

## INTRODUCTION: WHOSE QUESTIONS COUNT?

---

---

The question is, “Who commands?”

—*Alice in Wonderland*

---

---

Greetings and welcome.

In this book I pose questions about teaching and learning as I grapple with the issues that we face today in education. My primary audience is the classroom teacher who is working with English language learners, but I welcome all teachers for whom these questions seem important:

- Who is in charge of lesson plans and of organizing classroom activities?
- Who places students in classes?
- Who selects the books? The tests?
- How are students evaluated, and who determines this? What consideration is teacher opinion given in decisions about student progress in school?

My answer is that you *should* play an important role in *all* of these activities. As a classroom teacher, you *should* have the final say in most of these cases, and your opinion *should* weigh heavily in all of them. Recently, however, I have been

struck by how difficult it is for teachers to exercise their professional prerogatives. Consider the following incidents, for example:

- ❑ A teacher at North High School in Denver, Colorado, was told by the district superintendent (and the exchange was published in the newspaper) *how* she should be teaching her class—what she could or could not do and how she was to use the instructional materials brought to class. This occurred in response to public uproar over her displaying the Mexican flag at the same height as the U.S. flag in her classroom.
- ❑ Another teacher reported that she could not give a passing grade to a student because he was not reading “on grade level”; both the criteria and the measurement tools had been determined by school policy.
- ❑ The dean of our Initial Professional Teacher Education program announced that graduate students who received a B– or lower for a class would not get program credit for their work.
- ❑ The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, in conjunction with the professional organization TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), has issued guidelines for graduate programs that require courses to have assignments that are “performance based”; in other words, learning has been defined as behavior—if you can’t see it, it isn’t learning.

I hasten to add that a reasonable case can be made for the decisions reported in each of these situations, and I am not arguing for unilateral control by teachers of all features of the curriculum. But what these cases all have in common is the fact that the locus of decision-making in teaching—lesson plans, tests, methods and materials, teacher/student interaction—has moved away from the classroom; increasingly, important decisions are being made by individuals who are removed from day-to-day contact with students.

So, in spite of the fact that the territory is unambiguously demarcated—after all, most teaching is still done in classrooms—the number of individuals and special interests involved in decision-making has increased dramatically. If teachers are to maintain any semblance of influence in the profession, we cannot exclude or ignore the other players; *we have to find common ground* and negotiate our positions.

At the same time, *it is clear that the territory is contested*. That is, given the diversity of individuals who have a say in educational matters, we are not all going to agree on what needs to be done or how it should be accomplished. We need to be clear on our roles and responsibilities, and we need to work to maintain our professional prerogatives.

The problems teachers face are manifold. History and global events press in on all sides. I am writing these words in the summer of 2006, under the long shadow cast by events of 9/11/01 and the subsequent war on terrorism. Newspapers carry stories every day that directly impact me—news of war casualties that include the names of people I know or spouses of my students, visa restrictions and anti-terrorist laws that threaten to bankrupt the schools with whom I collaborate, letters and emails from friends and family abroad that recount the stresses of living in a global village where English speakers are increasingly viewed with suspicion or hostility. It is not difficult to make the case that everything is connected to everything else (Diamond, 1999, 2005; Friedman, 1999, 2005).

This book continues the argument developed in *A Place to Stand: Essays for Educators in Troubled Times* (Clarke, 2003), which is that classroom teachers hold the key to the future of education and, without exaggeration, to the future of society and the civilized world.

“Hold on!” you say. “I’ve got enough going on without some crackpot casting me in the role of superhero! Who are you to be telling me what my roles and responsibilities are?”

Good question.

In these days of barnstorming politicians and self-proclaimed gurus, it pays to be cautious when someone attempts to convince you that he or she has the answers to your problems. And in an increasingly partisan atmosphere of decision-making, it is important to scrutinize the credentials of people who present themselves as having answers to your questions (whether you asked them or not). And because I am not a fellow classroom teacher but a university professor, it is important for you to be clear on the claims I make on your time.

In Colorado, we have had our share of acrimonious exchange around the subject of professorial privilege. Consider this, for example: On Friday, September 10, 2004, I awoke to an overcast sky and chilly temperatures and the story on page 4 in the *Denver Post*.

