UNDERSTANDING VOICE, SELF, AND MIND

> *We do not think of ordinary people as preoccupied with such difficult and profound questions as: What is truth? What is authority? To whom do I listen? What counts for me as evidence? How do I know what I know? Yet to ask ourselves these questions and to reflect on our answers is more than an intellectual exercise, for our basic assumptions about the nature of truth and reality and the origins of knowledge shape the way we see the world and ourselves as participant in it. They affect our definitions of ourselves, the way we interact with others, our public and private personae, our sense of control over life events, our teaching and learning, and our conceptions of morality.* (Belenky et al, 1986, p. 3)

This is the opening paragraph of *Women's Ways of Knowing.* It could well be found in some teacher material prepared for Philosophy for Children. It is this theme, the theme of the importance of asking questions which help us to understand self, voice and mind and are therefore basic issues within teaching and thinking which ties together the three books under discussion in the Book Review Section. *Women's Ways of Knowing* is the first book under consideration. It is the broadest in scope and raises the most significant questions. *Learning How to Learn* is next considered. It presents research by Joseph Novak and D. Bob Gowin on two specific approaches to learning to learn. Finally, a volume edited by Robert Sternberg called *Concepts of Giftedness* ends the Review Section.

Two questions concerning *Women's Ways of Knowing* will be asked to prepare the reader for reading the review and hopefully the book. First, why write a book on *Women's* ways of knowing. Haven't we gotten beyond the point of looking at women and men separately and shouldn't we get on with the business of exploring human learning? The answer I believe is a resounding *No!* In examining women's lives as they relate to knowing, Belenky et al have not only provided women with a look at their own experience of knowing which they have not had until now, but the authors of *Women's Ways of Knowing* have also provided men with comparative look at ourselves which ought to help us better understand ourselves as well. This is not to say that we should stop at women's ways of knowing. We may or may not eventually find there to be one way which most effectively describes knowing. This is an empirical question and one which can be described more effectively now that we have a female model before us. If the reason for this is not obvious, let me restate a point made by Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice.* Most research in psychology has assumed that there is but one model for human development. This model has traditionally been a male model. The model has been presented as a universal one despite reported difference noted by the model builder themselves. These theorist, Freud, Erikson, and Kolhberg, to name but three, build male models by ignoring information within their own data.

Second, what is the best way on understanding the nature of knowing. How is one to study knowing. The authors chose interviews and it was the right choice. *Women's Way's of Knowing* build on two seminal works, among others, to design and interpret their research. The two works are William Perry's *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development* in the College Years and Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice.* Both of these works provide helpful beginning points for understanding knowing and also provide excellent examples of how one might listen carefully and constructively to the voices of others. Both are good examples of qualitative research. Qualitative research is tricky business.

This work is built on interviews of 135 women from all walks of life but in some way connected to, or recently involved in some type of educational program. These educational programs were as diverse as Ivy League and Seven Sisters colleges, community colleges, and women-to-women teaching in what the authors call the invisible universities, that is, day care programs, community support programs and shelters for battered women. The sample of women is representative.

A representative sample does not guarantee a good qualitative study. Perhaps the only things which can help insure that a qualitative study is well done are two intangibles: a good ear and integrity to the content of the interviews. The authors of *Women's Ways* have both. (It is important to state here that this work is a collaborative one and the listing of the authors in alphabetical and not in teams of senior and junior partner in a study.) The "ear" of the authors is in part developed by their careful scholarship; especially their through understanding of Gilligan and Perry.

The subtitle of the book, The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind, provides a picture of what follows. As the opening paragraph cited above implies, this book is multidimensional in its attempt to understand knowing. It is to a very large degree successful. *Women's Ways of Knowing* may not have immediate application to the classroom, but it will help both men and women sharpen their listening skills, allow new voices to find expressions, and provide a guide for us as we re-think our own self, voice and mind as teachers and learners. (The entire interview schedule is published at the back of the book and can be

extremely helpful to anyone wanting to explore the topic casually or rigorously.)

Even though Novak and Gowin in *Learning How to Learn* state: We are concerned with educating people and with helping people learn to educate themselves (p.1), their work can be seen as more narrow in scope and perhaps importance than *Women's Ways of Knowing.* They go on to state: We want to help people get better control over the meaning that shape their lives (p.1). However, the way they go about helping us gain control over our lives is much more schoolish than Belenky et al. This is not a criticism of *Learning How to Learn* as this is a very important contribution to education, it is only to place it into the context of larger social and educational issues. The concept mapping outline here has direct application to Philosophy for Children as it can be used to understand and learn from discussions ala Transcript Analysis, it can enrich discussion by providing a format for student to work done individually or in small groups on mapping the relationships of ideas, events or people before, during or after a discussion and it can be used in lesson planning or in preparation for writing in stead of an outline. This book has direct teaching application, it can be used tomorrow morning and ever day in the future.

Concepts of Giftedness is not only for teachers who teach in gifted programs. As we are all aware, each of us have gifted students in our classes. The collected writings in this work provide an expanded horizon upon which we may examine our classes and students. It, too, may help us to hear the voices of our students, help us get beyond narrow definitions of giftedness and perhaps provide some insights into our daily efforts in the classroom.

What counts for evidence?, a question posed by *Women's ways of Knowing,* is in a way the question which Sternberg invites us to ask as we examine giftedness. More specifically, we are asked to choose between or at least order social criteria, cognitive functioning criteria and performance criteria. As Ms. Armstrong suggests in her review, there are a number of possible approaches to this task. I bring this to the reader's attention to underscore the power of the statements which shapes the structure and content of *Women's Ways of Knowing.* To paraphrase that statement, the way we think about, answer and reflect on our answer to the question of what counts as evidences shapes the way we think about both the gifted and the non-gifted students in our class. It affects our teaching and our learning. It is importantly and basically a part of our conception of morality. I believe it is important to think about gifted education as a moral issues. If by morality we mean questions of fairness, questions of rights and responsibilities, and questions of distribution of wealth (both time and money), then questions of who is gifted and how they should be treated are in fact moral questions and ones which need to be taken seriously for the well being of individual teachers and students, as well as the society at large.

These three books together and separately raise important questions for education both in and out of school. If we are to work effectly in our diverse teaching roles, we must learn to listen. The ability to hear a "voice" which is not culturally acceptable or somehow minority "voices" is a skill which none of us master easily. Hopefully, these books can help sharpen that skill.

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