

Communique

Volume 14 No. 1

Fall 2010



Educators from across the U.S. and around the world came to WIS to be part of the first-ever Project Zero conference offered outside of home base Harvard University.

Project Zeroes in on Professional Development

If WIS were in the habit of naming our school years as other cultures name the calendar year, we might call this Project Zero year. While our school has had a relationship with Harvard University's Project Zero for nearly a decade, our connection with these researchers who are at the cutting edge of studying how individuals learn has deepened significantly over the past six months. • There are two primary reasons for this focus. Last year, we won a grant from the EE Ford Foundation, with the award based on a proposal to bring Project Zero consultants-in-residence to WIS over the course of the current school year. Several consultants have visited already, leading workshops with departments, addressing faculty meetings, and meeting one-on-one with individuals to explore strategies intended to improve our students' understanding of what they are learning, with the goal of making students active partners in the educational process rather than passive classroom observers. Most recently, Ron Ritchhart spent three days meeting with groups of 10-15 teachers, introducing them to methods of making thinking visible (actually documenting the learning process) within the framework of multiple influences that affect classroom culture.



Clayton Lewis

As noted in Head of School **Clayton Lewis'** back-to-school letter, the community made this consultants-in-residence program possible by responding to EE Ford's challenge to match the \$50,000 given by the Foundation. With WISPA, as well as the Bazaar, Pizza and Grill teams, collectively chipping in over \$25,000 and several

WIS families stepping forward to donate the remaining funds, our teachers have been able to participate in an ongoing professional development experience that will make them more effective educators.

What is the other evidence to support the fact that this is Project Zero year? In mid-November, our school co-hosted the three-day conference "Educating for Today and Tomorrow" in cooperation with Project Zero and the Center for the Advancement and Study of International Education (CASIE). Originally planned for February, but rescheduled after our history-making blizzards, the conference brought hundreds of educators from around the country and world to the Tregaron Campus, when the perfect fall weather only increased the envy of our guests, who noted how lucky our faculty members are to work in

such a lovely setting. Notably, this was the first time a Project Zero conference had ever been held outside the Harvard University campus, a testament to the strength of the WIS-Project Zero partnership.

The conference actually began offsite, with all of our faculty members joining hundreds of educators for sessions at the National Gallery of Art and other Smithsonian museums. Appropriately, most of the Friday workshops were geared toward using museums as classrooms, incorporating Project Zero thinking routines to help learners make connections between what they see in exhibits and displays and what they learn elsewhere.



Clayton Lewis

The article on page one captures the enthusiasm that was broadly felt by my colleagues as we experienced the recent Project Zero conference. From the start on Friday morning when we occupied the cafeteria at the National Gallery of Art (NGA) an hour before the museum's opening, to Sunday morning when Howard Gardner—arguably the most influential figure in edu-

cation during my lifetime—spoke warmly with his audience in the WIS theater, we knew that this was no ordinary professional conference. We were privileged to engage in deep thinking about learning—real learning—the kind that you can apply again and again to new situations, and that you can employ to make sense of complexity. We've all experienced it at one time, hopefully from a teacher or professor who helped us to extract some truth from what is vague, or to unlearn what we always thought to be true, or to see something that we thought to be familiar as though for the first time.

This art of deep thinking has been around at least since Socrates. The problem is that it has too often been ignored as education has become more institutionalized. The need to cover vast quantities of content to be assessed by pen and paper tests has all too often caused teachers to forget the importance of slowing the pace to look systematically at something in order to achieve depth of understanding rather than breadth of information. That is what Project Zero reminds us as we consider how our students are best taught.

I'll share one of my own experiences from the conference. After the introductory lectures in the NGA auditorium, we fanned out as small groups either in the Gallery or in one of the Smithsonian museums nearby. I joined a group in front of Jan Steen's *The Dancing Couple*, one of many gems in the Dutch collection. Having lived in Holland, I already knew something about Steen and had viewed this work before at the National Gallery. Several of my Dutch colleagues from WIS were in the same group, as were Project Zero's David Perkins and his wife. We took our seats in front of the painting, and our NGA guide led us through a process of looking deeply at what we saw, employing Project Zero techniques that are used by the NGA staff, called Artful Thinking routines.

