

REVOLUTIONARY EVOLUTION IN CLASSROOMS:

THEME-CENTERED INTERACTION (TCI)*

by Ruth C. Cohn

Introduction into the Principle of Competition

Imagine entering first grade, being one of those who come from the darker places of society rather than from a light and friendly home. Would you learn to love your little neighbor who glows in the nodding smile of the teacher's approval because he talks so well? Would you „whose mother don't talk so good" and whose father drops in for beatings at irregular times, would you find the right words about what you know and what is close to your heart? ("Them know what to say.") Maybe you even looked forward to going to school and having a locker to scribble on and put things inside. But other kids knew how to use crayons and make pictures and things because there were people at their homes who cared and had time or those who watched Mr. Roberts and Captain Kangaroo (as you did when your TV wasn't broken yet). Certainly, there were things you knew better than they, but these things didn't seem to count - like taking things fast and running away with them and not getting caught; and reading grown-up faces to discover whether they were dangerous or okay; or knowing how to make friends with the big guys who could protect you from others. Would you - being such a first-grader - learn how to love yourself when people looked down on you, and you got bad marks like E or F? Or would you rather be back with the kids on the street who gave you a chance when you watched out for "the Man"?

And if you were in Junior High, would you learn to love yourself as well as those who talked big about not caring about A's or B's because they got them? You know they will exchange these marks for a ticket for a good college; and you won't. Maybe your different colored face shows that they were born better. Maybe you even happen to be in a nice, new school with thick carpets on classroom floors (in which) children do their work in (little groups and the windows are as big as those of downtown offices. How could you make it so that you won't slip off this thick carpet back into the rat-infested tenements with their lead-paint peeling walls? Stupid as you have felt from kindergarten on, among kids who were brighter or richer or more popular - (or so it seemed to you) - how will you achieve joy of mastery, spinning the wheel of the comparison mill?

As a senior in high school would you help your classmates with the math test when you realize that only the very best students in class have a chance to get into the college of their choice, and that there are only a few openings?

As an assistant professor, would you give of your free time to the students for the joy of sharing yourself with them if you know that only the papers and books you publish will get you up the ladder of a university career - not your skills as a teacher and your caring for your students?*

*Competition can provide harmless fun. It can serve the same function many games provide: to „vaccinate" against danger which would arise from real competitive situations, like the peck-a-boo game which "vaccinates" against the fear of losing mother. Competitive games are valuable if they accept losing or winning as a matter of course for all players. This happens when respect for life outweighs competitive training. Competition is deadly when it attaches positive and negative labels to people.

The school ladder of competition teaches impersonal and asocial values: It pays to be smart and to put down those who are not. It sanctions those who get by and get through and abandons those who are slow or search. Marks above mind, haste above heart, Me above You, are concomitant features of a competitive school system! It neglects interaction and cooperation and demands outdoing and winning. Thus, much of youth's living-learning spirit has gone the way of singing birds, bubbling fish and flowering weeds into a Silent Spring.

*Also called the Theme-Centered Interactional Method or the W.I.L. Approach, after the Workshop Institute for Living-Learning

⇒ This unpublished manuscript in English appeared in the German translation as „Zur Humanisierung der Schulen" (Toward More Humane Schools) in *Von der Psychoanalyse zur Themenzentrierten Interaktion (From Psychoanalysis to Theme-Centered Interaction)*, Klett Publishers, 1975, pp. 152-175

And so students learn to live with the schizophrenic-like split of "how to become a good person and love-your-neighbor who shares toys and candy and books; to be first in studies and gym and not to enjoy defeating others; and being helpful to people the Christian way; and out to prove them inferior on the class curve of achievement which condemns the meek who will be first in heaven."

Do I exaggerate? I might. This educational matter is close to my heart, and I may lose perspective. Yet I do not complain about bad people, indolent teachers, ignorant parents, callous principals, politicking communities, spoiled children - I accuse bad principles which I believe have not been sufficiently recognized; and so I stress the negative elements of traditional schooling - being aware of some of its merits (such as giving poor children a bit of a break rather than none, helping people to get beyond their families at an early enough age, allowing most people to enjoy some readings, music and glimpses of the world awareness).

Humanistic Goals in Education

I believe that most people want children to grow up to use their abilities for their own and other people's joy and usefulness and become productive social participants in their communities (which may be wished for on the smaller scale of family, village, or nation, or on the larger, human society.)

For goals to be reached, methods must match. The competitive principle, however, is adverse to education aimed towards personal and cooperative maturity; so is the so-called traditional "medical model" in which the patient is acted upon by someone who has knowledge of his illness. If the ill person is totally unconscious, this model is adequate. The doctor is subject, the patient is object. However, in most illnesses the patient is conscious and able to cooperate in research and cure of the sickness. (A doctor who does not use the patient as his own researcher and therapist misses out as a healer.)

A similar model has been used in education. The subjects parents, teachers, and community - determine what is taught to their objects - children and students. Parents and school system unite in feeding and programming children. They determine what students and children must learn, "what is good for them" without realizing that learning depends on the process of discovery rather than on pre-processed input. This "things" the students and stunts their growth, joy, and liveliness.*

If doctors and teachers do not respect the need for communicative and discovering processes with their patients and students and treat them as "objects," they promote dependency and autism. When they treat them as subjects, i.e. as participants of communication and discovery, they further their awareness of autonomy and interdependence.

