

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

Volume 3
Number 1 *Anniversary Issue*

Article 10

1991

Advisement: From Bank Street to Binghamton

Margaret Yonemura

Follow this and additional works at: <http://educate.bankstreet.edu/thoughtandpractice>

 Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Yonemura, M. (2016). Advisement: From Bank Street to Binghamton. *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/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Centennial Collection at Educate. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thought and Practice: (1987-1991) the Journal of the Graduate School of Bank Street College of Education by an authorized administrator of Educate. For more information, please contact kfreda@bankstreet.edu.

Advisement: From Bank Street to Binghamton

Margaret Yonemura

In the four years, from 1969 to 1973, I spent as chairperson of Graduate Programs at Bank Street, I had opportunities to both observe and participate in the advisement process in teacher education. At that time, each student admitted to the program was assigned an advisor who met regularly with her, observed her teaching, and for one academic year led a group conference each Wednesday with all her advisees, generally no more than eight. On alternate Friday afternoons, the advisors as a group met with a group dynamics specialist and a psychiatrist, respectively. I sat in on these meetings, which were characterized by openness and depth as we made attempts to better understand how the advisement groups were functioning and how the advisors could support them. Time with the psychiatrist allowed us to explore together inner feelings, as well as to illumine ways of thinking and being in students' struggling to become teachers and fully alive persons.

I left Bank Street to participate in beginning a master's program in early/elementary education at the State University of New York at Binghamton. As part of my responsibilities, I have acted as an advisor in this small program and created a variant of Bank Street advisement. As advisor, I observe my students teaching during their last semester and we have one-on-one conferences around these. During their last semester, I meet weekly in a two-and-one-half hour seminar—the equivalent of the group conference—with about eight students. In addition, I serve as consultant to them in their final integrative project, which may be a thesis, a film, curriculum materials, and so forth.

I wondered initially whether Bank Street advisement would be feasible within a research center of a state university. My transplanted version of it is a

Margaret Yonemura has taught young children and their teachers for four decades. Currently a professor of education at SUNY, Binghamton, she has been a faculty member at Queens College and Teachers College. Dr. Yonemura served as chair of Graduate Programs at Bank Street College from 1969 to 1973, and she continues to participate in the Museum Education programs. Her daughter, Isobel, is a graduate of Bank Street's Early Childhood Education program.

Published by Educate, 1991

1

modified form, but I think that the basic structure holds. In this paper, I would like to touch briefly on what I find to be central to the advisement process. I will follow this with some thoughts on the relationship between advisor and student.

Advisement: A Place for Thoughts and Emotions

In a world where technique is worshipped, advisement is one place where holistic concerns should be central. Students as thinking, feeling, and acting beings can explore as part of the advisement process many parts of themselves, including those often dismissed in academe.

In writing about play, Biber points out that many teachers see in play children's attempts to interpret their world intellectually but "often stop short at allowing children full freedom in expressing the feelings aspect of their lives" (Biber, 1984, p. 191). Such teachers may very well have not found their own feelings recognized as part of their professional education. At Bank Street and Binghamton, I have been impressed by the strong feelings and the sense of mission and commitment students bring into the programs. I feel students generally bring a passion for their chosen work, but passions can be risky.

When Roger Fry was in his early childhood, his passion for color asserted itself, the passion that would lead to world fame and world criticism. In the small patch of garden that was given him by his parents, fortuitously there was a patch of red poppies. One day, he decided to sit and watch a green bud bloom into the red blossom he so loved. His older siblings were vastly amused at this and poured scorn on him. As young children will, he drew a generalization from this experience that "all passions even for red poppies leave one open to ridicule" (Woolf, 1968, p. 16). Fifty years later the memory rankled, but he did not give up his passion and withstood with fortitude years of ridicule as advocate for the impressionists. Many of us have given up our passions to avoid the accompanying pain. As Joan Erikson points out, there is a flattened-out quality to our beings and a deadness (Erikson, 1988). Part of this flattening out or burning out or stressing out is evident in the world of professionals, where we lose the ability to feel empathically with those we serve. Professional preparation focusing on holistic development could and should return to a concern with passion—is this what Dewey meant by wholeheartedness?—with working into teacher education a firm place for the intangibles of openness, caring, and commitment. There is no denying, however, that we go against the powerful riptide of technical rationality when we introduce and carve out holistic teacher education, the philosophical match for what we hope for children.

