledges these differences in her staff, their student and parents. She writes about the tough work she and her colleagues struggle with negotiating and re-negotiating trusting, working relationships with each other, their students, and their parents. She says that we must take the time to build relationships and that this attention to people's needs is as important to successful educational outcomes as the curriculum.

I also appreciate Meier's willingness to see race. So often in the reform literature race is a topic not touched. But Meier writes, "If we are keeping company with our kids, we can't avoid the subject of race... the kids desperately need to be able to talk about it openly with the adults in their lives." Meier does not ignore or make light of the reality of students' racial lives because it is a part of their educational lives. She writes, "The more complex the learning, the more children need genuine adult company, and the more trusted the adults must be."

Meier writes with such honesty about the relationship between parents and schools. Race, background, and education can have a significant impact on the way school is viewed by parents and the way parents are viewed by school. Meier shares information given to her by colleagues of color of their own parents' distrust of school people. Meier tells us of her own witnessing of racism and

Deborah Meier to Creekmore Symp Keynote Present

by Linda McNeil, Codirector

The Center for Education is announce that Deborah Meier will be the keynote speaker at the 2003 Creekmore Symposium. Debbie Meier is perhaps our strongest advocate for democracy for schooling that is truly centered on children. She is a good friend and we invite all teachers, parents, and friends of children to hear her address at Rice on April 2.

(For an excerpt from *In Schools We Trust*, see page 12 of this issue.)

continued on page 17



Trust, Not Standardized Testing, Is Essential to Successfully Educating Children

By Laurie Hammons, Program Coordinator

National education policy at this point in time tells us that we cannot trust our schools to educate American children unless teachers and schools are held accountable to standardized tests. Deborah Meier's latest book, *In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Standardized Testing*, speaks to a more complicated vision of what it means to trust our public schools.

"What worries me most is that in the name of objectivity and science – two worthy ideas – the testing enterprise has led teachers and parents to distrust their ability to see and observe their own children." What is the effect on a third grader, Meier asks, when despite his ability to read, he is given a failing score on the state reading test? The lowering of expectations for this child is a tragedy, and the loss of our ability to trust our own judgment about a child's achievement is a great loss to our culture.

"The alternative to standardization is real standards," Meier states, which require human judgment. Just as the best doctors do not rely alone on diagnostic tests, we need information in many forms to assess the progress of our schools. These words from Deborah Meier are the result of her more than thirty years of working in schools she and her colleagues created to be places where children feel trusted, where parents trust that their children will be well cared for, and where teachers feel trusted to effectively teach the children.

In Schools We Trust tells why trust is perhaps the essential ingredient if schools are to be successful in educating children and if they are to be strong building blocks in our democracy. This book shows how much work it takes to create such schools and to do the work inside schools to negotiate the many differences within and among communities that come together in a school. The book also shows, in the second section, how standardization – particularly standardized testing – threatens to undermine trust because by definition standardization says "we don't trust you to do school right."

From her experience in these successful urban schools, Deborah Meier provides recommendations that can help to build trust our in schools.

We need to build relationships between students and teachers by changing the organization of schools. The creation of small schools (or even small schools within a larger campus) gives students and teachers a chance to understand and trust each other. In a smaller community, students have a chance to have mentoring relationships with teachers, and a more natural relationship than is found in large lecture classes. Students also need to have a chance to observe and to learn from people with expertise – teachers, other adults, older students. Additionally, students need a chance to learn in various ways; they need to experiment and to discuss mistakes. There are powerful examples of this type of learning which take place in the schools

that Meier has helped organize – both in this book and in her earlier book, *The Power of Their Ideas*.