I do not know any of the professors involved in this case and I have no opinion on this particular controversy, but I bring the story to your attention for two reasons.

First, it is indicative of the climate within which teachers work today: Debates are becoming more and more shrill and accusatory, characterized by a singular lack of charity. Educational decisions are increasingly being made in the press, with political commitments playing as important a role as questions of teaching and learning. And that fact prompts a central message of this book: *Teachers need to participate in the exchanges around education, especially as these concern*

### 3 New Claims of Prof Bias Are Heard by Panel<sup>1</sup>

Three new accusations of political bias by college professors emerged Thursday in a special hearing before state lawmakers investigating the issue....Some Democrats, while denouncing the acts, likened the hearing on political indoctrination to a “witch hunt” and said the episodes—if they are true—are isolated and are being investigated by the colleges....

The professors were not present to defend themselves during the hearing, and attempts to reach them Thursday were unsuccessful. The new accusations come on top of allegations that emerged in two previous legislative hearings....

“The allegations seemed to have some credibility; however, it’s hard to be sure whether or not a problem really exists because we were given testimony by three or four students, and we have tens of thousands of students,” said Sen. Ron Tupa, D-Boulder, who likened the hearing to a witch hunt.

“I don’t see a pattern, I don’t see a trend, and frankly I’m not sure I see a problem. You may have a few bad apples among the other-wise thousands of fine, dedicated faculty.”

Students with differing views on either the professors or the ideological debate said they were told Wednesday they would not be allowed to testify.

Senator John Andrews disputed that, saying, “Our announcement made clear that public comment would be received.”

Thursday’s hearing stemmed from a memorandum of understanding signed this year by college presidents who promised to update lawmakers periodically on their progress in protecting students from political discrimination and indoctrination.

The issue rose to the forefront a year ago after Andrews and other Republicans met with David Horowitz, a Los Angeles conservative pushing for an “Academic Bill of Rights” for students.

*freedom of speech and professional prerogative. We need to define the territory of education, and we must find common ground with both our allies and our adversaries.*

Second, I want to assure you that I do not condone the use of the professor’s lectern as bully pulpit for personal political or ideological views. This book has been crafted in my graduate classes over three decades, and I have worked hard to present a balanced view of the problems that face us as English language teachers. I have successfully (according to course evaluations) orchestrated conversations among individuals from both ends of the political spectrum, among conservative Christians, confirmed atheists, and devout Muslims, and between adherents of opposing pedagogical and ideological perspectives. I hope that individuals from all walks of life will be able to read the book without feeling attacked.

At the same time, it is impossible to present an objective view of learning and teaching, so you have a right to know who I am and what my biases are. In the spirit of full disclosure, I hereby assert the following to be facts:

- I was born in 1947 in a small mountain town, Gunnison, Colorado. I have one younger brother, Andrew J. My parents were both college educated and together ran the Clarke Agency, real estate and insurance. I was the third

generation of Clarkes and Bomers to live in the town; my aunt still lives there. My father died of a heart attack when I was 16.

- I am married and have three adult children and three grandchildren.
- I live in an urban neighborhood in Denver, Colorado, and I belong to the large and racially diverse Park Hill United Methodist Church.
- I received my B.A. from the University of Colorado, Boulder, my M.A. from the American University in Cairo, Egypt, and my Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. At Colorado I was on the varsity wrestling team.
- I have taught at the University of Colorado at Denver since 1977 M.A. courses in the Language, Literacy, and Culture program and in the Initial Professional Teacher Education Program and doctoral courses in Educational Leadership and Innovation.
- I speak English (native), Spanish (fluent), and Arabic (basic).
- I am a registered Democrat. I am pro-choice and anti-war.

Therefore, to the extent that labels are informative, the following might be accurately applied to me: *native English-speaking multi-lingual white middle class educated progressive passivist anglo-saxon protestant heterosexual able-bodied jock urban academic male.*

I have dinner with my mother every Monday night and have lived in the same house for thirty years; you might reasonably conclude that I am pretty set in my ways.

However, I have traveled enough to know that there are as many ways of looking at the world as there are people living in it; I believe it is possible for people with profound and irreconcilable differences to live and work peaceably together.

