REFLECTIVE TOOLS
These discussion questions can be used as personal reflection, starters for an informal study group, or with professional learning community protocols (see protocols at School Reform Initiative, www.schoolreforminitiative.org/).

Chapter 1
“Real teaching happens within a wild triangle of relations—among teacher, students, subject—and the points of the triangle shift continually. What shall I teach amid all that I should teach? How can I grasp it myself so that my grasping might enable theirs? What are they thinking and feeling—toward me, toward each other, toward the thing that I am trying to teach? How near should I come, how far off should I stay? How much clutch? How much gas?”

Joseph McDonald quoted in Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden’s A Good Teacher in Every Classroom: Preparing the Highly Qualified Teachers Our Children Deserve, 2005, p. 376.

Discussion Questions
• Use this quote to begin your conversation about the art of teaching. Why is the “wild triangle of relations” so complex? In what way is teaching an art? How do local investigations add to this complexity?
• How does reflective practice and/or action research deepen and improve practice?
• Discuss the “philosophical threads” presented in this chapter. Which practices resonate with your own? Which offer an entry point to begin or deepen your ability to engage the local?
• What partnerships are available to you at your school and in your community to help?
• How is the view of “teacher as artist” different than seeing teachers as the director of all the activities, a “sage on the stage,” compared to a “guide on the side?”

Activity
Discuss the conflict that teachers experience between their “wannas” and their “gottas.” Make a list of each and discuss what action steps might resolve or lessen these conflicts.

Chapter 2
“When you analyze in the light of experience the central task of education, you find that its successful accomplishment depends on a delicate adjustment of many variable factors. The reason is that we are dealing with human minds, and not with dead matter. The evocation of curiosity, of judgment, of the power of mastering a complicated tangle of circumstances, the use of theory in giving foresight in special cases—all these powers are not to be imparted by a set rule embodied in one schedule of examination subjects.

I appeal to you, as practical teachers. With good discipline, it is always possible to pump into the minds of a class a certain quantity of inert knowledge. You take a textbook and make them learn it. So far, so good. But what is the point of teaching a child to solve a quadratic equation? There is a
traditional answer to this question. It runs thus: The mind is an instrument, you first sharpen it, and then use it; the acquisition of the power of solving a quadratic equation is part of sharpening the mind. Now there is just enough truth in this answer to have made it live through the ages. But for all its half-truth, it embodies a radical error that bids fair to stifle the genius of the modern world. I do not know who was first responsible for this analogy of the mind to a dead instrument. For aught I know, it may have been one of the seven wise men of Greece, or a commitment of the whole lot of them. Whoever was the originator, there can be no doubt of the authority that it has acquired by the continuous approval bestowed upon it by eminent persons. But whatever its weight of authority, whatever the high approval which it can quote, I have no hesitation in denouncing it as one of the most fatal, erroneous, and dangerous conceptions ever introduced into the theory of education. The mind is never passive; it is in perpetual activity, delicate, receptive, responsive to stimulus. You cannot postpone its life until you have sharpened it. Whatever interest attaches to your subject-matter must be evoked here and now; whatever powers you are strengthening in the pupil, must be exercised here and now; whatever possibilities of mental life your teaching should impart, must be exhibited here and now. That is the golden rule of education, and a very difficult one to follow.”


**Discussion Questions**

- Use this quote to begin your conversation about how local investigations work. What is Whitehead’s belief about learning and student engagement?
- Discuss Demarest’s moment at the pond (see p. 27). Share your own “moments” of teaching when students were intensely engaged. How do these moments change our view of teaching and learning?
- Discuss the term: “handing it over.” How is this accomplished? What are the challenges?
- What are the rewards?
- Discuss the steps of the inquiry process. Consider examples pertinent to your own practice and discuss the challenges and possible outcomes related to each step.

**Chapter 3**

“Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves.... The connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts—meaning heart in its ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit and will converge in the human self.”


**Discussion Questions**

- Use this quote to begin your conversation about the ways that teachers can better connect to students’ experience. In what ways do you already make important connections? In what ways can you do better?
- Discuss the breadth of experiences your students bring to school. In what ways does your school honor these—both formally and informally?
• How does this view toward students’ experiences (past, present, and future) deepen our view of what is worthwhile student work?

Activity

Consider what your students should know, feel, and do. Use outline of head, heart, and hands (See “Sustainable Child,” Module 1.4 in Sustainable Starter Kit at Sustainable Schools Project http://sustainableschoolsproject.org/tools-resources/starter-kit) or a simple outline of a learner as a reflective tool to consider what kind of human, authentic connections you want your students to experience.

Chapter 4

“...a pedagogy of place appears to transform the language of learning. Many students [in Rural Challenge settings] study history by becoming historians of their local towns and the major events that are rarely chronicled in history books. They study science by joining contextual knowledge with scientific understandings, becoming, in the process, scientists who analyze their watersheds, or raise fish for commercial use, or map and document the trees, birds or mammals in their regions. They learn grammar and syntax by producing newspapers read by virtually everyone in a local community and they learn accountability by being asked to share their work at school board meetings, legislative hearings, community meetings and state conventions. No assessment is more powerful than having to defend one’s research and analysis, written work or mathematical understandings, before a critical audience, not necessarily including one’s parents!”