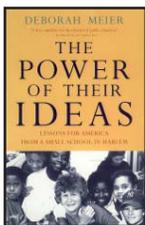
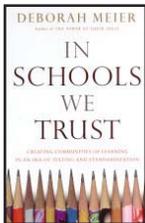
We also need to build ways to improve trust between parents and teachers. The educational goals of the school need to be made clear, as well as the ways that decisions are made which impact children. There needs to be sufficient time set aside for parents to feel comfortable with the teachers' and school's intentions, both through formal meetings and informal drop-ins. There also must be ways to independently judge the effectiveness of a school's quality, not just through standardized test scores, but through the results of student work and post-school success, the credentials of the staff, and independent peer reviews. And there needs to be a clear method of addressing problems if parents feel that the learning environment is not working for their individual child.

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[We Trust](#) see page





In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization by Deborah Meier

The following is an excerpt from Deborah Meier's book [In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization](#) (pp. 12-13)

Formal learning in particular deliberately ignored what might have been the strengths of the traditional routes from childhood to adulthood. Most children today are disconnected from any community of adults – including, absurdly, the adults they encounter in schools. Many young people literally finish four years of high school without knowing or being known by a single adult in the school building. Dry text books and standardized curricula unconnected with any passions or interests of children, delivered by adults in seven, eight, or sometimes nine 45-minute time slots, dominate schooling.

We've invented schools that present at best a caricature of what the kids need in order to grow up to be effective citizens, skillful team members, tenacious and ingenious thinkers, or truth seekers. They sit, largely passively, through one after another different subject matter in no special order of relevance, directed by people they can't imagine becoming, much less would like to become. The older they get, the less like "real life" their schooling experience is – and the more disconnected and fractionated. As my granddaughter Sarah tells me with delight at her new eight-period schedule (which she knows I disapprove of): "But Grandma, it's more fun; there's no time to get bored – you're in and out so fast, and you get a chance to chat with friends between classes." Children are expected to learn to do hard things in the absence of ever seeing experts at work doing such things – to become shoemakers when they've never seen shoes or a shoemaker making them.

We've cut kids adrift, without the support or nurturance of grown-ups, without the surrounding of a community in which they might feel it safe to try out various roles, listen in to the world of adults whom they might someday want to join as full members. At earlier and earlier ages they must negotiate with a variety of barely familiar adults, increasingly barren classrooms, and increasingly complex institutional settings; for many it starts as early as three or four years of age. My grandson, in a big New York City elementary school, spent his seven-year-old energies finding ways to avoid the halls, bathrooms, lunchroom, and recess, where everyone he encountered was likely to be a stranger – and a risk to his sense of safety. In some communities kids go from one huge school to another every three years – by design. Large schools designed exclusively for kindergarten through second grade, grades three through five, grades six through eight, and grades ten through twelve are not weird aberrations but are increasingly common. There are nowadays fewer children in schools where there are likely to be teachers they or their families have known over the years. We are – in short – perhaps the only civilization in history that organizes its youth so that the nearer they get to being adults the less and less likely they are to know any adults.

I believe this needn't be; schools can turn around the distrustful distance that the young experience toward the adult world. They can return children to the company of adults in ways that meet the needs of a rapidly changing and more globalized world. It's not true that the best way to learn to deal with adult change and trauma is to know nothing but change and trauma. In fact, quite the opposite. Greater, not less, intimacy between generations is at the heart of all the best school reform efforts around today and is the surest path to restoring public trust in public education – while also enhancing the capacity for creativity and novelty, which earlier forms of apprenticeship learning often downgraded.

*From [In Schools We Trust: Creating Communities of Learning in an Era of Testing and Standardization](#)
by Deborah Meier
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continued from page 4, In Search of Tomorrow in Children's Books

darkness in childhood. It is the obvious reason childhood is so frequently mined for pain and irony in all art forms. But books which insist upon laughing at, not with, childhood, books which provide a relentless parade of obtuse and even cruel adults, books which make growing up less and less an escape from the powerlessness of childhood, do their readers no favor. These books will not help children avoid the "flat pastures" of adulthood. They will only direct them there faster for fear of the alternative.

