Revising Teacher-Student Role Relationships: Collaboration and Mature Dependency

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[Our current society] unrealistically regards simple independence as the solution to all personal dependency problems, and... fails to recognize the need for an everyman's psychology that will accept a great amount of dependency and look for ways of allocating it.¹

What contradictions and discomforts do teachers experience when they attempt to manage their complex classroom realities in new ways? What risks do they undertake when they engage more directly their students' intentions and perspectives? In schools, as in all areas of life, new routines and procedures involve disorientation and self-questioning, so if we're talking change, we must be sensitive to the psychological dislocations that attend it. Consider, for example, what can happen when there is a change in the way writing is taught. If a teacher hazards encouraging

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students to take a more active part in the process of composing, he or she might rightly feel divested of a kind of ownership or prerogative. Having students devise their own assignments or serve as responsive readers for each other’s papers suddenly exposes the authority arrangements in the classroom, for the question of who controls what must now be addressed. Changing the classroom power structure indeed poses a clear threat to traditional classroom management strategies which try to keep students isolated from one another. And further, when a teacher’s conceptions about human interaction are challenged by students, resistance can certainly be expected.

For teachers anticipating some shift away from their central domination of instruction, the fears are genuine: 1) “Won’t I lose face when I’m no longer the central authority figure in the classroom?” or 2) “Aren’t students in school to learn from their teachers, not simply from each other?” or 3) “Shouldn’t I be responsible for setting the learning agenda in my classroom, not the students?” or 4) “If effort and intellectual abilities are not evenly distributed, is it fair to reward everyone equally upon the completion of a group project?” or 5) “If people don’t go off on their own and compete for limited and scarce resources, but are always collaborating, won’t this merely be adding to a welfare state mentality, where initiative is dried up as everyone looks for the quickest way on to the dole?” Of course, there may be a ready answer in each instance, but how easy it is to underestimate the depth of the emotional and intellectual issues that need addressing.

To offer students opportunities to control their own destinies, to allow them to see that human configurations exist other than isolation and divide-and-conquer competition, endangers the status quo. A general fear of unleashing the discretionary powers of subordinates in fact dominates many of our institutional arrangements in education, and this sends a strong message to people about the futility of cooperative effort. In a similar way, any elementary school curriculum that provides genuine audiences for writers and encourages self-expression provokes hazardous shock waves in the system: it can place subversive pressures on already beleaguered high school teachers and leave students unprotected for the “real” world of high school and college composition.

At issue here is a central question dividing teachers: *How will authority be determined and valued in teaching/learning situations?* Inevitably this question of authority turns on how we construe “role” and “role relations.” Our thinking in this area, I would argue, has overemphasized the autonomy of the individual self. We believe it is natural to feel we are the same person, the same unified identity, regardless of
the circumstances or the people we’re with. While a unitary self may appear to regulate our interactions with the world of others, this self is seen as being separate from other selves—social reciprocity seems to figure little in how we perceive our self-image.

Our notions about an autonomous self, and the unitary motives that drive it, have tended, at the cultural level, to reflect the myth of the individual in splendid isolation—self-sufficiency, rugged individualism, and all that. We cling to the platonic ideal that sees the atomistic individual as the source of invention and creativity. Further, we show little tolerance for ambiguity, for mixed motives; desirous of a clearly defined world of good and evil, we cheer our heroes dressed in white and hiss our villains in black. And naturally our economic system, from grades to salaries, rewards uncompromised individual effort (some call it narcissistic greed), thus reinforcing this sense of the solitary self. Superstars get the lion’s share of material compensation, not the behind-the-scenes team player; “monkish” scholars are promoted over dedicated teachers.