These essays constitute an account of my experience as a language teacher and teacher educator. I began writing a number of them some many years ago—my ongoing effort at understanding teaching and learning, particularly as this involves me and English language learners. I do not intend for them to be read as professional prescription or as personal memoir; rather, they are my best effort at making sense of the world, and I figure you will take what you can use.

I believe that we all make up our own minds about important issues in language learning and teaching, and that the best way to understand an issue is to explore the details of others' experiences that lead them to have different perspectives, opinions, and commitments.

One teacher took issue with that assertion. "I don't agree," she said. "I believe we need to understand our own experience with regard to the issue and form our own conclusions."

Yes and no.

I agree that we need to be clear on who we are and what we believe, but I note that today people seem to be doing more talking than listening, especially when they are engaged with others who are different or whose perspectives are different from their own. What I am saying here is that there is much to be learned by knowing other people's life experiences and the basis on which they have made their decisions. It doesn't mean we have to agree with them, but it will help us understand why our points of view differ.

So, in order for you to understand my point of view, allow me to continue with my own story.

My first teaching experience was as an undergraduate tutor for Chicano youth in a summer program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I had no idea what I was doing, and I seriously doubt that my efforts benefited the young women assigned to me. Later that summer, my wife and I boarded a plane for Egypt, and I soon found myself enveloped by the intoxicatingly exotic mélange of sounds, sights, and smells of Cairo. I now find it amusing that I was cast as the teacher in my evening encounters with English language learners—secretaries, embassy employees, mid-level government administrators—at the Department of Public Service because they were actually my mentors, amazingly tolerant guides to Egyptian life and culture, the intricacies of Arabic, and Islamic views of the world. Since then I have taught in a variety of settings in Latin America, the Middle East, North Africa, and Europe, but since 1977 most of my teaching has been an extension of my responsibilities as a professor at the University of Colorado at Denver.

Over the years I began to consolidate what I believe about teaching and learning. I have come to a number of conclusions:

❑ Learning is not limited to a change inside the skull; it is not merely a cognitive thing. Learning involves the “whole person”—changes in attitude, behavior, and thinking are all involved in one way or another.

❑ All learning involves adjustments in identity, whether the individual is learning to throw a pot in a weekend arts-and-craft class or picking up gardening techniques from a neighbor. Learning a second (or third, or fourth) language requires fundamental changes in one's sense of self.

❑ For this reason, language learning always involves some element of risk and anxiety. School is the site of tender negotiations for everyone, but it is an extremely risky place for English language learners.

❑ I have long since let go of the notion that I can make people learn what I want them to learn, and I have relaxed in how much detail I use to organize

my lessons. I have concluded that teaching is a matter of creating environments for learning.

□ Everyone is learning something all the time but very rarely the same thing. The best I can do is influence the direction of the learning. I cannot specify in advance *precisely* what is going to be learned, but I can increase the probability that some things will be learned by the way I organize classroom activities.

□ Relatively recently, I tumbled to the fact that I was the individual doing the most learning in my classes. I am, after all, the individual who is always present semester after semester, who responds to events and adjusts techniques and activities according to what has occurred, who gives the most time and thought to how class time is used and how assignments relate to learning goals.

□ I don't have to know all the answers to be a good teacher, and confusion—mine as well as that of the students—is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, creating opportunities for students to teach each other and me might relieve some of the tension that often creeps into courses where everyone has learned to be just a bit defensive about what they know and don't know. My grandfather was fond of saying that we are all ignorant of something, and some scholars believe that it is important to savor your problems and confusions as opportunities of learning.

These are some of the ideas that I explore in this book. I realize that you are at a different stage of your career than I am and that you arrive with your own questions and problems. It is impossible to write a book that anticipates every reader's experience and point of view. But I can offer advice on your approach to the book; to that end, I encourage you to adopt four rules of thumb as you wrestle with the ideas and activities in these essays.<sup>2</sup>

□ Be *critical*. Adopt a stance of thoughtful skepticism as you explore ways of teaching and learning. Step back, psychologically, and ask yourself, "What is the logic of this? Why should this be so? What are the assumptions behind this activity or that requirement? What are the merits/demerits of this idea? Who benefits from this view of reality?" Also, learn to question your own reactions to things: "Why am I feeling this way? How did I come to have this attitude?"