Helping students to hold on to their sense of mission and their passions seems central to advisement, so that we discuss feelings as one major ongoing thread in conferences and the seminar. From my perspective, it is not a matter

of sequence: feelings first expressed and then on to ideas and techniques. Such thinking characterizes the world of rational technicalism of which Schön (1983) writes so clearly. But it is not my experience of how human beings approach the complex, uncertain world of professional practice. Feelings and thoughts are inextricably woven together. For those who subscribe to a linear perspective, there exists a danger of self-absorption in this emphasis on the self and its feelings, and when feelings are seen in vacuo this can occur. Centering on the self need not be at anyone else's expense. The destructive individualism described by Bellah and his colleagues (1985), and symbolized in the lone-ranger mentality of many in our society, is a far cry from the emphasis in advisement on becoming more one's self within the interdependence of a small social group in which there is a sense of responsibility for one's own learnings as well as the other person's and the group's. The potential for multiple learnings in the group conferences at Bank Street was expressed well in an informal evaluation study of students' responses to advisement conducted by Charlotte Winsor. One student wrote:

My advisor's skill as a group leader set in motion the group dynamics that enabled us to learn from one another. The implications of this dynamic in classroom interaction were not lost upon me when I became a group leader in the classroom with my pupils." (Lewis, 1979, p. 30)

The seminar discussions move beyond the individual and personal in a roundabout way to key questions about children and their ongoing education. On many occasions over the years, students have come to the seminar after a week of student teaching disappointed and full of self-doubt because a project with the children seems to have fallen flat. Recently, one student teacher called on the children to become active participants in a project only to have them chastise her with demands for "real work"; that is, sedentary desk work and not "just play." Her feelings and doubt were expressed in various ways throughout the session, intermingled with all of our ideas about better ways of interpreting our objectives to children and the school community. We began a deeper probing into what the children were really saying about work and play drawing on Apple and King's (1978) provocative article on this topic. The political nature of teaching, which students have met formally in course work, acquired fresh meaning based on this discussion growing out of practice and one student's feelings.

I see it as an important part of the advisement process to help students reintegrate prior academic learnings in the light of their own classroom experiences. When this student consciously experienced the school as a political institution, Advisement was able to open up choices for her in terms of what she

Yonemura

could do as a teacher either to maintain the status quo or to move in new transforming directions. The advisement seminar is conducive to analyses of curriculum and teaching in terms of their intended and unintended social and political consequences. At Bank Street, it seemed to me that many students came with a sense of the need to transform society, shared by Lucy Sprague Mitchell and John Dewey. Not all my students at Binghamton share this view, a circumstance that generates sharp debates and agreement to continue to talk together.

It would be typical of the advisement seminar for all this discussion to be laced with humor and laughter. It is comforting to know that Dewey (1910) defined as the ideal mental condition the possibility of being simultaneously playful and serious. Sometimes, like the children in the student's project, we wonder if a session that has lifted all our spirits can really be called work, influenced as we are by a culture given to dichotomous thinking.

To sum up, the conferences and seminar are places where I hope students feel free to express their emotions and to build a sense of themselves as increasingly competent beginning professionals with the understandings, skills and techniques that go with this. With these objectives in mind, we plan the sessions carefully. We determine priorities in terms of what this time together helps us achieve and these priorities directly relate to the overall objectives of the teacher education program in relation to children, teaching, and curriculum.

Helping students to know what they know and supporting a perspective of themselves as generators of knowledge are also central to advisement. Of course, my colleagues play a key part in this. However, the ongoing relationship of advisor and students and the small size of the seminar permit deeper explorations than are possible in classes, as I know from firsthand experience. Such an epistemological emphasis supports students in perceiving children as knowing and knowledge making. Since almost all of my students have been women and, like me, have been conditioned to devalue knowledge growing out of our life's experiences, the seminar provides an opportunity to affirm the worth of such knowledge.

We look at our experiences and memories together in the seminar. In these stories lie embedded beliefs and values that give direction and purpose to how we live and how we teach. We take time for looking at ourselves and telling and retelling our life stories. I have found the concept of "personal practical knowledge" developed in the writings of D. Jean Claudine and Michael Connelly very helpful in this part of my work. Through such retelling, new aspects of our identities emerge forged by the new experiences in the teacher educator program. This is no slick, six-point procedure, nor is it an unbounded time of free association. The conferences and the seminar, as I have said, are bounded by the

objectives of the program in relation to children, teaching, and the curriculum. I feel that I have a responsibility, increasingly shared as the semester moves along, to help build connections between personal reminiscences of the past and present everyday experiences in the classroom.

In common with many teacher educators, I have found that students' memories of their own schooling are fertile soil for exploring present values, beliefs, and their contradictions. One student, Kate, mirrored in running notes of her teaching a much more teacher-directive self than she hoped. She could not understand what seemed to be drawing her in such a controlling direction, but reflecting on her past provided an insight. Her memories of her kindergarten and first grade were painful with teachers who dominated and humiliated her. Although not assuming their destructive qualities, she seemed to be drawn into their dominating ways. We fall back, unaware, on what we have experienced unless we acknowledge its presence, reflect upon it and, along with others' help and guidance, create new ways of being. I have to be ready to serve as critic here in the sense of opening up possible meanings and consequences of behaviors and intentions.

