The Personal Creed Project and a New Vision of Learning
Loaves and Fishes

This is not
the age of information.

This is *not*
the age of information.

Forget the news,
and the radio,
and the blurred screen.

This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.

People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.

—David Whyte
The Personal Creed Project and a New Vision of Learning

Teaching the Universe of Meaning
In & Beyond the Classroom

John Creger

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This book is dedicated to the children of the twenty-first century. Become parents and grandparents whose children and grandchildren prize the loving designs of a learning universe.
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**Web Resources**

www.universeWired.com

**For the Creed Project**

Complete Instructions for Step I to IV Reflections
- Semester-Long Version (with sample cover)
- Mid-Length Version
- Workshop Version (for adults)
Sample Step V Reflective Essays
- Eddie’s Creed Essay
- Natalie’s Creed Essay
- Jennifer’s Creed Essay

**For Weaving Personal Learning Through the Year**

Sample Two-Legged Writings
- Danielle’s Spring Final Exam Essay
- Matt’s Spring Final Exam Essay
- Melissa’s Spring Final Exam Essay
- Anthony’s Spring Final Exam Essay
Cosmos-Friendly Themes
- Student Statements on the Value of Meditation
- Tatiana’s Moment That Mattered
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**Other Web Resources**

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Life, Literature, and the Two-Legged Pursuit of Learning

The purpose of education is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions . . . to ask questions of the universe and then learn to live with those questions. [This] is the way he achieves his own identity.

—James Baldwin

At the beginning of Part Two, you read of my desire to learn to reshape my teaching so that my students can find more of their learning satisfying. This chapter will introduce the reshaping I have so far done in the sophomore English course I teach, share some plans for school-wide reshaping that are growing out of the entire Creed experience, and even set the conversation in a bit of global culture-reshaping.

The approach I share here is a collection of methods and activities I have put together over a number of years to reach the goal of spreading out across my students’ year the kind of enjoyment and engagement in learning I have seen among them during the Creed Project. To create this approach, I’ve used the same “process” I described at the end of Chapter Three—staying open to inklings, creating and implementing activities that arise from them, paying attention to insights from class discussions and student thinking-partners on how activities are working and might work better, making changes accordingly, following more inklings, and on around the loop. My task now was to find ways to alchemize all this with our existing academic curriculum into a coherent, developmentally attuned, and satisfying learning sequence for a year of sophomore English. As far as I’ve tested it with my students, I think the developing approach you’re about to explore makes good logical and intuitive sense. But it’s far from the only way to reach
the goal of making learning more satisfying. You may have one that works as well or better, or may dream one up next week. Ultimately, it will be the combining and recombining of what’s best in all of our approaches that launches us into awarenesses of learning and practices of teaching worthy of a new century.

Overview

Put simply, as you’ve already read in various places in this book, Two-Legged Curriculum (or Two-Legged Design or Learning) is a way to think about and plan classroom experiences for students and teachers that sets out to honor both the academic and personal dimensions of learning. The central aim of a Two-Legged approach is to create sets of learning experiences for students that assist them as much in gaining personal wisdom and insight as it does in developing more factual knowledge and skills. The idea first came to me as I thought through one of the more powerful points I came upon as I made my fascinated way through James Moffett’s *The Universal Schoolhouse*. It’s worth a short walk in theory before I sketch out what I’ve come up with to this point in practice.

Background of the Two-Legged Idea

Moffett identifies the present foundation stones of U.S. education as nationalism and economics. Such a foundation, he argues, is incapable of supporting the approach to teaching and learning we will need to develop if we are to thrive or even survive as a society in the new century. Business and government today complain, just as they did in the 1960s after the launching of *Sputnik*, that “American students don’t know enough science and math and that they lack skills in communicating, collaborating, analyzing, and creative problem solving.” The space race of the sixties was part and parcel of the military, economic, and political confrontation between the superpowers; it was also the rationale for the federal government’s instigation of the period’s curricular reform. Moffett lays out the problem with this government-mandated approach to learning: “Both then and now what spurred school reform was fear of a decline in technology as measured by nationalistic competition. This leads to wrongheaded thinking about public education” (33).