We were asked to examine the painting quietly, simply to identify what we saw rather than to try to apply meaning. It was difficult to detach myself from my assumptions about the scene. I kept reminding myself, "Pretend you know nothing already about this work." I started to see objects that I'd not noticed before. "Why were they there? I bet I know." Oh, yes, the instructions: just observe.

We were asked to share our observations. Our guide validated every point, but added no commentary to enlighten us. Next, she asked us to look again, and to ask ourselves, "What do you think?" We again pored over the painting, standing close to see a detail or stepping back to take in the whole composition. We then shared our thoughts. "I think those figures

huddled in the back are disdainful of the dancing." "I think the empty barrel in the foreground is left there for a reason." "I think that this is a very noisy scene." Every rumination from the group caused me to reexamine the canvas in front of me. "Why didn't I see that?" I kept asking myself. Together, we raised the possible explanations far beyond what I could have accomplished on my own.

Bit by bit, our guide added explanations based upon the work of historians, emphasizing that these were often assumptions, not facts. She then asked us, "What do you wonder about this painting?" We looked again. While the painting now felt much more familiar, there were many questions. "I wonder if the festivities are intentionally outside of the town." "I wonder if the tower is a church, and if so, is this symbolic?" Again, the guide offered comments based upon research. With each Dutch term, she turned to our WIS Dutch teachers to check for the pronunciation. She too was a learner. I looked at my watch, and 90 minutes had flown by.

I sit here now in my office and can see Steen's painting in my head, detail by detail. When I next return to the Gallery, *The Dancing Couple* will seem like an old friend. I'm sure with another careful perusal, I will spot more details. I know that when I roam about to see other paintings, I will ask myself first what I see, think, and wonder before I read the name on the plaque or listen to the recorded commentary.

If, as say a mathematics teacher, I returned to my classroom after this conference, I would be inclined ask my students to tell me what they see in a problem, to share what they think, and to wonder how they might apply what they see, think and understand to other problems. Throughout that process, I would try to draw out those elements that my students had not found themselves. The same would apply to my approach to understanding a novel, or an historical document, or a group of cells. I would probably cover less material as a result of this process, but the benefits might be far greater.

With so much to be gained in education from new technologies, it is important to remember the art of thinking.



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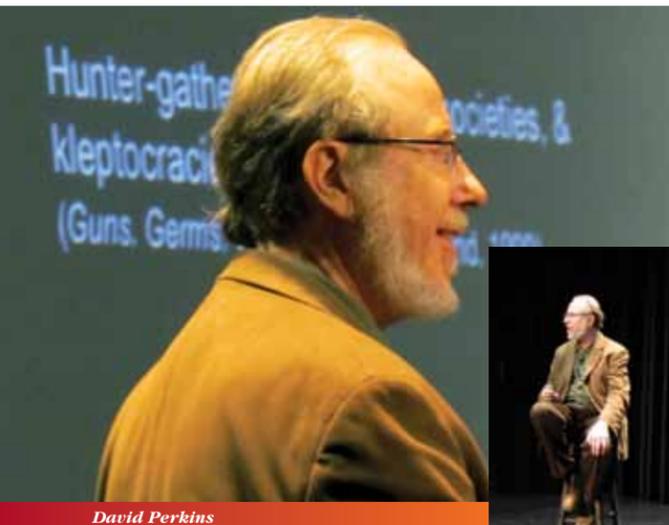
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Highlights of the Project Zero Conference

Friday's opening plenary session, headlined by Project Zero researchers Veronica Boix Mansilla and Shari Tishman, framed the learning for the days to come, with Tishman discussing the importance of looking at others' perspectives—for instance, an artist who has painted a charming landscape—in addition to our own when developing ideas. Veronica's presentation focused on global competencies we should be helping our students develop. As Middle School social studies teacher **Rita Adhikari** said, "It made me realize that the 21st century is about action—what you do with the knowledge you accumulate." Grade 4 Spanish teacher **Dolores Virasoro** observed that Veronica's speech "supported the idea that students can take age-appropriate responsibility for addressing problems in the world," belying the argument that little kids can't make significant contributions outside their classrooms or immediate communities.

Upper School French teacher **Carole Geneix** noted that the sessions she attended at the National Gallery helped her better understand how she could use thinking routines to generate deep and meaningful discussions (in French, of course). Middle School science teacher **Kusum Waglé** enthusiastically described the forensic anthropology lab she visited at the museum of Natural History. By using the process of inquiry and their skills in making deductions, participants try to identify whether the bones displayed belonged to a man, woman or child. "We'll be taking the 6th graders to this exhibit when they study the human body," she predicted, "because it provides a hands-on learning experience for them."