Experiential psychotherapists have increasingly challenged the traditional medical model in both medicine and education. This humanist progress evolved from psychoanalysis which initially followed the medical model as in hypnosis.

Psychoanalysis led to knowledge which our ancestors did not possess; for instance, that early strict toilet training may not so much lead toward effective cleanliness as to hateful stubbornness, ineffective ruminations (compulsions) and apathy; or that keeping parents' disagreements hidden in family closets may be more damaging to their children than having open fights; or that phoney or unloving parent-child relationships will promote suspicious, violent or withdrawn personalities; or that insisting on learning against children's own rhythm may lead them to develop unthinking computer brains and pseudo-stupidity.

Experiential psychotherapy has grown from psychoanalytic insights regarding parental impact on the child, and biological phenomena, to understand growth as being affected by a wider field of social contacts. Some experiential psychotherapists have become practitioners of integrated humanistic philosophy and education. The Theme-centered Interactional System was initiated by me directly out of the gains of knowledge from psycho- analysis and group/psychotherapy.

**Expression by George Bach.*

I use the word humanism here as embracing all philosophies and practices which value and support the human being as deserving respect and care, regardless of status, good or bad deeds, religious affiliations, racial descent, gender, wealth of talent or material goods, etc.

Goals such as "widening horizons, loving one's neighbor, being effective, and rightfully pursuing happiness and justice for all" may now rise - on the basis of the newly gained knowledge and skills - from the status of slogans and wishful thinking toward their realization. Human nature is not a static given but a potential which can be actualized.

A humanist teacher, like a good therapist - unimpeded by external demands - does not try to impart static knowledge or superimpose interpretations. He/she remains in a living-learning process with the students, as knowledge cannot simply be passed on and remain alive. (Rote learning of names and facts has value only within a meaningful context, such as learning words of a useful language, labels or numbers necessary within a field of concern.) The humanist teacher structures situations in which discovery is likely to occur.

Evolution toward Humanism in Schools

A humanist teacher believes in the importance of finding one's own way (forever new!). He/she asks questions like these:

Who am I? What is important to me? What do I want to experience and achieve Here and Now?

Who are you, students? What is important to you? What do you want?

What do we have to consider? Our wants, the parents' and community wants, time, space, materials, the curriculum? What are our unchangeable givens? What compromises can we think of? How do we balance between "Must" and "I-feel-like" to get toward what we will realistically decide to do? How do we choose our tasks, our themes for studying? How can we change what we do not like in our school system? (While we are in it?)

Such simple basic questions are encountered by teachers with enthusiasm or anger:

"We have to follow the curriculum - we have to do what has to be done." I have to push it down my students' throats or they won't make it."

"We have no time for long discussions on what to do - it's all in the curriculum what we have to do." I have to hand in plans for the week beforehand, I cannot shift as I please."

"Where do you live, in Paradise? How do Johnny and Mary get into college if I don't teach them what is requested?"

(Johnny and Mary have long been trained to learn "for later on in life" and not to search for questions which they personally might want to find answers for. By the time "later on in life" arrives, they are likely to have learned that inner strivings and social usefulness do not matter but conforming in appearance and one-upmanship do.

(Many students seek side doors: free universities, free new roads, choosing a counter-culture life. Paved roads lead to the repetition of our societal roles, unpaved ones toward insecurity.)

Teachers, students, and their parents have learned to accept the weird phenomenon of working for marks and cramming for examinations as the normal way of life. Generations of people have filled their brain storage-rooms with the results of dead-learning, to the point of fixations and explosive combustions. There has been little time for inside free-space-walks, for contemplation and associative creativity. ("Too many" is hard to take in a subway car. "Too much" rarely fits into a brain, never into a heart.)

Competition as such is a natural phenomena. It comes to pass when necessary things or services are scarce, or when people are not wise in the distribution of essentials such as food, oil, or loving care. Anger, anxiety, hostility, and apathy ensue. The Principle of Competition as an artificial educational maxim arouses such destructive emotions by its inherent frustrating design. Burdened with too many facts and things and with a stuffed-up heart, many of our young people have taken the last logical step before ruin or rebirth of our society: perfecting the art of cheating and the deification of violence.

The Principle of Competition as an educational tool has been seen as a device of capitalist society. It has been said that competitive, Peter-Principled people are a necessity to keep the capitalist system alive. I do not believe this is necessarily so. There could be competitive education in socialist countries and cooperative education in capitalist society. Most people are afraid of change, which keeps people, systems, rules, governments, education in power even when their usefulness has long been proven inadequate. Neither the oppressed nor the ruler think creatively of causes and consequences of their systems. They do not discover the chain reaction which leads from frustration to violence or from depleting earth energy to famine. Unaware of causes and consequences, frustrations lead to blaming and violence. Revolutions transfer ownership and power from one person or group to another. Names and titles of rulers and ruled are changed without altering the painful rape-victim cycle itself.