□ As an extension of this critical stance, require that decisions and interpretations be *grounded* in reality. If someone (including me, a colleague, or an author of another text) makes a claim, ask yourself, "What sort of experience might support this assertion? How does this relate to my reality?" Of course, be prepared always to offer evidence in support of your own opinion. And, just as

important, be prepared to yield to others if their experience is more authoritative than yours. This admonition requires you to look back, to evaluate ideas against your understanding of the past.

□ Be *pragmatic* as you think about applications of ideas to the classroom (or to life in general, for that matter). As ideas or suggestions are offered, test them against your view of the world and your experience in schools to evaluate if they would be practical and reasonable ways of altering practice. This admonition requires you to look forward, to evaluate ideas according to their likelihood of success in the future.

□ Be *prepared* to stretch your understanding of the effects of your actions; think broadly about your work and your spheres of responsibility. As you focus on a lesson, for example, think not only about what students are learning at the moment, but how that learning might carry over into their futures and into their lives outside of school. As you organize your teaching, think beyond the classroom to the ripple of your efforts in your school and community. In other words, assess your work according to the *scale* of effects that you may have. *Scale* refers to dimensions of space and time, and it is crucial that we understand that we are always working in the here and now, but our actions reverberate in places and events beyond the present.

The book is a work in progress (a somewhat disingenuous statement, given that you have paid your hard-earned money to acquire it), and I welcome your candid evaluations as you proceed. You can keep me informed of your thoughts, questions, and confusions by posting your comments on the website [www.press.umich.edu/esl/bookclub/](http://www.press.umich.edu/esl/bookclub/).

## **Overview of Essays**

All of the essays address questions faced by teachers as they work to solve problems encountered in the course of the day. The classroom is the most common point of departure and teaching decisions are the most closely scrutinized phenomena, but I also examine educational reform and institutional innovation. I am particularly interested in the intensely personal nature of language learning and cross-cultural communication, especially as these surface in classrooms as pedagogical problems or possibilities.

A theme that runs throughout the book concerns the importance of recognizing the range of choices we have as we work, and I repeatedly invoke the mantra of “teacher knows best.” I trust that you will find this an affirming stance. At the same time I argue that the only person over whom you have any

control is yourself, so if you are going to change things, you will have to start with who *you* are and how *you* teach.

Let me be clear on this point: If you want to exercise your proper authority as a teacher, you will have to change the way you think and the way you interact with others. I believe good teachers are always reflective practitioners and that they should also see themselves as theorists, philosophers, action researchers, and political activists. It is important for teachers to take an active role in school and community politics.

In other words, I think you'll find that reading this book will require more work than typically expected by teacher reference books.

And finally—perhaps most important—I believe teachers should cast themselves as learners in their classrooms and work to create environments in which the most frequently asked question is, “What have we learned here?”

Other questions arise as I consider the various arenas in which teachers are engaged. In what follows, I preface brief summaries of the essays with some of the questions addressed in the essays.

## 1. Ecological Perspectives of Teaching: Making Choices in a Complex World

- How do I organize my decision-making as I plan my teaching? How does one prioritize the work of the day?
- What are the choices I make for myself as I work, and what are the choices that others make for me?
- How do we achieve some modicum of agency, of professional discretion? What is the meaning of *agency* in this complex world or worlds?

Here I develop the framework within which all of the essays are organized. I believe we are plagued today by causal thinking—variations on “carrot and stick” approaches to teaching that cast both teachers and learners as balls on a billiard table, reacting unthinkingly to external forces. I argue that we need to adopt an ecological perspective of our work.

Succinctly stated, an ecological perspective uses the garden as a metaphor, rather than the assembly line or the theater. Teachers are seen as creators of environments that promote the healthy growth of their charges, rather than managers of learning or performers. Learners are seen as unique individuals whose curiosities require our attention and whose efforts require scaffolding. The implications of this approach are profound, and they impact all aspects of our

work. Among the most significant is recognition of the fact that we cannot force students to learn. Just as the gardener provides a trellis for the rose bush, we provide activities that guide learners to focus on what we believe to be important. A related implication is that the content of the curriculum is less important than our relationships with students and the decisions we make as lessons proceed.