Acting under the sway of our cultural myths, believing that our self is self-determined, not other-determined, we are inclined to polarize our options, to see the world in “either-or” terms. We hear, for instance, of teachers mired in one-sided arguments such as: “If I were forced to give up even some of my authority in the classroom, I’d lose respect and with it control of the students . . . how would I ever again be able to assign clear-cut grades?” In contrast to this rather negative view of social possibility is the perspective that would construe such options in “both-and” terms: individuals are really sets of selves determined by shifting contingencies including place, age, and occupation. For despite the fact that most of us who control the educational system were socialized according to the tenets of individual competition, increasingly we’ve had to recognize the limits of learning carried out in isolation.

Changing to a more collaborative perspective, however, requires a shift in sensibility, a shift that E. M. Forster, for one, began to explore in *A Passage to India*. The competitive trait of wishing to dichotomize and then circumscribe concisely emotion and action is revealed in a conversation Fielding has with Aziz regarding the resources of the spirit:

"Your emotions never seem in proportion to their objects, Aziz."
"Is emotion a sack of potatoes, so much the pound, to be measured out? Am I a machine? I shall be told I can use up my emotions by using them, next."
"I should have thought you would. It sounds common sense. You can’t eat your cake and have it, even in the world of the spirit."
"If you are right, there is no point in any friendship; it all comes down to give and take, or give and return, which is disgusting, and we had better all leap over this parapet and kill ourselves." (p. 254)

This conversation, and the contrasting point of view that it uncovers, had its origins in Forster's own life. Critical of his inclination to measure out emotion deliberately (a socially constructed inclination to be sure), he came to conclude, "The emotions may be endless. The more we express them, the more we may have to express" (1953, p. 15). Sharing Forster's concerns, we come to realize that the educational perspectives we hold need no longer be characterized in terms of a zero-sum game. Beyond the realm of simple winners and losers lies the art of negotiated victory, the ecological imperative. The sensibility Forster celebrates here mediates the creative tension between self and community, not denies it by questing after a self apart.

But while it may be easy to acknowledge the centrality of personal relationships in forming a community of concern, this still doesn't prepare us for the sheer difficulty of bridging the chasms that separate us one from the other. Faced with the impossibility of complete communication—with the indeterminacy of information and experience—how do we ever learn together collaboratively? Necessarily our connections with others are characterized by continual adjustments and reinterpretations, the kinds, for example, that modulate any invested conversation. Paul Ricoeur explores this process of mutual meaning-making:

... being-together, as the existential condition for the possibility of any dialogical structure of discourse, appears as a way of trespassing or overcoming the fundamental solitude of each human being. By solitude I do not mean that fact that we often feel isolated as in a crowd, or that we live and die alone, but, in a more radical sense, that what is experienced by one person cannot be transferred whole as such and such experience to someone else. My experience cannot directly become your experience. An event belonging to one stream of consciousness cannot be transferred as such into another stream of consciousness. Yet, nevertheless, something passes from me to you. Something is transferred from one sphere of life to another. This something is not the experience as experienced, but its meaning. Here is the miracle. The experience as experienced, as lived, remains private, but its sense, its meaning, becomes public. Communication in this way is the overcoming of the radical non-communicability of the lived experience as lived (1976, pp. 15–16).

The intersubjective dialogue Ricoeur privileges defines our experience of self(s). Our feeling of identity, of individuality, grows out of the mutual support and validations it receives from some other self(s), from persons
who serve as significant others in our constellation of human relationships. Who we are as individuals is literally made possible by how others mirror us—they send back a message to us that we are confident or afraid, contented or dangerous. So from the beginning our identity consists of reflected selves. However much we may resent this, self could not exist but for this primary obligation. Even in the case of the preverbal infant, the dialogue of physical touch or contact (as it’s provided by adults who are attuned to the infant’s expressive desires) is a prerequisite for normal growth. Yet strange it is how often we must be reminded that without dialogue our development atrophies, that none of us is born alone.