In the competitive systems, students are conditioned to succeed or fail on their grading and degrading ways through school. Dead-learning, -acting, being told what is expected and living up to extraneous commands, are conditioning factors for people who shall be working in dictatorial or oligarchical systems of any denomination. They have introjected ideals of the ruling man, group, class into their value systems and see compliance or rebellion with the eyes of the rulers. (This phenomenon has entered today's awareness as problems for such groups as blacks with white people's debasing attitudes; and for women who had accepted male supremacy norms as valid 'before their awakening "as different but equal." I see the most tragic aspect of this educational situation as the almost universal lack of awareness about the presence and destructiveness of both the Model of Thinging People and the Principle of Competition. Instead, people are being blamed - not for their apathy over changing what needs to be changed, but for being of bad faith - which they rarely are. Teachers resign from their initial enthusiasm and their wish to use themselves in behalf of students. Depending on their credo, they blame the conservative or progressive faction of teachers, principals, or community. And they join the apathetic crowd.

Students rarely even conceive of the possibility that learning without competitive examinations could produce knowing, worthwhile people including scholars. Their brief fight for more freedom and relevant teaching quickly subside under suppression and violence; and also, I believe, under the cloud of not knowing about their own and other people's living-learning spirit in non-competitive structures.

I believe that the use of humanistic principles of cooperation, interaction, personal growth, and mastery in education can promote a process of Revolutionary Evolution which may fulfill the task no revolution has previously fulfilled: not to replace one dictating government, class, industry, race, party, by another but to free all humans to create an equal and free society.

Revolutionary Evolution in classrooms means for our schools to promote self-fulfillment, cooperative responsibility, and mastery of knowledge and skills. (It means to put humanistic living-learning values against competitive dead-storage ones.)

Living-learning means to joyfully learn to master the tasks of living.*

*Living-learning, concept coined by Norman Liberman on the occasion of naming the Workshop Institute for Living-Learning, New York, 1966.

Living-learning means mastery of helping food and beauty grow from the soil; mastery of making and fixing tools and machines; mastery of words in reading and writing and speaking one's own and other languages; mastery means to put colors to things and houses, or to use them to express the inner world on paper or cloth; mastery means to put thoughts into workable theories, to perceive daily more of what the world is like and how it can and should be influenced. Mastery means to learn more about personal abilities and to become the conscious, decisive regulator of inner strivings in the context of the world around. Mastery means to choose loves wisely and to control hatred by letting it be without guilt or killing.

Achievements can be measured in numbers. Whatever can be numbered is exchangeable. Exchangeable people have a very hard time not feeling like rubber-stamped robots, especially when pushed into people-and-dirt-crowded subway cars, waiting in endless lines as for gasoline or for the doctor or for delayed welfare payments or for G.I. compensations. Exchangeable-people also may not find access to creative resources needed to deal with curing societal ills. They are victims of the Law of Inertia.

Psychotherapy and group dynamics have started to free educational theories from obsolete images of what humans are and to support humanism in the upbringing and emotional training of people. They aid in liberating people's ability to feel and to think independently. They help cure common illnesses of superstition, prejudice and ruminations (compulsions), and support people's rising up away from apathy ("leave things as they are"), and concomitant violence.

Schools are slow in responding to the pioneering efforts of many reforming psychotherapeutic educators and their groups. Some "progressive" schools still become their own worst enemies by stressing the I-Thou relationship above all other reality issues. In the early years of progressive education, the fear that children might be harmed by "repression" if directed along the line of reality (including their capacity), often overshadowed all other considerations. These ghosts are still around.

I encountered Humanistic Education as early as 1941, being a fortunate student of the Bank Street Schools in New York (now Bank Street College of Early Childhood Education). I had just arrived in the United States as a refugee from Europe and was not ready yet to pick up my profession of Psychoanalysis. My English was insufficient and I wanted to know American ways of life. Bank Street College helped me, generously and graciously, on my way towards becoming a citizen and an early worker for psychotherapeutically influenced humanistic education.

I was enthused about a new vista of life, the teachers' respect and joyful treatment of children, their patience and ingenuity in introducing them into basic skills. I was puzzled, however, by the fact that the reaching out and communality did not extend to adults, too; for instance, to teachers and their student-assistants. There was minimal interaction between them. Didactic courses were nearly always traditional - even in seating arrangements. Adults were taken for granted, discussions remained on the objective level, leaving out what was of subjective concern.

In the nursery school classes I became aware of being ruled by children as I had formerly known adults to rule. The democracy among the children was a process I admired. Why were we, the adults, excluded? "This is your adult seven-hour job," I was told. "We do our growing elsewhere." I was too inexperienced to find answers; yet, the questions remained: Why was the teacher not allowed to say "no" to a child? (We were told not to say "no" to a child more than four times a year.) Why should I throw a rope to little Susan on top of the jungle gym because she was the captain, when I had not been asked nor agreed to be the sailor on her boat?