I tell the story of Gwen Hill, a veteran ESL teacher at CU Denver, as she negotiated a lesson with a group of Vietnamese refugees in the early 1980s. Gwen dumped her lesson plan in favor of a letter-writing campaign prompted by her students' discovery that the state legislature was considering limiting financial aid for studying English. The story illustrates why lesson planning is less important than planned listening. Gwen harnessed the energy of her students as she crafted a lesson that not only furthered her agenda and the curriculum but also taught valuable lessons in citizenship.

## 2. On Learning and (Therefore) Teaching

- What is learning?
- How do you know when someone (including yourself) has learned something?
- What is the relationship between your teaching and what your students are learning?
- How do your lessons reflect what your students are ready to learn?
- How do your lessons reflect what is expected of you by the curriculum?

It may seem too obvious to mention, but because teaching is all about fostering learning, teachers must have a clearly articulated theory of learning and be able to explain how their teaching promotes student learning. These sorts of questions frame the work of the day—lesson preparation, materials development, student assessment, etc.—but they also provide the basis for others' evaluation of your teaching. You need to be confident in your answers to questions such as these in order to participate effectively in school decision-making and in the debates that surround teaching today.

I use the story of Aimee Trechock's reading lesson to illustrate this point. She and seven children explore the motivations and adventures of a little boy and a mouse as they become friends in the children's book, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*. I videotaped the lesson as part of a research project, and I have returned to one sequence again and again as I attempt to understand the relationship between focused grammar instruction on the one hand and communicative

language teaching on the other. Here, I am interested in exploring the relationship between theories of learning and the classroom activities teachers develop to promote learning. I argue that there is no “ultimate” theory, that what matters is your own grasp of how your teaching fits with your theory of learning. I believe teachers need to be able to answer questions such as those listed in ways that both satisfy their sense of what is correct and that meet the expectations of parents (or corporate sponsors), administrators, and policy-makers.

### 3. Teaching as Learning, Learning as Life

- How do you organize your time with students? What information do you use to make teaching decisions?
- How do you adjust what you do tomorrow based on what you did today? How do you reflect on your daily practice so that it goes beyond thoughtful pondering in the shower or on the commute to work?
- How does one make decisions now that still seem like good ideas weeks and months from now?
- What are the “adjustments” required of you and others (colleagues, administrators, community members, for example) to improve the environment for learning?

No matter what lofty motivations brought you to the profession, if you cannot get organized for the day, you will be miserable as a teacher. Teaching may be about nurturing the minds and souls of learners, but it is also about the relentless assault of minutia, and once the school day is launched you have little time to catch your breath, much less engage in philosophical pondering about the value of one activity over another.

So it seems important to have a grand plan, an overall vision of your work that is grounded in worthy philosophical principles and sound theoretical perspectives. My recommendation is that you see yourself as a reflective practitioner and action researcher. I use a story of a colleague working with Latino children in rural Colorado to make the point that serious problems can rarely be solved at the level on which they are encountered.

Maria is a conscientious sixth grader who suddenly begins arriving late, missing school, and failing to do her assignments. The teacher faces some difficult choices—follow school policy and fail her or discover the source of her problems and work to improve conditions for her. What originally seemed like a straightforward set of pedagogical decisions turns out to be an extended quest

for budgetary support for small-scale educational reform. The teacher succeeds in changing the system by doggedly asking questions and pursuing the answers with what can be described as action research at its best.

## 4. Philosophy as Autobiography

- What is a philosophy of teaching? Of what use is it and to whom? Who dictates what constitutes an adequate philosophy?
- Who are the authorities whose teachings guide my decision-making?
- How do I integrate my classroom experience into my philosophy?
- And a number of tactical questions: What should one include? What options are available for organizing it? How to maintain it, keep it fresh and relevant?

Most teachers I know are heartily sick of the teaching philosophy. It has become the symbol of bureaucratic intrusion, required in teacher education courses, job interviews, and school accreditation visits. No one reads them, and they serve no discernible purpose apart from institutional window dressing. If there ever was a professional equivalent of “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” the teaching philosophy is the rod that the teacher has not been spared.

My response has been to take it on as my own personal project. After many years of resisting the requirement, of reluctantly dusting it off and grudgingly updating it every year for my annual review, I decided that this was a ridiculous farce. If I was going to spend so much time complying with the requirement, perhaps I should make it work for me rather than letting it work me over.

