

Thought and Practice: (1987-1991) the Journal of the Graduate School of Bank Street College of Education

Volume 3
Number 1 *Anniversary Issue*

Article 1

1991

Front Matter and Forward

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Recommended Citation

Pignatelli, F., & Flaum, S. W. (2016). Front Matter and Forward. *Thought and Practice: (1987-1991) the Journal of the Graduate School of Bank Street College of Education*, 3 (1). Retrieved from <http://educate.bankstreet.edu/thoughtandpractice/vol3/iss1/1>

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Thought & Practice



JUL 25 2001

The Journal of the Graduate School of Bank Street College of Education
Volume 3, Number 1, Summer 1991

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Foreword	1
<i>Frank Pignatelli and Susanna W. Pflaum</i>	
Teacher: Being and Becoming	5
<i>Edna K. Shapiro</i>	
Spreading Out Its Roots: Bank Street Advisement and the Education of a Teacher	25
<i>William Ayers</i>	
The Early Years of the Advisement Program at Bank Street College	29
<i>Claudia Lewis</i>	
Advisement: The Journey for Preservice Students	32
<i>Maritza B. Macdonald</i>	
Advisement and Collaboration	40
<i>Maureen A. Hornung, Ariel Katz, and Claire Wurtzel</i>	
Storytelling in Advisement	49
<i>Nina Jaffe</i>	
Developing Collaborative Leaders: Reflections on Leadership Advisement at Bank Street College	55
<i>Lonnetta Gaines</i>	
The Advisement Process in School Reform	64
<i>Esther Rosenfeld</i>	
Advisement: From Bank Street to Binghamton	67
<i>Margaret Yonemura</i>	
Working with Teachers	74
<i>Maja Apelman</i>	
A Theoretical Framework for Advisement	85
<i>Dorothy Bloomfield</i>	
The Social Construction of Teachers' Practical Knowledge in the Advisement Conference Group: Report of a Case Study	94
<i>Gail Hirsch</i>	

Foreword

We are pleased to present this issue of *Thought and Practice* during the 75th anniversary year of Bank Street College of Education. With the support and encouragement of the Advisory Board, we agreed to focus on advisement at Bank Street for the one, expanded issue of this year. We came to this decision for different reasons and were delighted by its reception among our colleagues.

For Susanna, the new Graduate School Dean, the process of advisement was intriguing. She had come to Bank Street after twenty years of involvement in teacher education in large, public universities. An early experience at Bank Street during the annual telethon last spring stimulated curiosity about advisement that had already arisen from the written material and discussions during the search process. Across the table at that telethon meeting, as alumni were being called, she heard comments like, "I just talked to one of my students from my group in 19..." She wondered about these very human links and the centrality of advisement to the Bank Street experience. Advisement, in the minds of the faculty at Bank Street, appeared to be the major reason why "you can tell a Bank Street teacher the minute you walk into her classroom" or "associations made at Bank Street last a lifetime" or "advisement is where you learn to integrate theory and practice." Susanna's interest was piqued.

Several questions about advisement were raised at a faculty meeting. The comments suggested that faculty hold different understandings of advisement. All faculty agreed on the structure, of course—the weekly two-hour meetings, the monthly visits for one-half days by the faculty advisor in students' workplaces, the biweekly individual meetings—but not all agreed on the process. To Susanna, it seemed that analysis of the process might be beneficial for the faculty. Moreover, a close look at Bank Street's advisement might provide an interesting alternative approach for teacher educators outside the College.

For Frank, there were much more immediate issues about advisement. A new faculty member in September 1990, he, like nearly all faculty members, was assigned to advise a group of students. He needed to know the workings of advisement and how his experiences, his values, and his knowledge could contribute to the advisement process. Early conversations with colleagues and preliminary readings grounded advisement squarely in the literature of psychol-

ogy. What were the range of possibilities, he wondered, given this orientation? How, for example, would issues of race, gender, class, ethnicity, private versus public school, and the like enter into the advisement experience? How tightly structured and focused ought the conference group and individual meetings be? What about confidentiality between advisor and advisee? How much ought to be shared with the field supervisor? How to reconcile support for each individual with the question of evaluation? He was drawn to the tensions and challenges—the call to be supportive and caring with the need to pose the difficult, provocative question; the “easy” conversational tone and informality of setting (we all took turns providing light refreshments). For him, what it meant to be personally involved in the professional lives of one's students took on deeper meaning. Of course, he obtained help and support from colleagues in his department, as all new advisors do. He also joined the “Ibby group,” the group of advisors who meet regularly with Elizabeth Gilkeson, a wise and experienced elder stateswoman of Bank Street whose current role is to enable new advisors to find their place in their new role. But, like Susanna, broader questions about advisement were aroused.