As an early childhood educator, I take particular exception with some current titles for young children. I offer the very popular David series by award winning author and illustrator David Shannon as a prime example, despite the fact that Shannon's Author's Notes suggest he is a friendly sort of guy, fond of small children, and hoping only to amuse. All three books (*No, David*, *David Goes to School*, and *David Gets in Trouble*) borrow from Charles Schultz and depict a clueless small child and off-stage adults. Text and subject matter place them in the

three to six-year old category. The stories (really, it's one continuous story) have David either being reprimanded by adults or offering some obviously poor excuse for misbehavior. "PAY ATTENTION!", the teacher screams in *David Goes to School*. "But she likes it," David tells his mother as he pulls the cat's tail in *David Gets in Trouble*. Shannon has given David a semi-scary jack-o-lantern look, including a bald head, triangle nose, extra-wide grin, and gaps between teeth that are not due to the comings and goings of baby teeth. The illustrations aptly represent the mood of the text, which is where my problem begins. Unlike Sendak's Max, Shannon's David is, at best, stuck in today, always wrong or wronged, never right or in charge. At worst, and I do not say this lightly, David is trapped in the vicious cycle of abusive relationships, waiting for or causing (page after page after page) the ax to fall. And it does (page after page after page). Sendak's Max created a fantasy world in which he was king, and where he could act out physically and emotionally,

far from the eye of critical adults. His reward is to return home and to where his supper is waiting for him "and it was still hot" (surely some of the most comforting words in children's literature). In David's world, resolution comes, not after exploration of the self, but after shame, punishment, and ultimately complete submission.

As noted, the dark side of childhood is a well-rehearsed theme in various art forms, but most especially in literature. As well it should be. One purpose of literature is to look beneath what is supposed to be. But to small children who cannot possibly appreciate the irony of making it to the other side of a childhood they haven't left yet, the David books offer precious little motivation to get there. Even the Little Match Girl caught a break when the real world grew too unbearable, physically and psychologically. Adulthood in David's world is not merely flat. It's barren and unknowing. However valid a theme this may be for grown up Davids, it's a precarious one for those not yet grown.

continued from page 5, Houston Annenberg Evaluation

Our unexpected finding is that amid these exceptional and innovative efforts involving teachers' work, we saw little impact on instruction.

standardized systems undermine schools – and faculties -- that are working to create strong internal capacity to teach specific children in ways that foster understanding and in ways that foster continued love of learning.

As a research team, frequently comparing findings across our four case study schools, we were often in awe of the extraordinary hard work – extra work – that teachers and principals were willing to exert in order to take full advantage of these new funds – and the permission – for changing their schools. Our unexpected finding is that amid these exceptional and innovative efforts involving teachers' work, we saw

little impact on instruction.

Where instruction – children's learning – was at the center of the reform, as we saw in the two schools undertaking whole-school change, we did see beginnings of changes in classrooms. It is these changes that will be the ultimate test of the impact of Houston Annenberg – the changes that make students know that they are important and that their learning can be limitless.

The full report of these case studies and the other schools studied will be released in print and electronic formats by Dr. Pedro Reyes, chief principal investigator, University of Texas.



continued from page 3, The School Writing Project Embraces the 'Seriousness of Play'

will discover a wealth of meaning in the language and text." Building students' confidence before they read a page of Shakespeare and letting them develop their own context for key scenes, she gives them one-line quotations from six scenes in the play. They use the lines as prompts for freewriting and then as the subjects of a small group mime. Arriving at a collective interpretation of the quotation (independent of the play that they have not read), the group creates and performs an interpretative "body sculpture" which freezes at the moment the one quotation from the play is spoken.

As rich as the "play" of the groups is the audience's storm of "What I saw you do" observations that follow. The entire class is working together, eager to entertain and surprise each other, engaged in interpreting the actions and expressions of each other, respectful of those on stage, willing to be one on stage. A School Writing Project kind of interaction!