If centering education policy on the national interest was wrongheaded in the sixties, it makes even less sense today. For one thing, as the global economy develops, nations become less important as eco-
onomic forces. Today, “American and Japanese automobile companies are marketing each other’s products, building factories in each other’s countries, and jointly producing some cars.” The labels “Made in the USA” or “Made in Taiwan” can no longer tell us “the nationality of the company, of the capital, or of the components.” Not only is this result unintended but it runs counter to the initial intention of nations to outperform the economies of other nations: “In this ironic sense, business is leading the way to global thinking” (34). Another problem with continuing to base our system of learning on keeping the nation competitive is that competition itself is diminishing in global importance. It is increasingly in the interests of the global corporations whose labels and logos often wield more influence than the flags and insignia of nations to share technology, markets, and information. Yet, despite the increasing preeminence of networking and collaboration as modes of doing business effectively and profitably, corporate and national systems continue to be organized around competition. Writing a decade ago, Moffett noted, “In today’s global interdependence, competition no longer pays off, though for the moment multinational corporations still have not found all the necessary ways to replace it, just as nations still limit collaboration largely to regional alliances” (35). But ultimately, reluctance or inability to reshape and retool cannot stop the transformation. Writing five years after Moffett in *Natural Capitalism* (1999), Paul Hawkens and Amory and L. Hunter Lovins compare this global situation to

a train that is at the station about to go. The train doesn’t know if your company, country, or city is safely on board, nor whether your ticket is punched or not. There is now sufficient evidence of change to suggest that if your corporation or institution is not paying attention to this revolution, it will lose competitive advantage. (xiii)

If it is ironic that corporations mainly interested in profit have led the way through the old systems of nationalistic competition to the “global thinking” of networking and collaboration, it’s also ironic that unless we realize the limitations of the competitive mind-set and its creations we lose competitive edge. The irony is especially intense in education.

Because education is the “institution” that for better or worse guides learning, it is education, given the central influence of learning on human progress, that most needs to be “paying attention” to the revolution of which Hawkens and the Lovinses speak. We need to recognize that our education systems are based on the old notion that learning is mainly a means of maintaining competitive advantage, and that today this assumption is dangerously inadequate. Here is the crux of the irony: Either we acknowledge the inadequacy of this assumption and move to correct it, or not merely will we continue failing to foster
the personal unfolding that should be at the core of genuine learning—and for the want of which America is rapidly abandoning its legacy of democracy and putting its own survival at serious risk—but we will miss the very train to the future we intend our old-style accountability measures to guarantee. Aren’t these the true “high stakes” we should be talking and legislating about, and beginning to design our cultures around?

Because we continue to regard the purpose of education and learning as merely to serve the interests of business, rather than as the key to human surviving and thriving, we put the core survival mechanism of learning—we put our survival itself—at risk. The continuing national emphasis on “measuring” a process as complex and individualized as learning by arraying mere test scores, just as baseball standings are ranked on the sports page or stocks and bonds are compared in the business section, shows that the increasingly outmoded systems that drove the engines of nationalistic competition continue to drive education policy. Moffett warns: “To base school reform on the old nationalistic economic competition would lock education into a past that is dying for good reasons” (36).

A central source of the problem derives from the choice to form education policy in response to the fear of declining competitive power, a choice that puts us in the position of basing national education policy on fear. This is a weak starting position. From Kantor’s spectrum (Chapter One), we can see that much of the reason so many students and teachers find themselves disengaged and demoralized is that the essential attitude that drives education policy—fear—naturally generates doubt and despair. How do we find a better way?

**Culture and Consciousness and Teetering on the Brink**

The evolutionary purpose of liberty may be to force human beings, through the very adversities it causes, into a more spiritual consciousness.