In 1973, 32 years later, I visited an experimental humanistic public high school elsewhere. The teachers were on trusting terms with the students and with each other. The classroom was huge and bare. Rarely were books and other material visible except for some paperbacks laying around on the floor next to debris and empty Coca-Cola bottles. The students, ranging from 15 to 19 years of age, usually kept their coats on (in the well-heated room) and sat around in small groups, chatting. Sometimes they got up, walked around, and sat down again. The young people approached teachers freely and friendly. There were about 130 students registered of which I saw not more than about 50 altogether during the several weeks of my biweekly visits. Rarely more than 20 students were present on any one day. Sometimes groups gathered spontaneously with a teacher to talk about personal problems. The teachers listened well and were understanding. Once a movie of a trip a group of this class had enjoyed was shown; the students had made the film under supervision. Once, at the request of one student, a scene of a classical play was

read by some. It was not discussed afterwards; the students, except for the initiator, left silently. An outdoor hiking group and a senior citizens' aid group functioned well. These were all the activities that I observed or was told of by the teachers. I asked the students toward the end of my visits how they liked their school. They liked it a lot. Why did they think so few of them were usually there? "Oh, it is very boring here." I asked them why didn't they find something interesting to do? "Because there is nothing to do." I asked the teacher why they did not offer more content and structure. "They will learn when they are ready for it," they said. "They need personal care and love; then they will learn."

Love is not enough; attention is not enough. I believe that these students will not ever easily pick up content and structure. Their curiosity and sense of responsibility were not stimulated. Reality is challenge to resolve tasks; which includes understanding each other. (Yet understanding too is not enough.)

Initial failures in humanistic and progressive education have, so I believe, contributed to reinforce traditional methods and apathy. Against this Background we may understand the rising support of Behavior Modification in our schools as a short-circuit reaction to today's educational frustrations.

Behavior Modification has entered our schools and classrooms with "counting clocks" - (clocking off good or bad behavior) and a computed reward-and-punishment system. Our ancestors used this system innocently and with the grace of ignorant faith; they did not spare the rod and send the children to bed without supper and love. Modern Behavior Modification procedures, however, are the ultimate victory of "control over soul." "We are not interested in what is going on inside; we believe in results." The kids stop sucking thumbs or getting up without raising hands and stop hitting at each other." ("What about stopping thumbsucking and getting ulcers instead? What about stopping to hit and starting to use the gun?") "We don't believe in symptom substitution. It has not been proven.

German poet said: "No beating ever gets lost in this world; it is being given on." I often thought of this saying while living through pre-Nazi German "behavior modification methods." Now they get acclaim anew: "Just walk away from the child who comes home with bad news. Don't punish the kid, just walk away." In severe cases of inaccessible misbehavior, "Send him to bed without supper. Take away from him what he likes."*

*These quotes are literal. I picked them up in February, 1974 at a convention in New York where I listened to well-reputed behavior modification psychologists who work in school systems.

Such „training" puts Big Brother inside the person. It is as powerful as electrode implants in brains of extraneously tamed prisoners. These are tools for squelching budding autonomy; they negate 80 years of accumulated psychodynamic knowledge but find followers because their results are immediate and "effective."

To "humanize" or to "thing" people that is the question for us and our time.

Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) - A humanistic System of Education THE W.I.L.L. APPROACH

With the help of Humanist Philosophy, the Experiential Therapies and many colleagues and students, I have attempted to deduce a system out of psychotherapeutic knowledge and group therapeutic skills to improve group communication and education. In the following pages, I will attempt to outline some of TCI's principles and techniques of living-learning as they pertain to classroom teaching. The W.I.L.L. approach is applicable to all situations which involve groups. Techniques are adjustable to the various kinds and purposes of groups. This paper will not deal with the philosophical and psychological foundations of the TCI system but with some of its aspects and techniques pertaining to classrooms.

TCI is based on a working hypothesis that a group is an interactional group when each person, the group as a whole and their study or task are seen as of equal importance. The task (or study or focus of attention) is called the Theme (or the "It"). The It is that small segment of reality which happens to be the immediate focus of the participants; they are theme-centered.

Each person (in his/her attentiveness to the theme and the other participants) is I; all people in relation to each I and the It are We. The basic working hypothesis that I, We, and It are of equal importance – is practiced when equal attention is given to the three factors. (The interactional group can be visualized as an equilateral triangle with I, We, It points. In the process of group interaction, even-sidedness can never be maintained for longer than minutes. Any one of the I, We, It variables must be in the foreground long enough not to become superficial and not so long as to go stale or leave people or task by the wayside.) The basic skills of the W.I.L.L. approach is the art of "dynamic balancing" between these three factors and a fourth one, the Globe; the Globe surrounds the group as its environment (in concentric circles of closeness and distance in time, space and impact).

I define the situational givens which surround each person and the group as a whole as the Globe. The I-We-It triangle is enveloped and penetrated by interaction with the situational environment. This includes time, space, society, history, the human environment, earth, stars, space - all fractions of the universe. An interactional group is, structurally speaking, a triangle in the (onionlike) globe.

TCI's "Equal Importance Hypothesis" (of I-We-It Globe) is, in my opinion, the implicit foundation of any humanistic theory and practice. I am as important as you and as We; we are interdependent with the world as a whole - the big It which supports and penetrates us, and requests our support and interaction.

The whole world is, however, never in reach of our senses and mind. We can only grasp splinters in succession. The tiny parts, as focus of our mutual attention are our immediate It. In therapy groups this It may be one person's problems which are of general concern; or it may be a theme like "How do I deal with anxiety (or pain)? In an organizational group it may be "Establishing Effective Channels of Communication in our Organization." In a classroom, "I and Electricity, or "Born of the End of the Century in London - how would I have lived?" or "I am a Man. I am a Woman. I am a Boy. I am a Girl. - ROle ± Real?"