When I tried this activity as an introduction to *The Great Gatsby*, I couldn't help laughing with amazement at the creativity of the impromptu scenes, rich with implications for our future discussions of the book. Emotionally, these teenagers grasped and were acting out many of the conflicts and ambiguities of the novel. They were already showing willingness to consider and support different interpretations. Before we had read a page, they, as artists and experts, had found ways into the work. This was play, intense and risky, serious and hilarious, protected by our mutual respect for each other.

The workshops were great, but not bound by a workday schedule, Terri and I also found time to read *Hamlet* together. I'm going to leave it to you

to make the connection to the classroom; for me, "the play's the thing," that gives pleasure as we read loud favorite lines and pooled observations.

For two Texas teachers released from classrooms with sealed windows, Washington in November is irresistible. And so we walked from north of Dupont Circle through the Embassy district and on to Georgetown. Outside the Chinese embassy, we saw members of *falun gong* meditating in protest of persecution in that country. Through the tall open windows of a mosque, we saw people crowded into a prayer service and, on the sidewalk, protesters. We realized the little we know as we glimpsed these images of the great confluence of cultures and beliefs, in this place that invites and respects diversity. We saw gingko trees, with leaves like brilliant yellow

Japanese fans, fluttering through the cool air. We heard the soft patter of rain drops on the leaves, and, a minute later, we were walking through a downpour, Terri, hatless and umbrella-resistant, and me wearing sandals with socks, very wet socks. We were not late for class; no one was marking our attire

as a wrong answer. In fact, it was just right. Pure play.

I won't try to say of what use these excursions were, but I know they fed our souls. And they remind me, too, that the activity in many classrooms now is tethered tightly to the dead weight of a test. When we lose trust in the individual teacher and the individual student, when we try to substitute the mass-produced *Interactive Reader* for one person learning and supporting another as both explore new text and ideas, we have forgotten something of what it means to be human. We have forgotten the 'seriousness of play.'

When we lose trust in the individual teacher and the individual student, when we try to substitute the mass-produced Interactive Reader for one person learning and supporting another as they explore new text and ideas, we have forgotten something of what it means to be human. We have forgotten the 'seriousness of play.'

continued from page 6, Longview High School

Teachers have received vital support from the Annenberg-funded programs. Three professional development academies, on technology, vocational development, and international affairs, provided springboards for teachers to attend conferences and pursue learning useful to their teaching.

The Academies themselves constitute communities for teachers to hear reports of each teacher's professional learning. Teachers' Critical Friends Groups at the school meet monthly to explore issues arising in their teaching practice.

At Longview, a strong cadre of teacher leaders has grown along with the stability, depth, and complexity of the reform work over five years. The leadership capacity built at the school and the traditions established by these many excellent programs comprise the legacy of the

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continued from previous page, Longview High School

Annenberg reforms at Longview. The traditions, capacities, and programs that have been developed leave the legacy of strong communities at the school.

At Longview High School, five years of Annenberg-funded reform have fostered development of a school culture that recognizes the fundamental importance of strong communities at all levels The traditions, capacities, and programs that have been developed leave the legacy of strong communities at the school. . . . We would have liked to see the school and district administration provide better integration with the reform programs, as well as a more direct focus on instructional improvement.

District support for the reforms was limited. We would have liked to see the school and district administration provide better integration with the reform programs, as well as a more direct focus on instructional improvement. Some pieces of the reforms address instruction, through the Critical Friends Groups and the professional development Academies, as well as grant-supported attendance by teachers at AP and Pre-AP workshops. The focus on instructional improvement was not, however sufficiently strategic such that we can point to improvements in one academic area or another, or in one student group or another. The strength of the reforms at Longview lies in the multi-racial, multi-ethnic community they have built for students, and the collegial community of teachers that is developing.

continued from page 6, Port High School

This school shares with many urban schools stark attrition rates, particularly among 9th graders. It has based every one of its decisions about reorganization and curriculum revisions on trying to make that 9th grade year so productive that more and more of its students graduate.

