Book Review

Hopkins, R. L. (1994). *Narrative schooling: Experiential learning and the transformation of American education*. Teachers College Press, $28.00 (hardback), 204 pp. (ISBN 0-8077-3333-4)

Reviewed by Roger B. Hill

Richard Hopkin's, *Narrative Schooling*, challenges the mechanistic root metaphor which is so prevalent in American schooling, and proposes a narrative root metaphor upon which to base educational reform. Building on Deweyan principles, Hopkins blends phenomenology and pragmatism in a proposal to do away with schools based on the traditional mechanistic conduit model and to create new learning environments where firsthand experience is central to the learning process and the perspective of the learner is considered in all that is undertaken. On a theoretical level, this work provides a robust argument which would support an experience-based curriculum such as technology education, but would challenge technology educators to provide a learner-centered instructional approach.

Hopkins begins his book with a critical examination of the underlying assumptions, educational philosophies, and characteristic practice which has dominated our educational system. He then provides a detailed discussion of phenomenology, using this philosophical perspective to establish a theoretical base for experiential learning. Phenomenology provides a framework in which affective attitudes, emotions, and feelings can be considered as they interact in the learning process. It places an emphasis on what is experienced by the learner and the ways in which people assign unique meaning to their individual stream of consciousness. Control of physical activity and movement is addressed and concerns are raised regarding the extent to which traditional school mechanisms restrict the permissible activities of learners. Hopkins encourages educators to emphasize the processes, the choices, and the lived experiences from the perspectives of the learners. The role of the educator should be that of facilitator—not director, to teach processes of problem-solving rather than solving all the problems, and to help learners establish feeling-thinking linkages rather than to prescribe outcomes.

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In the later parts of Hopkin's text, the advantages and benefits of experiential learning are further discussed and recommended changes for schools are described. He points out that as people learn through experience, they must struggle with conflict when things do not fit with their previous structure of experience. The learning process which results involves efforts to put things back into order and to find some logical theme for what is observed. Learning through the conduit model is likened to the expertise of an automatic pilot in an aircraft. It works fine as long as the standard conditions exist. If anomalies occur, however, there is no substitute for an experienced pilot. When the pilot takes over, problems which have not been previously faced may arise. The pilot knows more than mere procedures and can devise new solutions as the occasion demands them. Learning occurs *in* the process—not altogether prior to the process. This new learning builds on prior knowledge, and the process is constructive rather than simply being based on the application of some heuristic or set of rules.

The central element in the system Hopkins proposes is a continuing narrative portfolio to be developed and maintained by individual students using any and all available media. Students would be organized into learning communities with 9 or 10 students in each group. A full range of students would be included in each group with regard to socioeconomic background, race, ethnicity, gender, prior preparation, and age. The students in each group would establish the goals, limitations, and social dynamic which would guide the development of portfolios. Teachers function to guide the work of individuals in groups by acting as a resource person and facilitator for learning activities.

Subject-matter courses would be available to serve the narrative curriculum and students could drop in and out of them as needed. No course would be required. Master teachers would work with student groups and would encourage students to pursue challenging and relevant areas of new learning based on awareness of individual student's interests and needs. Students would present their portfolios to peers in their group as well as to teachers and other relevant audiences. The end result would be learner controlled educational experiences which are relevant, of interest to students, and connected to learners' lived experiences.

With regard to technology education, certainly implementation of Hopkins proposal would have dramatic consequences. While the modular design of contemporary technology education labs would provide the diversity necessary to meet a wide range of needs for learning about technology, the present system of managing student use of the modules would be eliminated. The resources of the technology education program would be integrated with those of the entire school and groups of students with an agenda including study of technology

would pass through as they pursued their established goals. Irrespective of the objections and potential problems such a proposal would raise, Hopkin's model would likely result in exposure of technology education to all students in the school. He suggests that the separation and discontinuity between school and the world outside would be reduced or eliminated, and were this the case, the technological nature of our world would result in technology being a significant part of each student's narrative portfolio.

In conclusion, *Narrative Schooling* is a thought provoking work. It provides a compelling critique of traditional educational theory and practice. While it is not light reading, and the detail in the proposal for implementing a narrative system is sketchy at best, it is recommended reading for those who are interested in developing further insight into theory related to situated cognition, the importance of context in learning, constructivism, and experiential education. The text should also be included on reading lists for upper level graduate courses in technology education to stimulate and challenge students to consider a well-reasoned alternative to the conduit model of educational delivery still prevalent in our profession.