I am the only person who knows about me from within. I am aware of some of my inner strivings. I have perceptions, images, feelings, thoughts. I am my own captain, the chairperson of my various strivings, of my sensations, motivations, anxieties. I am also my own chairperson with regard to all of you, as I relate and communicate. As my own chairperson I create my life to some extent by my decisions. As I respect myself the way I am, with good and bad decisions and the ability to improve, I am likely to attribute the same right and responsibility to you.

A person is both a psychobiological unit and partner of social and cosmic systems. In our subjective shared experience we have some freedom of choice (which may or may not be substantiated by a super-human intelligence .) The range of freedom is wider for persons in good health, with rich endowment of talents, favorable socio-economic circumstances, and sustained faith that he/she is of value. The range of freedom is narrower for people who live in ill health, poverty, with poor endowment, in under-privileged socio-economic circumstances, and with apathy or resignation. The I can experience itself as freer or more entrapped.

The humanist therapist or teacher endeavors to widen his/her own, and the students', field of freedom for choice and depth. This is their job. The task includes aiding people to recognize their internal and external situation and to "accept with serenity that which cannot be changed, to change with courage that which can be changed, and to have the wisdom to know the difference."

This certainly is not easy. We are, as humans, the unit I and the part We. This fact puts us on the paradoxical awareness swing of being self-run units and of being particles of social and cosmic systems; we are always autonomous and always interdependent. Each I then has ego-centric responsibility for himself/herself; and partial responsibility for everyone else - more to those we consider close, some for the situational universe (the globe) in which and through which we are in interaction, that is in existence with everybody and everything.

Seen from this point of view, psychological illness demarcates a person's imbalance on the "paradoxical swing." He/she has swung too far on either side - the I-side or the part-We side: I am sick when I am aware of me only; and I am sick when I am aware only of you (with masochistic self-denial); or, more precisely, when I lack awareness of personal autonomy and universal interdependence.

In healthy balance self- and other-directed strivings are interwoven. Often they are felt as uncomfortable existential burdens, conflicts and tasks. The process of balancing is necessarily continuous; only when the I-We-swing rigidifies, conflicts change into illness. This may happen in a dialectic process between person and culture. When a multitude of persons suffer from similar autistic or dependent symptoms, the culture may be called sick. I believe that Western culture today suffers from the over-emphasis on egocentric strivings on the basis of competitive education. Eastern cultures may suffer from self-denial by traditional religious requests with their "giving up the ego" for the goal of union in transcendence; or in the new political version of giving up self-wishes for the goal of communal unity.

"Dynamic Balancing" is the core concept of TCI. That means to balance within the existential paradox of being unit and being part balancing between the I-We-It factors of the group; balancing between the physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual needs and wants; balancing between giving and receiving, listening and talking, between activity and rest.

THE W.I.L.L. APPROACH IN CLASSROOMS: Structure, Process and Balance

In T.C.I. classrooms teachers are in charge of initiating structure, process and balance. They are simultaneously builders of structure, guardians of process, experts in knowledge or ways of search, and human beings with the same primary needs as those of the students. They are in charge of initiating the class to become a group rather than a bunch of unrelated people or competitors. The teachers should be aware of personal needs and wishes as well as of those of others and to act accordingly. The teacher emphasizes the importance of the group as an interactional We including students and teacher; and he/she emphasizes the importance of tasks, themes, studies and actions. The teacher emphasizes the world-givens and the importance of mastering skills, cooperating with others, and perceiving the world as sharing in give and take. (Autonomy and interdependence, respect for life and growth, and responsibility are axiomatic basic assumptions of the Theme-Centered Interactional System.)

In the following pages I will survey some possibilities of how Dynamic Balancing of I, We, and It factors may be pursued by teachers. There are, of course, scores of technical aids which are useful which to describe goes beyond the frame of this paper.*

*The W.I.L.L. Approach (or T.C.I.) is a communication system which cannot be studied by reading only or by brief demonstration courses. In the experience of WILL faculty it has taken approximately two or three years of extracurricular courses and experience to fully integrate principles and techniques. This is true for group leading therapists, teachers, organizers, clergy, etc. However, some useful elements can easily be picked up. They help to shift a person's guidelines and directions. This is especially useful for use in the own family, commune, or other small groups one belongs to. I believe that the didactic, professional TCI approach could be integrated in the curriculum of Teacher's Colleges and Universities within the traditional time of study.

Emphasizing the I-Factor (Person) in the Classroom

- includes:
- To respect the teacher as a person responsible for him-/herself as a growing person. ("To be supportive of other people's importance requires awareness of my own; I respect the other "because he/she is like me.")
 - To accept that values are guidelines to live by, not permanent achievements. (Not to expect that I am an ideal image - or any kind of image. Not having to know what I do not know - I may want to find out, nor having to be what I am not. To be real rather than role.)
 - To take for granted that people have backs that ache, stomachs which cramp and throats which can feel choked - or to feel light and comfortable; and to include the facts in considerations and actions.
 - To have thoughts which come as flashes of discovery, or to feel empty.