The study of Port High School is vital now because its district is embarking on a program that will implement small schools in all of its high schools. The belief is that small schools offer the solution to drop out problems, poor attendance, discipline, and academic standards. None of these problems have been substantively addressed by small schools at Port. In fact, some students have been branded as failures and failed for years under the same teacher. Some of the small schools were branded as failures and that moniker settled on the faculty of the school like a "dead weight." It is important that high schools realize that while these academies may contribute to personalizing the

environment, their small size can also exacerbate problems that lay hidden under the framework of a large school.

It is also important to note that this school has had two strong principals with vision as it has moved through its forming process. In addition, the Annenberg coordinator has been a strong leader who has modeled behaviors for all teachers in the school and who is revered by her students. The Annenberg reform has enabled the principal, the lead teacher and other dedicated faculty members to voice their support for the forming of Port High School and has helped to sustain them as they work to gain the physical resources that will enhance the school and to inspire students, teachers, and the community to dedicate themselves to their vision of academic excellence.

The question for the school district is whether it is prepared to match the extraordinary investments made by these principals, teachers, staff and

students in Port High School – with equitable and adequate (one would like to recommend *abundant*) material resources, safe and learner-friendly

The question for the school district is whether it is prepared to match the extraordinary investments made by these principals, teachers, staff and students in Port High School . . .

laboratories and classrooms, a well-stocked and up -to-date library, Spanish-fluent and culturally fluent teachers and support staff, and ongoing opportunities for teachers to learn. Will the district provide the administrative and political permissions this faculty needs to take risks on behalf of its students – to try authentic ways of assessing, to bring parents and community residents into discussions about the future of the school, to experiment with structural organizations in support of good teaching?



continued from page 7, Knight High School

status as a 'Beacon' school played an important, though not necessarily a critical role in influencing the new principal. And finally, the choice of principal was not an ad hoc one, but one that both the school faculty and district made with the nature of the school in mind.

That HAC supported and enabled the school to build a strong foundation for its reform program is not in question. But this statement needs to be read in conjunction with the fact that pre-HAC there was already a reform mentality embedded in the founding rhetoric, and was beginning to be put into action at KHS. The granting of HAC validated the school's mission on two levels, on the purely utilitarian level of providing money, and on the intellectual and moral level. This latter fact is perhaps the key to making a positive prediction regarding overall sustainability of the reform program at KHS in the post HAC period.

The granting of HAC validated the school's mission on two levels, on the purely utilitarian level of providing money, and on the intellectual and moral level.

The fourth school we studied, a middle school, was evaluated by Dr. Amy Sexton, who now works on education issues in the Philadelphia area.

continued from page 7, Science Instruction

While most science teachers were striving hard, their instruction did not improve noticeably. My analysis is that the reform effort provided teachers with generalized support such as Critical Friends Groups, but it did not contribute substantially to teachers' knowledge of science or of science instruction. This conclusion was strengthened by the one notable exception – a high school that hired an outside consultant to assist the staff on "engaging in authentic intellectual work as an educational community." Fred Newmann conducted sessions with the full faculty and with the individual content teams on developing authentic teaching and assessment.

I was able to join a meeting of Newmann with the science teachers. One teacher chose formulas and equations for chemical reactions and the [Newmann] standard of "construction of knowledge." He reminded them that the definition for this standard was not getting the idea into student heads, but rather reaching the

point where students use the idea. It was fascinating to watch the interaction and development because the teachers challenged him, saying students must memorize the symbols for the elements and the four

While most science teachers were striving hard, their instruction did not improve noticeably. My analysis is that the reform effort provided teachers with generalized support such as Critical Friends Groups, but it did not contribute substantially to teachers' knowledge of science or of science instruction.

classifications of reactions (composition, decomposition, single replacement, and double replacement), period. They felt free to argue with him and claim that his system of learning just did not pertain to science. They wanted the students to drill the basics and then learn how it might be used.

