REFLECTIONS THROUGH A KALEIDOSCOPE

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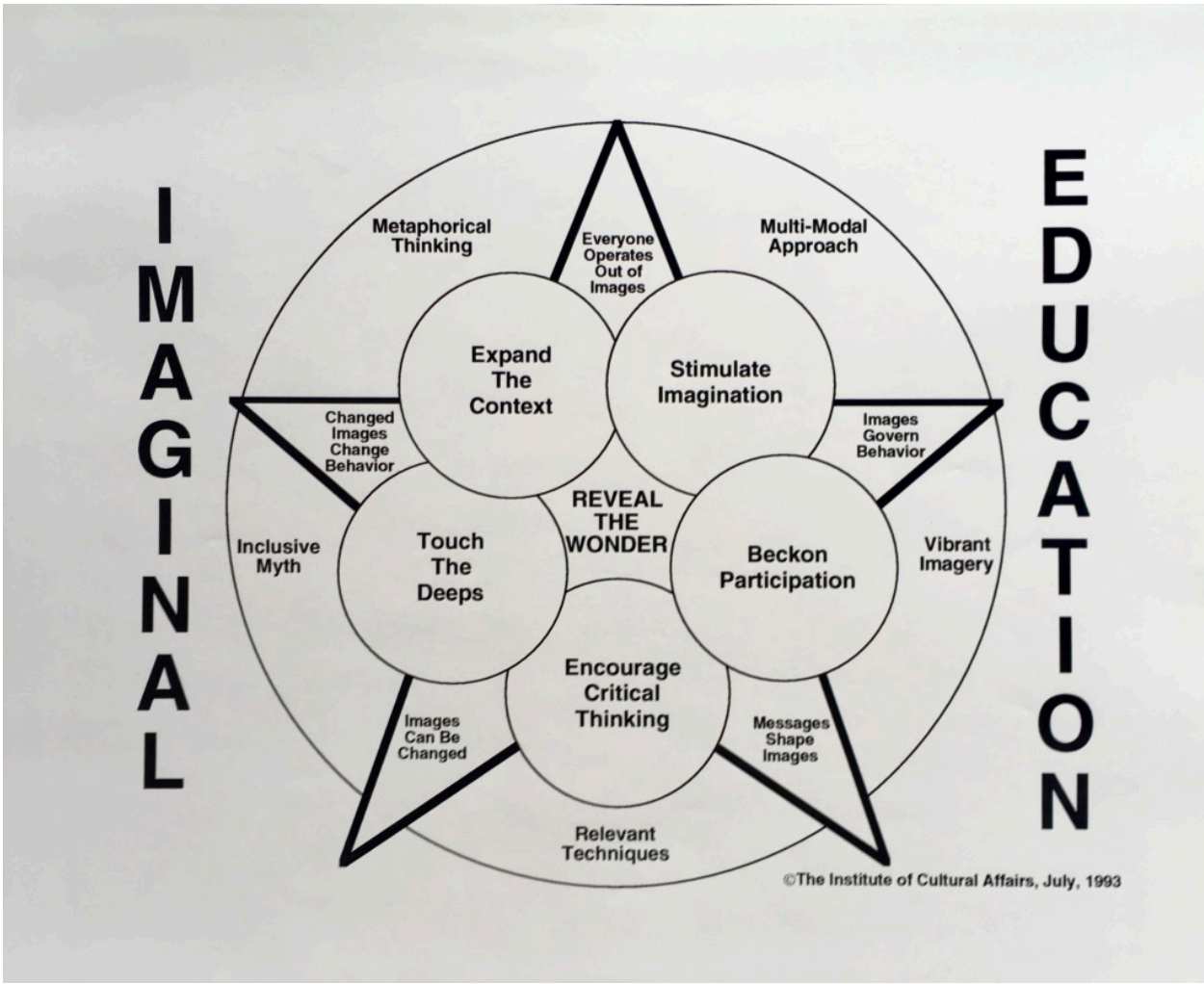

The calendar said January, 1960, when I first entered that sixth grade classroom in south Omaha. A new college graduate, I stepped into a room where the students had experienced two other teachers that year. This class knew more about teaching than I did!