To allow for faith in being loved by a Higher Being or to believe that there is nothing beyond; to differentiate faith and knowledge.

To be aware that someone may have been born into a childhood of light and love, and that someone else may have grown up in the misery of lacking food and things, or belonging to a cold and torn-up family; and to practice awareness and corresponding skills accordingly.

To seek truth and never be too certain. To err and to return for improvement. Not to try to be a sample of virtue and not to be without restraint.

Not to indulge in brainfeeding nor to abstain from giving with joy. To be aware of the ebb and flow of energies in everybody and to greet the challenge of change.

To try to understand and outgrow early harmful influences, which include having been raised with competitive and "thinging-people" principles.

To attempt to be aware of transferences and countertransferences as illusions that people bring along from their childhood experiences, and to encounter these illusions by standing up to reality. This includes the ideas that teachers are archetypes of authority - the Master-Image illusion that father/mother are infallible or monstrous and all-powerful.

To admit failures, achievements, feelings, vulnerabilities.

To try being fair and not always succeeding.

To be authentic yet tactful in the choice of statements, and sufficiently self-protective.

Working toward increasing communication by diminishing vulnerabilities and choosing what to say with "selective authenticity."

To take interests and feelings seriously - not only achievements and interactions. Feelings are what they are. Actions need control. Feelings need understanding; they may or may not change. (Don't be furious" is silly. Instead, "I see that you are furious - something must be upsetting you" is conducive to dialogue and change. My furor is my property; my furious action carries interpersonal responsibility.)

To challenge students with this basic message is the TCI approach (adjustable to age and maturity of the student): "You are your own chairperson. Listen to your inside committee of needs, wishes, motivations, ideas; look outside of yourself with your senses - hear, see, smell, perceive. Use your mind; your knowledge, your judgments, your responsibility, your thinking. Decide carefully. Nobody can make your decisions. You are the most important person in your world as I am in mine.

We need to speak clearly and to listen carefully to each other as this is our only bridge from island to island. Consider what is important for you to say and hear. Tell us when you want help. We can't guess at each other. Guessing is too cumbersome and unsafe; we can use words clearly and authentically. Get from this what you want to get, offer what you want to give and take your reactions to others seriously. Risk to ask for what you want - you may or you may not receive it. Accept this as reality.

If you are unable to be interested in what is going on in the classroom - if you are too angry, or too bored, or in pain or too excited with something that you enjoy so that you can't concentrate, say so. Disturbances and excitements take precedence (if you can't fully participate)

The teacher must know that he/she carries full responsibility only for his/her own learning/ teaching and cannot carry it for the students.

Yet, in the paradox of living by this rightful decision, the teacher accepts part responsibility for the students' living-learning by taking his/her own responsibility for teaching with discernment; he/she uses the students' feedback and progress for guidance. The teacher who learns is being helped by the students who teach him/her how to teach. The learning student is being helped by the learning teacher's teaching. In other words, by the teaching-learning process of teachers' and students', discovery occurs for both of them.

Emphasizing the "It"-Factor (Theme, Task) in the Classroom

We cannot perceive the world all at once. The little segment a person and group concentrates on is the here-now focus of learning; the It. In living-learning classrooms, the It is relevant to the people. Their input and output of- communication about this It widens their horizon.

All learning is interactional. This is obvious when people are gathered in one room and communicate with each other. It is less apparent when books or TV replace live company. But even in solitude, introjected interaction continues, documented by language - our words inside; forming the sediment of communicative living.

People who work together comparatively stimulate and enlighten each other. The best themes are those which grow out of people's realistic, daily and personal experiences. Living-learning emphasis is not on motivating students but on helping them to find their own personal motivations and themes. The teacher's basic question is not: "How do I motivate students?" but "How do they live? What are their interests? Where are those of the community?"

The theme-setting can only evolve slowly out of patient work of many parents, teachers and students. Most theme-setting is handicapped by a curriculum may or may not fall into the immediate interest sphere of students. A curriculum is (by necessity) always behind the times and away from the immediate. This is a regrettable segment of traditional education. Thus teachers and students are deprived (to an extent) of dealing with the immediate concerns which would naturally also lead them into subjects of the relevant past and distant subjects as a matter of normal process. They cannot, as it is now, let their interests grow and deepen - being pushed from subject to subject - in the dead-learning of quantity without time.

Accepting the fact that teachers have to adjust to teach the given curriculum, even personally distant themes can be helped to become more relevant if students are being guided to look for personal relevance in every given subject. The driest topic can become a matter of passionate concern if students find their own entry into it. Initial contact to any theme is easiest through personalization: "If I were..." or "What does this mean to me?" This approach has usually been accepted for small children but often denied to adults and "adulterated" children. Personalization is useful. The compromise of making other-directed distant subjects relevant carries within itself a danger for individuals and society. Students and teachers can be led away from where their passion would naturally be, i.e., to recognize their personal and social environment and look for new ways in living together. A distant and superficial menu of facts can seduce students and teachers from what really matters, and by dead-learning youthful useful time can so be wasted.