In return, Newmann kept probing the teachers. Why is it

important to know these four reaction types? Who cares? How does it connect to their lives? When might it be critical to them to know the difference? Eventually one teacher suggested that she could present an assortment of reactions and have students in small groups classify them and thus engage in a second standard of "substantive conversation." Presenting examples from home for students to classify would bring in a third [Newmann] standard of having "some application to life."

The intellectual honesty and earnestness of the participants was remarkable. The session related directly to what the teachers were doing, on topics of their choice, and was a true dialogue about different educational approaches. The bottom line was maximizing student learning. This small group consultation was an impressive experience. It was one of the few times that I have seen short intervention have any impact on science instruction.



continued from page 9, Science as a Way of Thinking in the School Science Project

and intermediate schools (Anderson Academy, Bethune Academy, Carmichael Elementary, Ermel Elementary, Odom Elementary, Raymond Academy, and Stovall Academy).

RASC's success depends on three interwoven strategies. First, each RASC school has a full time science facilitator (science specialist). These science specialists are the primary science education resources for their school's teachers. Second, each RASC school participates in Teachers Engaged in Authentic Mentoring Strategies (TEAMS). TEAMS ensures that teachers provide professional development for each other and also observe each other teach.

Through these interactions and the debriefs that follow, a science learning community is created on each campus. The third strategy employed by RASC is to emphasize inquiry during science instruction. Through inquiry, students learn scientific thinking skills.

Following the lead of the Texas Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Science Teaching, RASC has adopted the "5E" model of science instruction (Engage, Explore, Elaborate, Explain, Evaluate). In the 5E Model, students are presented with questions or problems that engage them in the learning process. Then students are asked to explore and create their own knowledge through investigation and experimentation.

During the exploration process, teacher and student work together. For some teachers this step, working together with students, is difficult. Working together with students may expose a lack of understanding on the part of the teacher. Yet, as Ms. Angela Gardner of Odom Academy states, "teachers must be willing to remove their fear of teaching science, and the 5E model encourages taking this risk." Both teachers and students should understand that no one today could possibly know everything about even a narrow science specialization. What is important is not whether or not you know something, but whether or not you are willing to find out.

Through observation, hypothesis formation, data collection, and conclusion, students learn to think scientifically, to rely upon their own analysis, and to use evidence in drawing conclusions. These are the scientific thinking skills and life long learning skills that are required throughout life. Every time you see the 3R's, remember that the 's stands for *science*, and that science, as a "way of thinking" must be an essential component of our public education system.



Ms. Gardner from Odom Elementary experiences Chemistry with her students.

continued from page 10, Through Race Conscious Eyes

inequity in school settings from her early teaching. She acknowledges that there are real reasons for some people to distrust schools and school people. This makes it hard, Meier notes, to argue with some of the standards and testing reforms: "I was glad when the word went out that schools needed to have high expectations for all children, that no kids should be labeled uneducable and written off." Meier notes, however, that a test and a set of standards will not change some of the fundamental problems of schooling, especially those operating from a deficit model when it comes to educating poor, non-white students.

In my work as Director of the Cultural Conversations Project I struggle with teachers about the impact race, culture and ethnicity have on teaching and learning. I am not and do not

want to be colorblind in my conversations about school reform. I read and react to many things with color-conscious eyes. I don't want to have to apologize for the way I think, speak or live to be a part of the reform conversation. Certainly every school discussion should not be about race or culture, but neither should every school conversation be void of it. Meier writes with a knowing voice and one not afraid to wrestle with difficult subjects. It is clear that she has been talking with and listening to the agendas and intentions of her colleagues, all her colleagues. In her own words, "We need to accept the public responsibility of seeing all our children as our common responsibility, while at the same time avoiding the arrogance of thinking there is therefore only one right way."



continued from page 11, Trust, Not Standardized Testing, Essential to Successfully Educating Children

Often overlooked is the collegial relationship between teachers, the value of giving each other feedback and accepting helpful criticism. Building a culture that supports this level of trust among teachers is a challenge. There needs to be time to build relationships and a belief that there is a shared responsibility for the success of the students – to get over the awkwardness of observing and commenting on each other’s work in order to give each child the best education possible.