I often returned home sobbing. My husband of a year and a half asked, "Honey, why do you want to do this?" And I wailed, "I don't know, but I want to!"

My ideal of helping others, of making a difference in children's lives, was heartfelt. The trouble was, I did not know how to do that. My methods classes and my preconceptions of teaching assumed happy and eager students. I had focused on what to teach, not on how students learn. Reality in the classroom revealed cynical, disinterested, and generally naughty children!

Retirement 35 years later has proved time for me to reflect on what I know about teaching. My reflections have encouraged me to share my most helpful and instructive tool. It is a model I was privileged to help create nearly a decade ago – a model called the Kaleidoscope teaching strategy.

Walk with me into the kaleidoscope. The model (see diagram) was developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) for their Imaginal Education program. I began my association with the ICA in 1967. The ideas that we developed have since marked the central philosophy of my teaching.

We named the chart the Kaleidoscope because it changes the view of classroom teaching. It was corporately drawn in 1986 as an outline of twenty years of research into how people learn. A group of teachers, professors, and community leaders worked together in Atlanta, Georgia, at Spellman College, to put our insights into this model.

There are several sections of the kaleidoscope. The star describes the five presuppositions of the whole person approach to life and learning. The "mirrors" are used to plan lessons or "messages". The inner circles and the center are the desired outcomes of Imaginal Education.

I. IMAGE CHANGE PRESUPPOSITIONS

The presuppositions originate in the work of Kenneth Boulding in his book, *The Image* and are represented on the Kaleidoscope in the star. The first is **everyone operates out of images**. When a fifth grade student says, "Girls aren't good at math", I know she has an unhelpful image which will impede her learning because **images govern behavior**. If she sees herself as "not good at math", then, sure enough, she won't be! **Messages shape images**. As her teacher, my challenge is to design the activities and mini-lectures to use in the classroom to change her image. I send those "messages" because I am convinced that **images can be changed**. If the image change is successful, my student will believe that she is good at math, and she will be able to learn it. **Changed images change behavior.**

II. THE MIRRORING PROCESSES

Around the edge of the larger circle are five categories called the "mirrors" of the kaleidoscope. They represent the methods used to bring students to self-conscious reflection.

Vibrant Imagery. As I consider what pictures my students will be forming in their brains as my lessons proceed, I intentionally project positive images. I use multiracial pictures and titles on bulletin boards, choose books and stories which create future messages, bring artifacts to illustrate my points, and keep my room orderly to symbolize intentionality. I present chalkboard outlines in imaginative shapes and designs to help spur memory of the points I am making. The parts of a flower on a daisy shape will be remembered longer than a list in outline form.

Multimodal Approach. As I plan for teaching, I include methods that use the many "intelligences" my students bring to the classroom. Music, video, physical games and

dances, art activities and drama, all enter my plan, as well as the words I use to teach the lesson. Using a ball of yarn to connect students during a discussion makes the idea of interactive communication real. A math song about "How many?" makes a lesson more fun, and involves more students in learning.

Relevant Techniques. Learning in cooperative groups, written work, tests and worksheets are used as needed. The key word here is relevant. I choose techniques that will spark learning. As we studied the Pilgrim's journey on the Mayflower, I took my class to the playground and measured the ship by pacing out the dimensions and chalking them in. Then we all stood inside the outlines. When we went back inside, we looked at a calendar and saw how many days we would have to live in that tiny space, along with all those others! To bring poignant depth to a lesson on the Holocaust, we read a first person account about a family living at that time called *The Big Lie*.