Theme-setting (finding the relevant topic and its formulation) is a skill. Finding the topic in utter freedom of interest would mean to search for all persons' (including the teacher's) goals. It would include perceiving their own environment sharply and integrating perceptions and ideas into their own frames of reference. This frame-work could be widened through teachers, books, films and other learning tools. There would be openness to themes of study, themes of action, themes with small groups within the class, themes that all would want to explore.

Theme-setting in schools with given curricula requires the ability to combine the obligatory with "where the group is."

The theme must not be too narrow, nor too wide. It must be concrete enough to stimulate and not so definite as to exclude new perspectives or any one person in the group. It must be short enough for easy recall. If the class is large, parallel groups or different sub-themes must be established.

The theme needs introduction. It is hard for most people to find enough stimulation by search within. The theme can be introduced by relevant activity or by mutual exchange. The theme can be introduced verbally by provoking relevant images, memories or meditation. It can be presented in a short lecture (not exceeding 5-7 minutes; a longer lecture stultifies spontaneity and interaction). It can be introduced by a guided silence (leading the participants into their past and present relatedness to the theme, their thoughts, feelings and immediate connections). Introductions can include games, dialogues, role-playing, here-now group interaction, as long as they lead to the topic. Of importance is that any theme and any introduction include everybody in the living-learning class.

The theme is supported by the teacher's authentic interest in it and the support she/he gives to that of the students. "I cannot know your ways of learning best; I would like to help you find yours." Although the teacher cannot be anybody's chairperson, he/she is often in the position of helping students to find methods or techniques, to stimulate by exploring ideas or facts. It is destructive to only ask, "What do you want to do?" The Kindergarten joke. "Teacher, must we do again today what we want to do?" reveals the need for stimulation and structure. The challenge to an individual of taking sole responsibility for making his/her choices requires first that the person possess enough inner freedom to perceive, awareness of goals, and stored knowledge and alternatives to choose from. Education is a process of dosing challenges and tasks according to the potential and stage of maturation of the student.

Personal relatedness to themes can be found through brain-and-heartstorming dialogues, games, interactional discussions. Sometimes deeper disturbances relate directly to the subject matter and need to be recognized and worked through before learning can take place.

It is amazing how many seemingly deep-reaching disturbances can be relieved and even worked through when a class of students has become cooperative and genuinely benevolent. The atmosphere of acceptance, the similarity of human difficulties, the eagerness to help are potent curative agents. Often these seem to be more potent in classrooms than even in therapy groups. The bond of collective endeavor, of being in the same boat, and wanting to complete tasks, exhilarate and accelerate; this is only true when the competitive angle has been sufficiently overcome.

The theme is supported by teachers being teacher-students and students being student-teachers. Nothing is more supportive to the theme than studying together. Most teachers readily admit that their own learning deepened when they started to teach. The same is true for students. Giving and receiving are existential needs. To be deprived of either is hardship. Teachers do well to be taught by their students.

The theme can be supported by structuring the classroom in small discussion, activity, or study groups. The theme can be supported by "inter-reading" or "inter-writing" in groups of 3 or 4. (The stimulus of 3-4 people doing something together in technically creative ways is rewarding.)

When I suggest "inter-writing", the class divides into subgroups of 3-4 students. They choose any sub-theme they want to explore in any way they wish, with the goal of putting some of their study into written words. Results are: essays, skits, poetry, research, jokes, fairy tales, various work projects; sometimes written by all, sometimes by one or two. Almost all students, even the avowed "non-writers" enjoy this stimulating experience.

("How can there be small writing or talking groups in one room, especially when the desks are screwed to the floor?" It can be done: even if people have to sit on top of the desks facing each other. When there is space for people in one room, there is also space for little groups!)

The theme is supported by not fiendishly sticking to it. If the class spends only some part of the time directly on subject matter, more integrated learning comes to pass than when the group sticks to the theme all the time. When personal and group needs are taken seriously, theme work flows better and with less strain. (Full emotional involvement radiates into the spirit of work and creative and cooperative action.)

Emphasizing the "We"-Factor (Group) in the Classroom

The We connects all I's who interact around the It. The We gains in depth by each person's deepening awareness and involvement in the self, the group, and the theme.

The teacher promotes the We in the classroom:

by his/her respecting each person's dignity and fostering awareness of autonomy and interdependence,

by the expressed belief that mastery of skills and creative use of one's potential are inherent needs of people which can only be subdued through personal and societal illness ,

by employing cooperative rather than competitive principles which promote the wish in the group to include weaker and disturbed students into the We-ness and activities of the class and to reduce distrust and anxiety. This often alleviates the disturbance or leads the student to seek professional help;

by accepting and promoting the wish for silence, solitude and meditation together with active work attitudes;

by continually reminding students of their responsibility for their own decisions, their perceptions, thoughts, judgments, actions, and awarenesses of feelings and sensations. As students gain in personal assurance and self-determination, they grow in their capacity to grant others the same right and responsibility. This attitude is diametrically opposed to the ideals of obedience and conformity which push weak egos not to form a strong We but a brittle herd. The We is as solid as its component I's;

by interspersing group themes into the workplan. Themes generated by inherent conflicts in the life of the classroom. These may be formulated as they come up and brought out in scheduled or spontaneous class discussions. Themes must be formulated so that the conflict as well as solutions are promoted, for instance. "Recognizing and Appreciating Differences," "Keeping it in and letting it out - When and How? When not?";

by structuring the classroom in various group sizes - smallest, middle-sized, large and total groups. Intimacy is unlikely to evolve in very large groups. It grows easily in noncompetitive small ones. Intimacy can be transferred, from smallest to larger groups.

