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# When Good Ideas Flow Two Ways

By **Mary Ellen Kenny**, *Division Coordinator of the Middle School*

Bank Street College of Education is located just a stone's throw from the banks of the Hudson River. Hundreds of years ago, the Lenape people called the river Muhheakantuck, which, loosely translated, means, *great waters in constant motion*, or, *the river that flows two ways*. Much like the waters of the mighty river that inspires New Yorkers each day, the energy, expertise and ideas generated by educators at Bank Street, are in constant motion, flowing in two directions. Collaboration between the Graduate School and the School for Children continues to be a source of strength and vitality that serves as a model for the interactive process of teaching and learning. What follows is a summary of three projects that are joint ventures between Middle School teachers in the SFC and Graduate School faculty.

- While faculty in the SFC are fully engaged in teaching children, they also serve as mentors for assistant teachers, student teachers or interns, most of whom are enrolled in one of Bank Street College's graduate programs. In each classroom, a unique combination of teaching and learning is underway all the time. Recently, with the help of Joy Lundeen-Ellebbane, Director of Continuing Professional Studies, a full-day workshop was offered to teachers in the SFC. Adjunct instructor Nancy Klinger designed the workshop based on teacher input, in order to meet the specific needs of the group. Teachers spent a day together exploring the various components of mentoring. Topics of interest included: *stages of teacher development, building trusting collaborative relationships, strategies to support beginning teachers' growth and independence, and skills/knowledge/dispositions of the good mentor—What do mentors do? How do teachers learn?*

Klinger provided readings and resources and the group shared stories, anecdotes and strategies, making for a lively exchange of information, experiences and new ideas.

- In the SFC, the social studies are at the hub of a rich, interdisciplinary curriculum. In age appropriate ways, students in the Middle School are all engaged in the process of understanding the relationships among people and their environments. How do people affect the environment? How does the environment affect people? The connections between science and social studies are tangible and an

important aspect of curriculum development.

During the 2012 - 2013 school year, a relationship was forged between middle school faculty in the SFC and Jenny Ingber, PhD., who is the Director of Science Programs in the Graduate School. The collaboration was designed to reinforce the connections between social studies and science, as well as to help clarify instructional goals for the faculty. Jenny was generous with her time, meeting with the Middle School faculty as a whole group and in smaller, age-level meetings as well. She has also worked directly with students, modeling lessons for the SFC faculty. Teachers appreciated the opportunities to brainstorm, strengthen their own scientific knowledge base, and to consider science teaching standards as they modify and extend the science curriculum. This collaborative effort will continue into the next school year, and is an excellent example of the ways in which the SFC takes advantage of its relationship with the Graduate School.

- Yet another joint project that is still evolving taps into one of the greatest resources at the College. Bank Street is home to a premier collection of children's literature. The creativity and voice of the authors represented in the collection serves as an inspiration to students and teachers alike. Through the combined efforts of the Center for Children's Literature, the Graduate Program and the School for Children, we are poised to embark on a Writer-in-Residence project. Through a series of workshops, an author of well-known children's literature will join classroom teachers to help children develop their writing. As one teacher put it, "The kids always have good ideas, but they need help in knowing how to go deeper". Additional inspiration will be gained by getting tips and encouragement from a respected author.

Developing the curiosity and engagement in learning that leads students to formulate thoughtful questions and to look for solutions is a hallmark of a Bank Street education. Providing students with meaningful experiences that encourage active investigation and inquiry in all avenues of learning is a primary mission. We are very fortunate to be part of a dynamic institution that values collaboration among educators from the various divisions of the college. We are energized and inspired when ideas are in constant motion—flowing two ways.