Underlying these areas of trust is the complicated issue of race and class, which must be acknowledged and addressed if there is to be trust among teachers, students, and families. (See Connie Floyd’s article on page 10.)

Policy makers have looked for a simpler way to mandate trust in our schools. The use of

standardized testing has increased to its highest level with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001. This federal law mandates standardized testing and the penalties for both schools and students for performance that falls below acceptable levels. If the stakes are high enough, the reasoning goes, student achievement must increase.

If only it were that simple. Meier recounts the problems in attempting to measure student learning through standardized testing. Just as students learn in many ways, so too must assessment systems gauge achievement in different ways. The testmakers’ assignment to rank children leads to test questions that sort kids rather than test their competence. We need not more testing, but data that we can rely upon. Deborah

Meier states, “Holding each other accountable starts with a shared and reliable knowledge base: good data – in the broadest sense of that word.”

Deborah Meier sees trust as important not only to learning, but to democracy. It is through education that students learn to be good citizens, and schools should help us practice the habits of the democratic system. Public schools are especially valuable in that we must learn to work with and to trust people outside our own group, a skill that is central to a democracy, and never more important than today. “If democratic habits can’t flourish in school, if they are viewed as utopian in the place we should have the most reasons for trusting each other, how much harder to believe in their possibility in society at large?”



Karen Capo, Literacy Codirector for the School Literacy & Culture Project, leads a workshop for Classroom Storytelling Project teachers.

Reading, Writing and Cultural Connections Summer Institute Receives Enthusiastic Reviews

“In my two years in the U.S., and after so many inservices, I was beginning to feel disappointed – until I found you!” “Truly, you all did a magnificent job at presenting your material in an effective, inviting, and engaging way. All of the hands-on examples were fabulous to see and touch. It’s one thing to hear about them, another to see.” “Everything was presented logically and so well organized, with more information than I ever dreamed.”

Such were the comments from almost 100 early childhood teachers who attended one of the two Summer Institutes on Reading, Writing and Cultural Connections in July, 2003 sponsored by the School Literacy & Culture Project. Led by Literacy Co-Directors Karen Capo and Judy Rolke, and assisted by Literacy Consultant Margaret Immel, these teachers from public and private schools spent five days learning to enhance the literacy learning of their students.



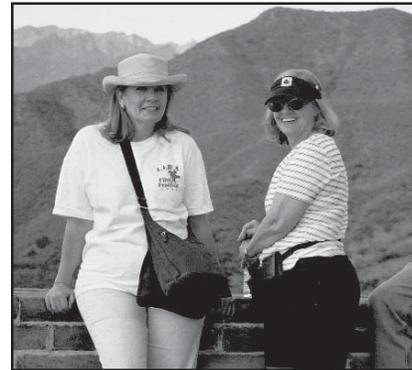
Asia Outreach Sponsors Third Faculty Development Institute

The Center for Education's Asia Outreach and Global Education project, initiated in 1993, has gained considerable momentum in the last couple of years, particularly after Rice became a regional center of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) in 2001 (<http://ncta.easia.columbia.edu/>). Generously funded by the Freeman Foundation and supplemented with financial and administrative support from the Center for Education, Rice University has sponsored two Faculty Development Institutes on East Asia for Houston-area secondary teachers during the past two years (see the Spring 2002 edition of the *CenterPiece*, p. 8). Spring 2003, we will be sponsoring a third Institute (for details see <http://asia.rice.edu/> under "Faculty Development East Asian Institute"). This Institute will be conducted by Professor Nanxiu Qian, a world authority in the field of medieval Chinese literature, who has published extensively in both Chinese and English on a wide variety of literary topics. She is also a poet and a playwright.