Whenever we resist our natural urge to reify the ways we cognitively and culturally divide up the world, we see that the realities surrounding us result directly from acts of social construction. Even in a court of law, we must remember, criminal acts are not judged in absolute terms but are weighed in the balance of mitigating circumstances—meaning depends on context. Thus the arena in which I act out my various behavioral scripts is in large part determined by how I represent things to myself. One day I may see the world as hostile and threatening and so be on the lookout for a fight; on another day I may interpret the gestures of my colleagues as being warm and friendly and so return their favors in kind. Of course I am not immediately free to merely make up out of whimsy or fancy either the arena or the script. Instead I always perform my role as part of some ongoing program of social conventions, and these conventions provide the ground for the present and evolving meanings held by my role(s).

To illustrate the intricate ways in which role relations are interpreted and played out, and how in turn this affects intention and action, consider the plight of a college freshman who recently came to me wishing to appeal a failing grade he had received in a required composition course. Although his other work had been completed satisfactorily, he had gotten into a dispute with his teacher over a personal journal assignment. It seems the student had written his entries on a computer at the last minute and the printout he handed in included duplicates of these entries. Upon discovering this duplication the instructor might merely have been amused at yet another example of a cloning word processor gone wild; instead he chose to confront the student over a case of fraud. And indeed the student admitted that the duplicate pages were an attempt to pad the journal, to give the appearance of bulk, suspecting that the instructor was more likely to weigh rather than read the entries. No plagiarism here, but a deception nonetheless; still, an act of contrition
at this point would have met the instructor’s role expectations, and the incident might have been forgotten.

Alas, the student was taking his cues from another script (one highlighting a different kind of honor with a need to save face), so there was no humbling apology, no admission of wrongdoing or vow never to do such a stupid thing again. On the other hand there was no attempt to evade or deny the “truth” the instructor had uncovered. Still, even though he was aware that the student might be operating under a contrasting set of principles, the instructor was caught in the aesthetics of his own conventionalized script regarding the guilt that must be played out on such occasions of scholarly crime and punishment. Bending, and passing the student, would have been an admission of weakness on the part of the instructor, would have been to deny his duty to uphold the standards of conduct sanctioned by the academy (especially, he reasoned, as such fraud would not have been allowed at his own undergraduate college). So in the face of options, with a series of opportunities to avoid confrontation, particular roles became locked in place and an incident arose. Whereas if another set of interpretations had predominated, if the teacher had less rigidly adhered to the role he had already set for himself, the problem might have had a happier resolution.

These various and conflicting interpretations of experience that absorb any one person signify a multifaceted self. Each of us is but some distillation or cluster of our contingent responses to a range of social encounters. Very early, for instance, we assume different postures in order to try to play our parents off against each other for our own advantage. And from there we learn that our conduct is best varied between the playground and the classroom, between the sock hop and the church service. For even if we choose to cling to the view that a person’s behavior reflects the consistency of a unified self, we readily see our behavior as displaying great variability depending on the shifting constraints of audience, or the changing contexts of social intentions and exchanges.

Sociolinguists and ethnographers are forever offering new examples of our ambivalence toward our role and the range of relationships it serves to define. On the one hand people are shown to command a variety of linguistic codes depending on the meaning situation they find themselves in. On the other hand, these same people offer up a consistent core script when they feel they are being asked to display their true identity. Some inner-city children, for instance, are able to mimic the teacher accurately on the playground, but then when isolated in a linguistic interview these same children appear to speak only a non-standard dialect. So there is continually this tension between who we
think we are and what we are actually able to do. Thus the concept of role figures prominently in any consideration of the kinds of accommodations a teacher will need to entertain if the classroom is to prize the collaboration of its learners. It is finally within the realm of our roles that we work out the conflicting value schemes or theories of the world that help to determine our classroom behaviors.