The membership in small groups should rotate so that each student will get acquainted with the whole class and not form tight sub-groups;

by giving leadership instructions to students as early as possible. The auxiliary "rules" of TCI can be helpful if they are taught as aids and not as dogma and are practiced by the teacher too. The rules are deduced from postulates which are existential facts which have been made explicit ;

- 1) Be your own chairperson
- 2) Give and get what you want to give or get in each situation
- 3) Disturbances and passionate involvements take precedence;

These postulates are deduced from the axioms that life is to be respected, that we have real though limited freedom to choose, and that we are autonomous and interdependent. All other rules are auxiliary and less permanent. Among them are rules and aids such as these:

"If you ask questions, state why you want to know." (This prevents scapegoating. The interviewer is asked to reveal himself.)

"Please speak or act one at a time."

"Speak per I; take responsibility by not hiding behind "we" or "one".

"Bring side conversation's to the group if you want to - they are likely to be important and helpful."

"If you criticize, try to include your own suggestions for improvement."

"Don't tell other people what they are like and why; give your reactions to them instead."

Game rules may be invented by the class at any occasion; they must not conflict with the spirit of the existential postulates.

Allow for and promote teamwork. The principle of cooperation must be stressed. The appreciation of teamwork must not interfere with appreciation of individual skills and activities.

Promote encounter games and acquaint each other (cautiously) with one's autobiography. Cooperative living requires understanding. The background helps to illuminate the fore-ground.

Accept tasks from the world outside - tasks which are of realistic relevance and extend the cooperative principle beyond the classroom. This will avoid the group dynamic phenomenon of the "We-They" syndrome. We are good - They are bad. (A solid group accepts strangers and outside concerns. A group with basic difficulties among its members shuns strangers in chicken-pecking-order fashion.) Beyond the educational value for the class, such outside activity extends humanistic principles into the community at large.

We-ness is especially promoted by abandoning the (undemocratic) principle of deciding questions by majority votes. Although voting is commonly hailed as democratic procedure, it may resemble authoritarian processes. Neither of them protect the individual. Minorities in thought or power are pushed out or under. Hurt, hostility, non-cooperation often result ("to prove that we would do better than you"). As long as people must win out or lose, their reasoning and cooperative actions are not at their best; an outside enemy is therefore often needed to bring cooperation and unity to pass.

When people are challenged to include all viewpoints and to work toward reaching acceptable consensus or compromise, cooperation is required. Experiments with such ideas have convinced me that the mere switch toward precise statements and careful listening has tremendously beneficial effects on decision making. People who are really listened to are much more ready to listen carefully themselves. They don't have to think of what to say next while the other speaks or how to attack or how to defend themselves.

The Hebrew version of the Golden Rule says: "Respect your neighbor; he is like you." Modern Humanism accepts this ethical maxim and adds some suggestion of „methods," (the path method), how such requests may be approached - which is the hope the social and psychotherapeutic professions offer to the human world at the brink of destruction.

"People-thinging" or People-Humanizing Education.

Today, awareness that people can change and can be changed is nearly universal. Two main educational trends can be discerned: one that leads to further mechanization and dehumanization, and one that carries hope for the revolutionary evolution of humanism. People-thinging versus humanistic trends are characterized by differences:

- between an extreme reward-punishment system versus a tender corrective one;
- between indirect manipulation and direct guidance;
- between deliberate, restricted access to information (of people, things, material) and open offers for reality orientation
- between starvation or drowning-in-wealth and adequate provisions for all;

-between indiscriminate or manipulative surgical, chemical and electronic operations, and developmental support (which may not exclude any of these techniques as emergency aids - but only as such - generally relying on interpersonal therapeutic means).

Humanistic education requires new directives and Job descriptions for teachers. The principles of People-Thinking and Completion which are all-pervasive in our schools must be detected and replaced by humanistic and cooperative guidelines.

The Teacher's job description may include:

- (1) experiencing and studying their own personalities thus promoting awareness of their own and their students' autonomy and interdependence and "response-ability."*
- (2) experiencing and studying interactional structures, processes and interventions and using them to promote equally personal growth, cooperation and mastery of skills.
- (3) experiencing and studying situations and curriculum material and working with personalized themes which promote social and personal relevance, depth and creativity.
- (4) uncompromising stand on ethical issues (not to forfeit a person's, group's or human-kind's dignity by accepting People-Thinking or Competition Principles).
- (5) Supporting depth of emotional and intellectual experience by allowing time and stimulation to study a few issues in depth rather than to amass superficial informative items.**
- (6) promoting humanistic changes in the community which will affect basic humanistic changes in the school system.
- (7) working with the humanistic (explicitly TCI) hypothesis that person (any person), group (any group and we all) and world (all our world) are of equal importance; requiring support in spirit and action.

* Expression by Fritz Perls

** Martin Wagenschein's "Exemplarisches Prinzip" (the principle of studying by a few relevant examples) .