What I do in this essay is tell my own story and use it to illustrate an important point that none of us can escape: Who we are as teachers is a variation of who we are as human beings. If you are going to be an effective educator, you need to cultivate the habits of the philosopher and the autobiographer; you need to become more aware of who you are and how you learned to be you. I explore the assertion that personality and identity are socially negotiated entities and that you can expand your consciousness by reflecting on the relationships that have shaped your life. I trace my own propensities as a teacher to my rural Colorado upbringing, my love of books, the quiet serenity of libraries, and my wanderlust. I organize some activities that encourage you to discover how you learned to be you.

## 5. Authenticity in Language Teaching: Working Out the Bugs

- How can we harness the curiosity and enthusiasm that learners bring with them so that they master the knowledge and skills required by society?
- What can we do to create meaningful, authentic activities within the constraints of the required curriculum?
- What can we do to mitigate the pressures of school that often provoke resistance from students?

This essay recounts a class in which I taught from a newspaper as I tried to coax students into authentic conversation about a pleasingly bizarre event: the seven-year cycle of the cicada invasion in central United States. I use the story to examine the concept of *authenticity* and to develop principles for lesson preparation that improve our chances of authentic teaching.

I define *authenticity* as any experience that connects in meaningful ways with student experiences, interests, and aspirations. It is not a *thing*; it is an event. Authenticity emerges in the conduct of the lesson, the result of the focused, sensitive response of the teacher to the efforts of the students. It permits the individuals involved to experience the activity as having value *in and of itself*, apart from whatever significance it may have for the lesson.

I develop seven principles for lesson preparation and orchestration. Key among them is keeping one's core values in sight and establishing a rhythm and routine. I elaborate on Earl Stevick's criteria of *strong, transparent, and light*, and I emphasize the importance of nudging students toward critical thinking using activities that appeal to both head and heart.

## 6. Authenticity Revisited: Rhythm and Routine in Classroom Interaction

- How do I find the time to create authentic lessons as I cope with all the pressures of the day?
- How can I make lessons authentic when I am teaching with mandated curricula, textbook, and materials?
- How do I know if a lesson is authentic?

There are two problems with conventional thinking about authentic teaching: First, it is generally assumed that extensive planning and elaborate materials are required, and second, that the activities involved must be drawn from “real life,” not the classroom.

I argue that authentic classroom experiences emerge from meaningful interactions between teacher and students, and that the key element is in the teacher managing to make a “shift of consciousness,” getting inside the students’ heads, in effect, and discovering how they see the world. This is the ultimate example of “starting where the learner is,” and it gives the teacher a chance at orchestrating authentic lessons regardless of the materials being used.

I illustrate my points with excerpts from an ESL text, attempting to show how subtle adjustments as the lesson unfolds permit the teacher to move in close to the students, focusing on the language being learned and checking and extending comprehension as relationships deepen.

## 7. Teachers and Gurus

- How do we get students to take responsibility for their learning—how do we balance control and initiative in activities?
- How does one keep up with the scholarly work in the field? How do you integrate the advice of experts into your teaching?
- How does one respond to educational mandates from administrators and policy-makers?

Perhaps all professions are the same, but it seems to me that teaching has more than its share of bandwagons and gurus. In the current climate of accountability, teachers are required to implement “scientifically based” teaching and to defend their practices by citing the authorities on which their classroom activities are based. It is impossible to participate effectively in curriculum decisions or even coffee shop discussions about teaching without being up to date on the latest acronyms and professional personalities. I know from working with novice teachers that this is a daunting aspect of entering the profession, but I can assure you neophytes that it is not a piece of cake for veterans either.

In this essay I argue that you need to balance the dictates of gurus with your own common sense understanding of what works. For many years I have used a technique called “the blackboard composition” as a way of teaching writing. I tell the story of one lesson in which international students were trying to make sense of contemporary values surrounding love and courtship in the

United States, and I argue that the success of that lesson depended more on the choices I made than on the wisdom of gurus. I use this experience as the basis for arguing that you need to develop a “higher consciousness” about your work, one that permits you to see yourself as a shaper of the trends and fashions of educational discourse rather than as a consumer. You have to become your own authority for your teaching.