Together, we talked about these questions. Compared with student teaching as we know it, advisement has several clearly different features. It lasts for a year, not a semester. The groups remain together through the year and appear to focus on issues which the group members agree are important, whether stimulated by student or by advisor comment. Advisement at Bank Street is viewed institutionally as the core of students' experiences and occurs concurrently with courses, not as a culmination, so as to heighten the opportunities to reach the avowed goal of integrating theory and practice. At Bank Street all students in all the masters programs participate, even those with considerable teaching experience. Faculty at Bank Street, where there are no faculty ranks or tenure, are defined as advisor and instructor, and nearly all advise. Unlike student teaching which tends to stress only professional growth, advisement embraces students' personal concerns that relate to work issues. Further, there is a strong emphasis on continuous reflection on practice both by the individual student and her advisor and by the group. Advisors seek opportunities for staff development for they need continual renewal through sharing.

We thought that advisement was an appropriate topic for *Thought and Practice* because it would provide an opportunity and forum for faculty to describe and analyze their own practice; and, further, that it would lead to an extended conversation beyond Bank Street College about the preparation and ongoing development of teachers and administrators. There are several questions we formed from our different perspectives and from our initial conversations about advisement. They are the questions addressed in this issue:

- Some advisors say there is no set agenda; others say there is, at least to some extent; and one person told us that instead of a linear agenda, the experienced advisor has a range of issues she knows are part of the year-long conversation and when a student raises an issue, the advisor moves into those topics of common need. How are the topics of discussion derived in the conference group? Across the year, how do the topics indicate change in participants?

- How does Bank Street advisement enable students to reflect upon their work and thinking as educators? What are the pedagogic practices, values, beliefs, and ethical concerns that frame the experience?

- How does advisement lead to shared assumptions and practices?

- How can advisement be adapted in other contexts, including institutions of teacher education? Is advisement a process that applies to staff development in schools?

- What are the attributes and skills needed by the advisor? Can one become an effective advisor if one has not been a part of the experience as a student?

Searching for insights in written documents, we found few recent analyses. However, advisement and Bank Street have not gone unnoticed. While clearly admiring the process, C. E. Silberman (1970) stated that the approach “require[s] people with an extraordinary combination of expertise” and “is not readily transferable to state colleges and universities where the bulk of teachers receive their education.” He suggested that the size of the institution (then about 100) permitted an intimacy not found elsewhere. But in the twenty-one years since Silberman’s observations, advisement continues and now involves approximately 300 students a year.

Within Bank Street, Barbara Biber’s insights into the process also cast light on several of the issues. We drew on Biber’s remarks made on the occasion of her retirement in 1975. She articulated aspects of Bank Street that, like the Silberman analysis, are nearly twenty years behind us, but which still represent the thinking that is fundamental to Bank Street’s approach to the preparation of educators. Biber referred to Charlotte Winsor’s characterization of Bank Street as a “convinced society.” Certainly, to the two of us newcomers, Bank Street is a society in which it is assumed that certain values about human development, about teaching, and about learning are shared. They hardly need to be talked about because they form the foundation. Still, there is considerable talk. Given the very real constraints and pressures that all schools of education

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face—Bank Street is no exception—and the tendency to prescribe and control¹⁴

the life of the school community, open conversations guided by mutual regard for the other frames much of what we think is special about Bank Street College. Biber also looked to the relationship of the institution and its work to the world outside Bank Street. As she put it, there was a “responsibility for communicating our understanding of childhood to a wider and wider sphere of environmental influence.”

In a spirit of inquiry we turned to the faculty, to former faculty, and to former students for answers. Their reflections constitute this issue, shaped and formed through work by us and the Advisory Board and many faculty who served as readers. To all of them, many thanks.

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