Another student, Lisa, recalled her kindergarten play, which was attended by all the parents except hers. She recalled how her sadness was eased when the principal came to be with her and made it a shared event for the two of them. The event seemed fresh in her mind, perhaps one of the touchstones of reality which are "signal events of our lives that remain present for us not just as insights or ideas but as living realities that we use to find our unique response to the situations and persons that claim us" (Friedman, 1978, p. 339). This fresh touchstone, perhaps, gave her what was a very special capacity to empathize with the young children she taught. She also drew all of us who heard her memory back into childhood's avenues of pain. Such memories as Kate's and Lisa's are starting points for exploring present relationships with children and for bringing half-conscious beliefs forward for deliberation. This deliberation draws on the arts and the professional and scholarly literature. No apologies are made in advisement for time spent reflecting on the ravages of multiple forms of discrimination and their impact on us as persons and professionals.

The Relationship Between Advisor-Advisee

When I was at Bank Street, I heard the relationship between advisor and advisee described as one between a senior and junior colleague. I saw this as a worthwhile move against a perspective in which there are superiors and subordinates. Hierarchies of power create a climate of guardedness in which openness and passions are to be avoided. Yet, the essential work of advisement depends on a climate of trust and openness. If students are to be fully themselves and enjoy a

growing sense of autonomy, the relationship must be one of mutual respect for each other's "learning/knowing." A view of students, children, and all others that conceives of them as holders of knowledge of different kinds helps set the groundwork for a relationship in which all participants are teachers and learners.

A way of being for advisor and advisee is captured by Donald Oliver (1990), who decries reliance on thinking about learning/knowing (his term) in mechanistic ways that are derived from the physics of the 18th and 19th centuries. Instead, he proposes this:

A more nearly adequate way of thinking about learning/knowing, perhaps, requires that the separate participants in an occasion—teacher, students, material, classroom—to use a biological-physics metaphor, "collapse in an interaction, as happens when a photon of light and a green leaf participate in photosynthesis." (p. 69)

My role as supervisor and evaluator can jeopardize this mutual learning, "this collapse in an interaction," because I play a key role in determining whether the student passes the final field assessment seminar. The students realize this and I hope from the beginning of what is at least a two-year relationship with them that the bases for passing are made clear. The program makes a number of efforts to prevent failure, such as additional placements and a change of advisor. I hope that I convey to them as their advisor that my commitment, my passions, are directed to their professional, as well as inextricably personal, development.

For the most part, our relationship does grow and become trustful. When I observe them teach, I gather low-inference running records, which the students analyze first. We then go through them together for the student to elaborate on what I saw in terms of what was happening to the children, what had led up to the events, and where the student saw them leading. (During the semester, a fellow student also gathers data and follows the process I have demonstrated of being nonjudgmental until the observed student has had time to reflect and expand upon the data.) Elliot Eisner's (1985) concept of the critic who illuminates is one I value and try to emulate: to see what about the teaching works and, with the student, appreciate it critically together. From this base, I feel that I can offer guidance, but observation always has some tensions in it.

I find acknowledging that teaching is largely an art, for which I found strong support at Bank Street, helps the student and me with this. The tensions of stage fright are common to actors, artists, and writers, and certainly the classroom is one more place where one's artistic performance can be seen, appreciated, and criticized. My own experiences teaching children have left residues in my bones and mind that add to my empathic feelings and temper my critical judgments about the teaching I witness. The observations remind me in a cogent way that

the student and I are in this education for teaching work together. We are not poised one above the other on the career ladder but each teaching the other in a complex way. As Robert Coles (1989) puts it: "Supervision is after all a meeting of two persons, a shared possibility for each of them" (p. 8). It was clear to me at Bank Street that advisement served as a source of self-renewal for the advisors. I believe that it also reinvigorates my colleagues and me at Binghamton.

Although we do not have regular meetings in relation to advisement, we are a very small group so that we do have frequent informal contacts and discussions. Our students over the years have valued the advisement process, so I close this paper with my conviction that the basic structure of the Bank Street ways of advisement has transplanted well and beneficially to Binghamton. ♦

References

- Apple, M. W., & King, N. (1978). What do schools teach? In *Qualitative education: Concepts and cases in curriculum criticism* (pp. 444-463). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan.
- Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Biber, B. (1984). Dramatic play: Interpretation, reorganization, and synthesis. In *Early education and psychological development*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Coles, R. (1989). *The call of stories: Teaching the moral imagination*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Dewey, J. (1910). *How we think*. New York: D. C. Heath.
- Eisner, E. (1985). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs*. New York: Macmillan.
- Erikson, J. M. (1988). *Wisdom and the senses: The way of creativity*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Friedman, M. (1978, September). The intellectual challenge Buber has left us. *Thought*, 53(210), 339.
- Lewis, C. (1979). The conference group leader: A model. In *On teachers and teaching*. New York: Bank Street College of Education.
- Oliver, D. (1990, September). Grounded knowing: A postmodern perspective on teaching and learning. *Educational Leadership*, 48(1), 69.
- Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Woolf, V. (1968). *Roger Fry: A biography*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.