Discussion Questions

• Use this quote to begin your conversation about the ways that subjects can “come alive” in local investigations.
• In what ways can students experience the intellectual rigor of a discipline in local learning?
• In what ways do your own experiences of learning a subject influence the ways that you think it should be taught. Are these influences both positive and negative?
• Discuss the curricular construct of “my place, your place, all places.” How can understanding subjects locally help student learn how concepts and ideas function everywhere?
• In what ways do the content standards student learn how concepts and ideas function everywhere that affect assessment?

Activity

Use a text protocol to examine assessment tools in regard to how to best assess content, process, and results.
Chapter 5

“Students see homelessness and poverty in the streets around them, they know about immigration as they hear so many languages spoken, they are aware of community violence, drugs, war and the threat of war. That schools don’t explore such issues deeply, for the most part even ignoring them, reinforces for students that the schools are about something other than the realities of the world.

Further, the content of schools seldom relates to what people in a particular community care deeply about. Schools don’t often make the local community architecture or its historical and cultural roots a focus of study. The community’s storytellers and craftspeople are not common visitors. The literature that is read is seldom selected because it illuminates the life that students see day in and day out outside the school. This disconnectedness trivializes much of what students learn.”


Discussion Questions

- Use this quote to begin your conversation about places. What stories are important in the place where you teach?
- Consider ways that the local environment was—or was not—part of your schooling. How does this impact how you teach?
- How do you define your “place?”
- What are the hidden stories of your place? What might the unanticipated stories be?
- What treasures are in your community and have they been explored? Are there “treasures” that are viewed differently by members of the community and, if so, how will you explore these different perspectives in your teaching?
- In what way does this element of curriculum design differ from the subject emphasis described in Chapter 4? Use examples from your own practice to compare the shift in emphasis.

Activity

Brainstorm what different things your students should know, do, and understand about your place.

Chapter 6

“What characterizes human selfhood is the construction of a conceptual system that organizes, as it were a ‘record’ of agentive encounters with the world, a record that is related to the past but that is also extrapolated into the future--self with history and with possibility. It is a ‘possible self’ that regulates aspiration, confidence, optimism, and their opposites.”


“Kids, like the rest of us, don’t need perfect communities. What they do need is invitations to join the work in progress of making places better.”

Discussion Questions

- Use these two quotes to begin your conversation about the power of integrated curriculum. How do they together relate to the ideas in this chapter?
- What is James Beane’s view of the difference between interdisciplinary and integrated curriculum?
- What “new” topics, directions, and tasks do you consider important for students to participate in?
- In what ways can teachers incorporate student direction into their practice?
- In what ways can teachers incorporate a “bigger purpose” into their practice?
- In what ways are these new undertakings a “new language of possibility?” How would you define the “edge” of your practice? How can students be partners in curriculum design?

Activity

Use protocols to share student work that you believe incorporates the ideas presented in this chapter.

Chapter 7

“My understanding of place-based education is that it is not necessarily about using resources like museums or big cultural resources. It’s about uncovering and unpacking resources that you have around you that you don’t see all the time….the stories that people tell or community organizations that you might never have heard of. It’s an opportunity to look beyond the grand cultural institutions and beyond just nature or parks and really find the stories.”

Lissa Fox, pre-service teacher, 2001

Discussion Questions

- Use this quote to begin your conversation about learning in the field. What stories can you investigate with your students?
- Discuss the idea of “reading the world” and “place as text.” How can these concepts help you structure learning in different places?
- What are the forgotten, hidden stories in your community?
- Discuss the ways that students can use people and places as sources. How do these “live” sources change teaching and assessment?
- Consider Demarest’s “pre-, on-site, and post-site” (POP) strategy for learning in the field. Is this helpful to lesson planning? How does this build a literacy of place?

Activity

On a large piece of paper, create a collective “map” of your community on which you label the people and places that could be used as sources and sites for learning.
Chapter 8

“The art of curriculum construction is that of helping students develop their own creative and organizing powers. This cannot be done by over-direction or under-direction: …what we call facts or basics of a field are needed, but we also need to play with these facts, to rearrange them in imaginative ways.”


**Discussion Questions**

- Use this quote to begin your conversation about curriculum design. In what way is place-based curriculum design more “fluid” than planning traditional lessons?
- Wiggins and McTighe (2005) maintain that it is “easy to fall into the thinking that the textbook is the job.” (p. 30). Do you agree with this? In what ways does this happen?
- In what ways do the tools and strategies presented in this chapter serve the ideas of the rest of the book?
- Discuss your experience with Understanding by Design. In what ways are these tools helpful? What other tools do you use alongside or in place of the ones suggested here.

Chapter 9

“Reflective practice is a professional development strategy; it is also a problem solving strategy. It is about individuals working with others to critically examine their own practice to resolve important problems. To engage in reflective practice requires an environment of support. It requires an organizational climate that encourages open communication, critical dialogue, risk-taking and collaboration.”


**Discussion Questions**

- Use this quote to begin your conversation about professional development. In what ways does active reflection and dialogue change practice?
- How does the practice of “professional learning communities” differ from traditional professional “development.”?
- Consider the four strategies for moving forward suggested in this chapter. What seem most doable in your practice?
- In what ways can student work be more public?

**Activity**

Use the future protocol ([http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/future.pdf)) to imagine what your school would look like if you were more successfully engaging the local. What would students be doing? What would teachers be doing? What would student work look like? Create a list of “Top Ten” steps (in order of priority) for moving forward that align with this vision.