One psychological theory that gives us a better feel for how the dynamics of interdependence govern role relations has been developed by George Kelly. Kelly’s personal construct theory focuses on how an individual uses an interlocking series of opposed qualities (selfish–altruistic, rich–poor, religious–skeptical, dominant– submissive) to categorize the world of social experience. Kelly argues that these polar opposites or personal constructs serve to define the value basis for the ways in which people come to anticipate events. For example, if I judge people’s motives on the basis of a construct that emphasizes their “selfish” dimension, then when someone “helps” me, or in some way treats me “kindly,” I might construe this behavior as a cover— “What does he want?”— and so predict that the person is about to extract from me a “favor” in kind. On the other hand, the same event could yield the reverse interpretation, thereby triggering an occasion for mutual largess on my part. In either case we have a situation in which my action depends on my interpretation of the significance of a social exchange.

Kelly’s theory bears directly on this interpretive capacity by seeking to extend our understanding of how learning might proceed along social-collaborative rather than just individual-competitive lines. In viewing the role-taking self as an amalgam of personal and social constructions, Kelly emphasizes that a person’s view of the world inevitably helps determine the individuality of others.6 Indeed he offers an updating of the seemingly paradoxical description given by Søren Kierkegaard of the instructional relationship: “All true effort to help begins with self-humiliation” (1962, p. 27).

“Humiliation” here refers not to a state of disgrace or embarrassment; rather, it signals the hierarchical nature of the roles that are normally played out in the instructional game and suggests a shift to some more egalitarian plane. Further, “self-” indicates that the responsibility for initiating this shift rests with the one on top, in this case the teacher. Yet how are we to understand such a role “reversal” in the light of conventional authority arrangements in schools? Isn’t the powerful instructor or the helper the one holding the superior position? Shouldn’t the powerless student or the person receiving help be the one worrying about how to display properly deferential behavior?

The secret, of course, lies in how we perceive and act on the roles
others play in relation to our own. And in all cases our perception of the situation dominates our capacity to even receive the message sent by the other person’s role. To connect requires that the teacher, helper, or advice giver comprehend the perspective of the student self, and yet to achieve this comprehension one’s own role and authority must be held in abeyance. In the instance of the student padding his computer journal, the teacher might well have used the opportunity to address matters of form versus substance or illusion versus reality. Only a traditional role relation demanded a transgression versus responsibility response. By shifting away from this expected pattern the teacher might have engaged the student in a dialogue about intentionality and the writer-reader connection. In other words, imagine the alternate scripts that might have been played out by a teacher less quick to assume the role of judge and jury, one willing to meet the student on his own level. To do so of course requires deflecting the absorbing power of the authority vested in the “adult” role of teacher, as it is traditionally defined by the school. Yet through this deflection, this erasure, teachers might come to adopt roles more appropriate to the intentional states of the students they are helping. Learners, in other words, are more receptive when they influence and help drive the teaching.

Understanding our natural proclivity to socially construct a variety of selves or roles is prelude to our getting a better grip on what collaboration entails from the inside out. In giving us the person’s perspective on how the world is represented and then dealt with, Kelly’s theory of personality helps to capture what’s going on inside the learner’s head (why, for instance, a teacher needs to function as servant, not sovereign) (Kierkegaard 1962, p. 28), and begins to explain why a pattern of collaborative teacher-student relations contributes to learning. In doing this Kelly forces us to replace prescriptions with descriptions, reversing “our habit of asking [the person] to answer our questions rather than noting the nature of the questions which he is asking” (Bannister & Fransella, 1971, p. 82).

Kelly’s psychology of personal constructs is built around eleven corollaries that elaborate his basic postulate: “A person’s processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events.” Each corollary in turn takes up some aspect of the nature of a person’s construct system from choice (“A person chooses for himself that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greatest possibility for the elaboration of his system”) to experience (“A person’s construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events”). It is the final corollary, however, that has the
most to suggest when we consider the need for collaborative role relations in learning, yet this remains the least discussed corollary in the literature on Kelly. This corollary, the *sociality corollary*, relates the “individual” to the “social” and thus suggests that collaboration is not a mere activity we somehow choose to do, but is indispensable to life itself: “To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person.” The point here is that when two or more persons are engaged in a task, some social endeavor, they need not simply be on the same wavelength or see eye to eye; rather, if the venture is to be constructive, there must be some mutual accepting of the other’s point(s) of view, even when, as will often be the case, substantive disagreement exists.