Inclusive Myth. We all have an internalized set of "myths" which we have received as part of the culture that shapes our values. As the teacher, I attempt to be conscious of as much of that mythology as possible. For example, in the story of the Pilgrims, our culture has internalized the first Thanksgiving as a myth that gives meaning. It symbolizes the gratitude we all feel to those forces outside of our control would sustain us. My job is to reinforce helpful mythology and lessen the power of unhelpful mythology. The traditional "pioneers and Indians" myth about the settlement of the American West may be less helpful to the appreciation of multiple cultures than the current myth explored in the PBS "How the West was Lost ", which tells the story from the Native American point of view.

Metaphorical Thinking. Even children who are very young can and do think metaphorically. I read *The Sneetches*, by Dr. Seuss, to both my second and fifth grade classes every year. When I ask the reflective question, "What did that remind you of?", invariably at least one student relates the story to the work of Martin Luther King. Or after reading an Aesop fable, I might ask, "When have you ever seen someone crying wolf?" Students of all ages are able to translate this metaphor into real life situations.

III. THE DESIRED OUTCOMES

The desired teaching outcomes are represented in the five circles. As I plan and as I teach I emphasize one or more of these.

Stimulate Imagination. Art projects, stories, small group dramas, and a nonthreatening teacher attitude all help student creativity to bloom. I encourage children to question. If I don't know an answer, or for one reason or another don't wish to answer at the time, I respond with, "That's a good question!" I congratulate creative suggestions, even if they are "wrong" or "impossible".

Beckon Participation. I plan for students to work cooperatively and report back to the whole group, to lead the class, to "Show and Tell", to bring extra projects and artifacts from home. During presentations I allow and encourage questions and comments and insights. Students need to be active agents in their own learning.

Encourage Critical Thinking. I try to allow sufficient time for students to process information, and display a non-judgmental, non-defensive attitude in the classroom. Teachers have recently invented and published many lesson plans that aim toward critical thinking. Debate and discussion of issues and attitudes needs to be allowed, even with highly controversial subjects.

Touch the Deeps. Poetry, pictures and stories which encourage empathy and appreciation of beauty help students to acknowledge the depths of life. The stories of Helen Keller, Gandhi, and endangered species - all help students to feel deeply. This cuts over against the cynicism that is so rampant, especially in children above the age of nine or ten. I want my students to acknowledge that they care - about their families, their communities, about the people the world, and about nature.

Expand the Context. The more broadly we consider time, space, and relationships, the more comprehensive our understanding becomes. My students experience awe when I help them use a thousand-link plastic chain to count off the years since the Pilgrims came and contrast it with the years since the Native Americans first walked across the Bering Strait to this continent. "It would have taken 10 or 20 of these chains to show how many years Native Americans have been here." I say.

In another lesson I use the same chain to represent hundreds, thousands, or millions of years for each link to demonstrate the time since Egyptian pyramids were built, or the time since human beings first walked the earth, or the time since the last dinosaur died. In a lesson aimed toward expanding the context of space, I tell students that the earth is some 25,000 miles around. It takes 24 hours to turn once, so earth must be moving over 1,000 miles an hour! To expand students' context in terms of relationships, I plan many lessons to include the objectives of appreciation of the oneness of all humans and the oneness of this planet.

The center of the kaleidoscope spins and is transparent in the original handheld models we built. It describes the products which every good teacher intends to achieve in her students – hope, creativity, discovery, responsibility, self-esteem – are desired outcomes in the lessons we teach.

The center title states the underlying theme. As a teacher I am out to "Reveal the Wonder" to my students. The wonder of language, math, science, and historical studies – the wonder of life itself for this emerging 21st-century generation. My hope for them is that they capture the experience of wonder and are enabled to become lifelong learners.

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I hope you enjoyed exploring the Kaleidoscope. It would be presumptuous to suppose that this one-page model could be a panacea for all the issues of an educator. But I present it to you to be a tool to place on the inside of your closet door or on the first page of your planning book or under the glass on your desk to help you remember what will help make your teaching more effective. While the model does not define curriculum, or specify test results, I do believe that it will help learning come alive for your students. I know it did for mine.

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