The variety of topics covered on Friday meant there was something to interest everyone, and the day was, as Primary School Assistant Principal **Leah Reilly** declared, "a powerful experience that left all of the participants invigorated and energized for the weekend ahead."



David Perkins

Saturday morning's keynote presenter, David Perkins, spoke to a full house in our Black Box Theater about the need to teach peaceful resolution of conflicts, using the concepts of "tribethink" vs. "worldthink" to reinforce Tishman's point that topics need to be viewed from more than one perspective. Perkins developed his argument with extensive examples from history showing how important it is to teach young people to think objectively, as if they were historians, rather than introducing their own cultural, national or other biases into the equation.

After Perkins's speech, attendees moved into breakout sessions for the late morning and early afternoon. Carole reflected on how much she appreciated the fact that the sessions were small and were designed to be interactive, rather than lectures. The workshop she led on using movie-making in the classroom was well-attended; participants came away with an understanding that movie-making is a realistic project that not only enhances technical skills, but is an excellent way to encourage students to think about creating messages and effectively conveying them to others.



Vaija explains how she uses thinking routines in the classroom.

While Primary School Principal **Melody Meade** enjoyed the French-language workshop she attended on making thinking visible, she most appreciated the fact that the conference gave her and her colleagues an opportunity to reflect on the important mission they carry out every day. The three-day conference, she said, "gave us the time and ability to digest various ideas and meld them together in a way that provides us with new tactics and strategies to use in the classroom."

Vaija Waglé, who has significant experience with Project Zero and is deeply appreciative of how employing Project Zero methods has improved her teaching, introduced the individuals who attended her session to the idea that the point of educating is to develop students' understanding of the world, not to teach them facts. The idea made sense to her audience, and perhaps sparked the same kind of epiphany Vaija had when she was first exposed to the idea during a Project Zero summer institute.

Saturday concluded with WIS educators taking the stage to demonstrate how we incorporate global issues into everyday learning. Kusum Waglé, Carole Geneix, Clayton Lewis, **Kate Meenan-Waugh** and **Jim Reese** introduced projects such as the Student News Action Network and the upcoming Global Issues Network conference. Kusum demonstrated how a local field trip—Grade 7 outings on the Chesapeake—can be turned into a global experience through a videoconference with KIS International School in Bangkok, where students use water testing results to compare the levels of pollution in their respective local rivers. Sharla Head, a conference participant from Field Club Elementary School, wrote an enthusiastic letter about how valuable she had found the conference, indicating that she was impressed by all of the projects WIS has undertaken to deliver a truly global curriculum to students.

Howard Gardner, perhaps the most renowned of all of the conference speakers, treated the audience to a talk on his book *Five Minds of the Future* during the Sunday keynote speech. The theories in this book center on the notion that five different ways of thinking need to be developed in all of us, but particularly in young people, in order to prepare them for their roles in the world of the 21st century. He believes that, to the extent possible, individuals need to focus on good work—projects that will contribute to the good of society rather than merely furthering individual careers. He borrowed a Ralph Waldo Emerson line ("character is more important than intellect") to illustrate his conviction that young people need to be taught to behave ethically just as much as they need to learn specific facts.

Many of those interviewed for this article commented that the conference was, bar none, the best professional development experience they had ever had. The combination of speaker expertise and flawless organization meant that there was no wasted time and that every session had some value in terms of providing teachers with new tools or ideas to use in the classroom. Some participants wrote "thank you" notes including details about how they had already integrated new thinking routines into their classroom teaching.

One individual who certainly deserves further acknowledgment is Jim Reese. He was a key organizer for this conference, and also our resident expert in all things Project Zero. He will continue to be instrumental in guiding our faculty and students as they attempt to grasp new ways of thinking and learning.

While there were many positive summaries of the conference, Leah's assessment encapsulates the general opinion quite well: "It made us remember why we went into the field of education. So much of our day-to-day routine is taken up by logistics and planning; for me the conference was an indication that the work we are doing—preparing young minds to take on the challenges presented outside the classroom walls—is a mission we are all lucky to help fulfill."



Howard Gardner