## 8. Teaching to Standards: How to and Why Not

- What are standards? Where do they come from, and how do they influence our thinking and behavior?
- Whose standards count?
- How can I position myself to balance external mandates against my own sense of what is right?

Given the realities of education today, how do teachers cope with the demands under which they work, and how do they maintain some semblance of professional discretion? My answers to the questions posed in the title are simple: Do your best work for the benefit of your students, use the standards as a checklist after the lesson to assess what you have accomplished, and decide how you are going to proceed. The “why not” portion of the answer revolves around the age-old tension between internal and external authority: Do NOT organize your teaching merely to comply with a mandate; maintain your own view of what is required for your students. Work as if you were self-employed.

## 9. Changing Schools: Creating Disturbances and Alarming Your Friends

- How can schools adjust policies and procedures—and even more important, norms, routines, and daily rhythms—to provide a healthy learning environment for English language learners?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of the individual classroom teacher in promoting the larger systemic changes of the sort required by these questions?
- How does one adjust one’s thinking and daily activity to move oneself and the school toward these goals?

My argument here is simple: You need to be teaching in a school that values your contributions and that is organized around your priorities. If you discover this is not the case and you decide that change is unlikely, it is time for you to change schools.

I do not find it surprising in general that institutions are slow to change or that schools and universities espouse values that they have difficulty putting into practice—it is the nature of systems to resist change. In fact, if you were to adopt an aggressive approach to the democratic inclusion of non-English speaking students in your school, you would indeed alarm your friends and colleagues because the smooth functioning of the institution and the habitual calm of everyone involved depend on practices that assume that everyone speaks English and shares the broad cultural assumptions of the mainstream English-speaking world.

It is clear to me that changing this situation is a gargantuan task, and not one that English language teachers are going to accomplish in my lifetime, perhaps not for generations to come. However, I provide an opportunity for contemplation about how you might approach a project of linguistic democracy in your school, and I offer some ways of thinking about the issue that you might find intriguing....or not, depending on how you feel about alarming your friends.

## 10. It's All One Thing

In this chapter I reiterate my argument that there is only one thing: life. All human beings and all enduring collections of human beings—families, communities, classrooms, schools, etc.—are open systems functioning according to a handful of principles. If we understand those principles, we stand a chance of achieving some peace of mind as we grapple with the overwhelming complexity of the problems we are trying to solve. I summarize the principal arguments of the book, and I offer three suggestions for coping with the complexity: Identify the boundaries of your efforts; work within yourself; focus on what you are doing *now*.

### **One last word or two....**

You will have noticed that all the essays are keyed to questions. I have amended them countless times in response to readers' comments and confusions. I'm not confident that I have, in fact, captured the most important ones, but I remain convinced that the questions matter as much, if not more, than the

answers. As we work to create dialogues with others, I think our most important behavior may be this act of constantly questioning. And, of course, listening to the answers we get.

On reading the essays: The way I have organized the book puts the more general arguments first—the ones that address theory, philosophy, and action research—followed by essays in which classroom teaching and school activism are the focus. But I intended for each essay to constitute an argument unto itself, so you should be able to read them in any order that strikes you as interesting.

You will, of course, follow your own inclinations in any case....

## REFERENCES

- Clarke, M. A. (2003). *A place to stand: essays for educators in troubled times*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Clarke, M. A., Davis, A. W., Rhodes, L. K., & Baker, E. D. (1998). Principles of collaboration in school/university partnerships. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 592–600.
- Diamond, J. (1999). *Guns, germs, and steel: The fates of human societies*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- . (2005). *Collapse: How societies choose to fail or succeed*. New York: Viking.
- Friedman, T. L. (1999). *The lexus and the olive tree: Understanding globalization*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- . (2005). *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. L. (2001). *How the way we talk can change the way we work: Seven languages for transformation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## NOTES

1. Excerpted from an article by Dave Curtin, *Denver Post* staff writer, Friday, September 10, 2004. (Full article available at [www.denverpost.com](http://www.denverpost.com) archives.)
2. These admonitions are excerpted from an article that appeared in *TESOL Quarterly* some years ago. From “Principles of Collaboration in School/University Partnerships,” by M. A. Clarke, A. W. Davis, L. K. Rhodes, & E. D. Baker, 1998, *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, pp. 592–600.