—James Moffett (70–71)

Presciently in *The Universal Schoolhouse*, Moffett argues that a transition is already under way, and that the tired industrial-age underpinnings of nationalism and economics are gradually being edged out from beneath the edifice of education by two new foundation stones. He calls these new underpinnings *culture* and *consciousness*. This evolutionary transition is intertwined with the one noted by cultural historian Riane Eisler in her equally important *The Chalice and the Blade*. 
In Eisler’s vision, world society in our period is teetering back and forth on the brink of a shift from one model of societal organization to another. In the old *dominator* model, on one hand, societies are most characterized by the *ranking* of gender, class, race, and other distinctions. In the emerging cultures based on the *partnership* model, on the other hand, one increasingly sees a more pronounced *linking* of individuals from among groups formerly separated by the old dominator hierarchies. Intentionally or not, multinational corporations have facilitated certain early phases of this linking process with the transnational collaboration discussed above, and even more the linking of individuals is made possible through the Internet. But we must now begin to move forward with clearer intention. Moffett’s image of the new foundation stones also resonates with the perspective *The Urantia Book* offers on our period. In this view, when human society is challenged to fuel the evolutionary forces working to displace the old economic *profit motive* (nationalism and economics) with the oncoming *service motive* (culture and consciousness) in the emerging global orientation to life and work. The poem at the front of this book, by poet David Whyte, “bard of the bottom-line world,” comes from a book whose title bears the mark of this evolutionary shift: *Crossing the Unknown Sea: Work as a Pilgrimage of Identity*, as does the title of Whyte’s best-selling business book, *The Heart Aroused: Poetry and the Preservation of Soul in Corporate America*.

However we view this transitional period, few continue to argue its reality. The transition is proving to be long and arduous, and is bringing about terrific dislocation. The period is also fraught with the understandable tendency at every level to retreat from this disruptive process and return to more orderly approaches rooted in periods in which order was enforced in *dominator* hierarchies and decisions were made on the simpler industrial-age priorities of *profit motivation*. We see this in the reflexes of the current administration as it responds to world and national events. And these reflexes are particularly evident in the current policies on education.

**The Height of the Stakes**

Given a new awareness of the central role of learning in determining our ability to make progress—a beginning appreciation that learning is *the* primary means of human advancement—we must realize we are about to be left at the station watching the train disappear. Few educators or policy makers, having considered the view of learning described in Part Two of this book that learning is most fundamentally a process of individual unfolding, would argue seriously against its truth. Few
willing to think it through would even dispute Moffett’s analysis that education continues to rest on industrial-age underpinnings of nationalism and economics that are inadequate to support a truer and more useful vision of learning and are in dire need of replacement. Yet, rather than consider how such new perspectives might be understood and applied in schools, the present administration implements an education policy reflecting a view of learning that is essentially a view of business. It is the same view that guides the forces of business and commerce to attempt at all costs—through war when necessary—to keep outmoded national and international systems of competition and hierarchy in place. The education policies deriving from this motivation in effect force what Moffett goes on to suggest may rightfully become the central societal institution in the coming period—education—to become accountable to an industrial-age view of learning that is passing from the scene. What can teachers do in the face of this retrogression? Two-Legged Curriculum attempts to equip us to carry Moffett’s image of the new foundation stones of culture and consciousness into the conceiving and designing of learning experiences, possibly even of entire schools, for children. Writing a decade before they became obvious to the world, Moffett explains the true height of the stakes involved:

Unless the raising of consciousness and culture is the primary goal of education, people eventually betray their practical goals such as material improvement and social amelioration. Americans are losing both prosperity and democracy because they are too undeveloped to make freedom work. (my emphasis, 331)

In reality, the primary threat to homeland security is our own lack of development. How can we salvage prosperity and democracy? One long-term answer is to insist that our leaders (and if not the present ones, then the ones we elect in their places) participate in a national conversation on the nature of learning, and how what we call school can begin to serve a truer idea of learning that is capable of sustaining American democracy. Reexamining an insight from Chapter Six in a different context, we can again listen to Moffett as he thinks through the rightful purpose of education:

I argue that personal development must be central, because all solutions to public problems, no matter how collective the action, depend on mature, enlightened individuals to call for and indeed insist on these solutions. (xvi)

This national conversation must revolve around the necessity to establish in schools approaches to learning that provide learners with opportunities to develop themselves into the “mature, enlightened individuals” who only can make and preserve democracy. What does this kind
of learning look like? Moffett has given us the outlines. It entails a twin purpose: to raise culture and raise consciousness.

Two Legs

Because those who have recently been charting the course of U.S. education are unlikely to be impressed by ideas as subtle as culture and consciousness, I use more recognizable terms: academic and personal. What I call personal learning links directly to Moffett’s notion of the growth of consciousness. Academic in my usage may not be exactly synonymous with culture in Moffett’s, but I see the translation, at least for the time being, as workable. (Academic skills equip learners, through the various disciplines, to become conversant with the knowledge and skills of society—loosely, with key aspects of culture.) In Two-Legged Curriculum, then, school communities—teachers and administrators, students and parents—work together to complete the ongoing retrofitting of education’s foundation. A Two-Legged approach begins with the intention to balance the academic and the personal at every stage of classroom and curricular planning. A Two-Legged classroom or school is as much devoted to the care and unfolding of persons as to the acquisition and honing of skills.

A note on how this twin goal relates to the Beginning Model of Twenty-First-Century Education you find at the front of this book and again at the end of Part Two. The Beginning Model centers on the notion from Moffett and other sources that personal development is the true purpose, the central aim, of learning. Why, then, advocate a twin goal in the Two-Legged approach? I see two reasons.

First, I separate the academic and personal in order to remind myself of the present need for a greater emphasis on personal learning in my students’ experience in school and of the need to continue designing this kind of learning into the courses I teach. In reality, of course, academic and personal learning are both aspects of personal unfolding.

The second reason has more to do with how to make this really happen. Because we have become so invested in creating and holding ourselves accountable to academic standards, it makes little sense to advocate throwing academics and standards off the bridge and suddenly reinvesting everything in personal learning. Such talk would raise unworkable logistical and political barriers, and wouldn’t go far. Perhaps the greatest impediment to educational progress during the twentieth century was the destructive pendulum swings as opposing education trends came and went, reversing policies, wasting resources, and breeding cynicism. So it makes sense to build on existing momentum rather than radically change direction; I see the Two-Legged idea
as a way to stabilize the pendulum swings and move in a forward
direction. If adopted in a sensible manner that sought to find
approaches to integrate the two aspects, a Two-Legged plan could help
make peace in education circles, since it makes room for a broad range
of viewpoints in the conversation, giving both those who call for
accountability and those who call for personal meaning a place to stand
and work. How, then, have I applied the idea in my classroom?

Designing a Two-Legged English Course

Figure 14–1 shows a statement of purpose I wrote several years ago
to guide my own decisions in planning and teaching my sophomore
English course. I wrote this statement (a bit cheekily) as if it were
intended to guide our entire sophomore English program. While I
could not then and cannot now make this claim, I wrote it mainly to
keep my own sights set on a clear purpose. Still, I have been surprised
at the developments of the past two years at the school. The embrac-
ing of the Creed Project by three English colleagues in the sophomore
program—this past year including first-year teacher Patty Baca, who
handily took four of our eight sections through the experience, allow-
ing well over half the sophomore class to participate—makes me
wonder if perhaps there was a reason I wrote the Statement of Purpose
this way.