As Kelly explains, “the person who is to play a constructive role in a social process with another person need not so much construe things as the other person does as he must effectively construe the other person’s outlook” (1955, p. 95). This means that collaboration is based neither on commonality nor on rivalry; rather, the individual must have what Kelly calls “a subsuming construct system.” To be able to subsume the diverse and conflicting perspectives that others might hold, we don’t deny our own individuality; rather we commit ourselves to processes of inclusion. We see that if our system of meanings is to approach others it must entertain multiple viewpoints. One way of looking at this subsuming relationship is to imagine the kind of self-suspension that Hans-Georg Gadamer describes in his phenomenological analysis of game-playing:

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\ldots \text{the player surrenders his separate stance and is absorbed into the movement of the game. His individual projects are suspended, not so much at the point where he decides to enter the game but, more significantly, within the actual playing itself. There the movement of the game “takes from him the burden of the initiative.” It would be truer to say that the game plays the players than that the players play the game (Howard, 1982, p. 143).}
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To take part in a social process, a game, is not merely to tolerate coexistence; instead it is to recognize the social basis of our separate outlooks.

Consider even a seemingly trivial example of a social process: walking down a crowded street with people going in both directions. Total chaos does not ensue because we anticipate the moves of others so as not to bump into them, just as they anticipate our moves. This mutual construing of how the other will act to avoid us involves a collaborative role relationship; naturally this does not mean that all will be smooth sailing,
as we have come to realize on those occasions when to avoid a direct hit we move to our right only to have the person coming in the opposite direction move to the left, and so the adjustments continue before each smiles, or frowns as the case may be, and finally we get it straight. Adding the complex dimension of language and conversation only serves to highlight how the various frames of anticipatory conventions we share with others constitute the performative aspects of our role relationships. Just as we have a psychomotor script for not crashing into others on the pavement, so too we develop script routines for dealing with the social situations of our lives. A child, for instance, receives cues on how to act with a teacher—is this adult a parent or a friend, a judge or a guide? And in turn too often a pattern becomes fixed beyond renewal and negotiation, as we saw with the college student who had been failed in composition.

Playing an interactive social role makes our individual construct systems productive. Unless we are banging our own theories about human motives and actions up against the construals of others, we have no way of monitoring and thus developing them in the first place. The audience categories developed by James Britton and his colleagues to sort essays as part of their research on the development of writing abilities illustrate this point (Britton et al., 1975, pp. 11–18). Different kinds of student language production occurred depending on which end of the continuum defined the student-teacher role relationship. If the teacher had constructed a role of “trusted adult,” the student texts were much more open and exploratory—leading to the extension and elaboration of learning. On the other hand when the writing was directed to a teacher who served as “judge and examiner,” then the student was constrained not to attempt anything new or inquiring. In the first instance a dialogue that examined a student’s emerging theories of the world had come to be set up with the teacher, the natural dialogue foundational to development. This was not the case when students were writing merely to give back knowledge previously transmitted by the teacher.

Despite our culturally expressed preferences for the values of individuality, ownership, selfishness, and competition, others are what make growth, change, and maturity possible. And most important, to be an other is in turn to have the capacity to recognize and participate in the ongoing construed lives of others. Role is not reducible to a static “self-concept”; instead, role is a dynamic process, the activity of relating one set of hypotheses to another, and frequently getting our own hypotheses out of the way for a time. For the challenge is always before us: Will we hold the roles of others at arm’s length in order not to render our
own constructions vulnerable, or will we try to remain permeable to
the experience of the other?