In the summer of 2002, Rice organized a Freeman-funded study tour in China for 24 secondary teachers chosen from the Faculty Development Institutes sponsored so far by the regional centers at Rice and the University of North Texas. This tour was led by Dr. Steve Lewis, Director of Rice's Transnational China Project (<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~tnchina/>) and Dr. Marshall McArthur, who teaches Chinese history, literature and film at Rice. We will feature this tour in a Spring issue of *CenterPiece*.

During the past year, Professor Richard J. Smith, who directs the Asian Studies program at Rice, in addition to the Center's Asia Outreach and Global Education project and the Rice regional NCTA center, has made several trips to Asia (Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand and India) to gather images and other curricular materials for future Institutes and related activities. In October he gave a presentation—based on his experiences with the first two NCTA Institutes—titled "Ways Of World-Making: Some Approaches to Teaching about the Asian 'Other'" for the "Windows on Asia" teacher's workshop at the Annual Meeting of the Southwest Conference on Asian Studies. He then tried out some of this material himself at Jackson Middle School in Houston during "Teach for America Week," returning two weeks later to follow up with the same group of delightfully inquisitive students.

In December, Smith gave a paper titled "The *Yijing* (*I Ching* or Book of Changes) In Global Perspective: Some Pedagogical Reflections" for the international conference on "Remaking Asia Pacific Studies: Knowledge, Power and Pedagogy," at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. His basic point was that cross-cultural comparisons are often most productive when we focus on radical "otherness"—that comparisons involving initial likenesses are easier to undertake perhaps, but ultimately more ethnocentric and therefore less likely to yield true understanding.



Asia Outreach Faculty Development Institute participants, Esther Hartman from Cypress Springs High School and Barbara DiPaolo from St. John's School, at the Great Wall of China, one of the stops on their study tour of China this summer.

Teacher Scholarships for Summer Study

The Fund for Teachers is focused on energizing and celebrating the essential work of K-12 teachers. By recognizing the value of their own personal potential, the Fund helps them to more easily inspire potential in their students. Established in 1998 to provide grants up to \$5000 for teachers funding summer sabbatical travel to explore a personal or professional passion; grants were awarded to 150 teachers for summer 2002. Teachers from Houston, Tulsa, Oakland, Minneapolis, St. Paul and Denver will be traveling to every continent of the world excluding Antarctica! In 2003 the program expands to New York City.



We have all heard of programs and grants available for scholarships, family involvement, tutoring and mentoring, student academic and cultural enrichment. However, there are few, if any, large-scale national initiatives that address the personal growth and renewal of teachers. With private and non-profit sector funding, the Fund for Teachers bypasses district and union bureaucracies and adds value in the classroom without additional operating costs. For more information on grant opportunities for teachers from the Fund for Teachers, visit their website at <http://www.fundforteachers.org>



•Upcoming Events•

- January 18, 2003** **School Literacy & Culture Project Miniconference with Vivian Paley,**
8:00 a.m. acclaimed early childhood teacher and author, Student Center, Rice University
- April 2, 2003** **Hazel G. Creekmore Symposium with Deborah Meier, "Building Trust In**
4:30 p.m. *Schools,*" Grand Hall, Student Center, Rice University
- April 10, 2003** **School Writing Project Elementary School Student and Teacher**
4:30 p.m. **Readings,** Farnsworth Pavilion, Student Center, Rice University
- April 24, 2003** **School Writing Project Secondary School Student and Teacher**
4:30 p.m. **Readings,** Farnsworth Pavilion, Student Center, Rice University

**To learn more about the Center's teacher
development programs, its publications and its
research activities, see our website at
<http://www.rice.edu/education>**

**To learn how to participate in one of the Center's
teacher development programs, contact the Center
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