Kelly highlights the dilemma of becoming seduced by our own view-
points when he describes some of his early work with teachers in Kansas.7
Operating under a system of interpreting student behavior that empha-
sized “motivation,” many teachers had come to rely on the construct
of “laziness” when they complained about students who were out of
sync with the mandated curriculum. The root of this problem, Kelly
believed, resided in “the traditional rationale of science that leads us to
look for the locus of meaning of words in their objects of reference rather
than in their subjects of origin. We hear a word and look to what is
talked about rather than listen to the person who utters it.” Thus when
a teacher referred to a “lazy” child, this word became the diagnosis,
and then some external treatment, some more powerful motivating
agent, was supposed to provide relief. But as Kelly wondered, “What
does one do to cure laziness?” The trick, of course, was to realize that
“complaints about motivation told us much more about the complainants
than it did about their pupils.” So Kelly tried reversing the construction
process by asking the teachers what the student would do if no external
motivation was attempted:

Often the teacher would insist that the child would do nothing—
absolutely nothing—just sit! Then we would suggest that she try a
nonmotivational approach and let him “just sit.” We would ask her to
observe how he went about “just sitting.” Invariably the teacher would
be able to report some extremely interesting goings-on. An analysis of
what the “lazy” child did while he was being lazy often furnished her
with her first glimpse into the child’s world and provided her with her
first solid grounds for communication with him. Some teachers found
that their laziest pupils were those who could produce the most novel
ideas; others that the term “laziness” had been applied to activities
that they had simply been unable to understand or appreciate. (Maher,
1969, pp. 77–78)

In finding that the learning solution grows out of discovering what hap-
pens when children are left to their own devices, Kelly allows us to see
that collaboration in education is very much a function of our ability to
construct alternatives for any given teaching/learning event. If we are
able to establish a collaborative role relation with our students we will
have to press beyond our immediate labels, which invite closure, and
find ways of subsuming the student’s point of view.

What we are after as educators, I would finally claim, are those social
scripts which make others (learners) accessible, which encourage others
to enter into interpersonal role relationships with us. Such a condition I would label *mature dependency*. Infants, because they are unable to survive without their mothers, determine the immature end of the dependency continuum. At the opposite end is not independence as it is usually associated with individualism, but rather the kind of relationship that is possible between two friends, or two learners, or two workers, or a wife and a husband. Each case involves a kind of reciprocal dependency that in fact defines maturity (a social term) as opposed to self-sufficiency (an individual term).

For obvious reasons mature dependency means risking exposure. While we realize we're not going to be perfect even a small fraction of the time, we may not necessarily have developed adequate scripts to support us through moments of anxiety and insecurity; thus, total avoidance often seems the easiest way out. From the point of view of the teacher, it is easier to set the “learning” agenda than to invest all the energy required to evoke and understand the range of students’ interests and intentions. Similarly for students it is difficult to hold back and really listen to what their peers are saying. Kelly’s stark description of the role options available in a specific teaching/learning situation highlights the importance of being self-less, which really means adding other selves to our own, not dominating or denying them:

A teacher examines her pupils’ arithmetic papers. She may approach the task in either of two ways: she can look at the answers only, and mark them right or wrong, or she can look at the methods by which the individual pupil obtained his answers. In the former case she operates as a test-scoring machine and reflects only validating evidence for the pupil to make use of. In the latter case she undertakes a role relationship with each pupil and joins with the pupil in establishing a miniature society with mutual efforts and objectives. A similar possibility is open to the psychologist in his relations with his client. He can exhibit himself to his client as a stalwart representative of “Truth, Justice, and the American Way,” or he can take a second look at his client’s own personal outlook to see how the two of them might work together for a common purpose (1955, p. 321).

The math teacher operating in the role of mere marker creates an adversary relationship with the student; she owns all the answers and exactly how the student scrambles after a correct one becomes irrelevant. Rather than attempting to understand and respond to a process behind the final result, this stance locks the teacher into a gatekeeping role (just as happened with the composition teacher who failed the student over the journal writing controversy). This is hardly the best route to learning, however, for as Kierkegaard observed, “instruction
Revising Teacher-Student Role Relationships

begins when you, the teacher, learn from the learner, put yourself in his place so that you may understand what he understands and in the way he understands it, in case you have not understood it before. Or if you have understood it before, you allow him to subject you to an examination so that he may be sure you know your part” (Kierkegaard 1962, p. 30). In this contrasting role the teacher serves as reflective audience. Such a teacher script recognizes that the student as learner needs to focus on the means of inquiry, not just the ends. Thus in a conferencing situation, for example, a teacher sees the student’s construal of the conference as being central to what gets accomplished, for it is the student’s construal that constitutes the student’s agenda, which in many instances can be in conflict with the teacher’s own agenda. From this collaborative perspective then, a teacher needs to deliberately elicit what students think and feel about the learning they are participating in.

Yet to enter into the learner’s understandings and strategies—to show trust—teachers must genuinely listen and then model this caring receptivity as being foundational for whatever group work occurs in their classes. This, of course, is an extremely difficult assignment, as Kierkegaard realized: “that to help does not mean to be ambitious but to be patient, that to help means to endure for the time being the imputation that one is in the wrong and does not understand what the other understands” (Kierkegaard 1962, p. 28). Still, when a “common purpose” emerges, collaboration provides an avenue for responding to and testing the students’ ongoing realization of their individual intentions and experiments. This is not a solipsistic one-way operation, however, for in turn these actual intentions of self are being socially shaped by the transactions negotiated among students and teachers as a result of collaboration. Owing to the reciprocity of mature dependency, of course, teachers are not merely passive vacuums; having listened keenly, they know when to speak. And as a critical challenge to what can be a student’s unexamined and thus “comfortable” way of organizing experience, what a teacher finally says will benefit greatly from really having heard the student’s question. Competitive isolation, on the other hand, works in the opposite direction. By shutting down the mutual role relations which support a learner’s passage into competence, it effectively stifles intellectual and emotional inquiry.

When teachers grow beyond defending their own authority and begin to honor the authority of the learner, they are no longer divided on the central question of education. For now they can appreciate the interpersonal dimension of their classrooms, that space in which learners
exploit their fundamental human need and capacity to play a social role in relation to someone else while allowing others to play a role in relation to them, and in doing so gain the reciprocity of mature dependency. In this way collaboration is not merely a route to learning, it is learning itself.

NOTES

1. Kelly, George. (1969). In whom confide: On whom depend for what?” In Brendan Maher, Clinical psychology and personality: The selected papers of George Kelly (p. 206). New York: John Wiley & Sons. The passage continues: “Such a new psychology is one based on the process of construing—which has practically nothing to do with conceptualization or cognition. Moreover, in a society where this kind of psychology directs attention primarily to the understanding of outlooks rather than the manipulation of behaviors, and to human striving rather than transactional exchanges of services, it should be possible to find suitable persons in whom to confide and on whom to depend.”

2. See Jerome Karabel’s Community colleges and social stratification (Harvard Educational Review 42, 4, Nov. 1972, pp. 521–562) for one of the many commentaries on this particular way our educational institutions reproduce themselves by establishing arrangements that serve to “blame the victim.”

3. See Karen Burke LeFevre (1987). Invention as a social act (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press) for a complete account of the tension that exists between individual and social models of invention especially as it applies to our thinking about and teaching of composition.


6. Kelly’s theory of personality, of course, is intellectually compatible with the line of sociology stemming from the work of George Herbert Meade and Alfred Schuetz, and more recently from the work of Erving Goffman. Obviously, any exhaustive consideration of role transactions will draw on a rich range of sources in the humanities and the social sciences (including such psychologists as Harry Stack Sullivan and Ronald Laing, and the important I-Thou thinking of Martin Buber).

8. This concept draws heavily on the British school of psychoanalysis concerned with "object relations" (Fairbairn, Cuntrip, and Winnicott). Specifically they attempted to revise Freud by emphasizing that individuals in their libidinal capacity are object-seeking, not pleasure-seeking. This view privileges self-other relationships as a mark of maturity; when the other is solely a means of self-gratification, learning and development have somehow miscarried.


REFERENCES