Finding a Course Theme/Title

Reaching this two-pronged goal, I soon realized, meant not creating
alternating chunks of curriculum but intertwining experiences to pro-
mote academic and personal growth in my classes (see the discussion
of Scheduling in Chapter Nine). But first I needed a guiding concept,
an overarching course theme. This is something I had been consider-
ing for a number of years, and this thinking eventually led to the
proposed schoolwide thematic curriculum we’ll explore later in this
chapter. As you may recall from the kickoff section of Chapter Ten, I
eventually chose “Envisioning a Life” for our course theme/title. It’s
funny how resistance to change so often governs us. One day after I’d
been using this title a few years on handouts as a way of reminding us
what the course was about, a colleague, having noticed the title on a set
of copies for my students by the copy machine, stopped me in the hall.
“You name your courses?” he asked, incredulously. “You can’t do
that!” “Sure I can,” I shot back, mischievously. “Don’t you?”

Among other things, I want the course theme to serve as an
umbrella for the various thematic studies that make up our year. These
studies and their themes, by the way, are not set in curricular stone. At least I don’t think so. In the same way our notions of secondary English curriculum can center too rigidly on skill development, I believe that oftentimes they center too inflexibly on literature. This leads to a narrowing rather than an expansion of possibilities. I prefer to center my idea of a course on a conversation I want our classroom to have through the year. Then I want to choose literature that stimulates this conversation at the same time it helps students acquire the needed academic skills and knowledge. This conversation helps address personal and academic learning goals alike, but ultimately the substance and tenor of the conversation at the center should be guided most of all by personal learning goals set by the school community. Democratically determined personal learning goals, as we’ll discuss later in this chapter, should condition the substance and tenor of the conversation that guides learning. The Cross Section of Twenty-First Century English Curriculum at the end of Chapter Eight came out of a conversation with student thinking-partner David Xu on how to help more students care about learning. It is a beginning attempt to conceive a more fruitful relationship between academic and personal learning, with personal learning becoming the curricular core that inte-

**Sophomore English at American High School**

*Statement of Twin Purpose*

The purpose of sophomore English at American High School is to help students develop themselves in two major areas:

1. to promote their progress in reading, writing, language, thinking and learning skills. [Beyond the personal benefits these skills bring, they are also culture-orienting skills.] To this end, we teachers find reasonable and effective ways to use standards and assessments in our classrooms;

2. to begin building a personal vision for their lives. [This is one means of bringing about Moffett’s “raising of consciousness.”] To this end, we teachers select themes and literature, design a writing program, and create other activities to encourage and inspire our sophomores to begin envisioning life concepts for themselves.

Our goal is to balance students’ time and energies between these two essential areas of development.

**Figure 14-1** Statement of Twin Purpose

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**Figure 14-1** Statement of Twin Purpose
grates and brings meaning to the academic parts. More conversation is needed to develop this approach.

My idea for the overarching theme of our course crystallized sometime during the first two years I “piloted” Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a replacement novel for Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*. After teaching Golding’s book for eight years, I had come to the end of the trail. While Golding’s novel is clearly a work of genius, I could find no way to construe the view of humanity it so powerfully puts forward in any light that could assist my students to reflect on their lives and purpose in a post–Cold War world. What I want for my students is to facilitate a class conversation that can help them find answers for themselves to their own big questions about their lives, the universe, and what really matters to them. I am not willing to impose my answers, Golding’s answers, or someone else’s conviction that there are no answers. Since everyone in Golding’s story who even asks questions is hunted and/or murdered, for the sake of my students I needed reverently to toss this novel over my shoulder and find one that could help them figure out their lives. Following an inkling, I got permission from my department chair to pilot Hurston’s book.

I have discovered in the several years since then not only that *Their Eyes* is a work of genius on a par with the greatest of literary works, but that the novel fits the course I dreamt of creating in a way that is nothing short of uncanny. In the article I eventually wrote for *California English*, I discussed the main character, Janie Crawford:

> Though it may not be immediately apparent, Janie’s growth in the novel echoes the remarkable expansion of horizons so characteristic of a developing 15 or 16 year-old. My impression is that Janie’s growth as a person, more than that of most literary characters, can incite personal growth in young adult readers. (22)

Sometimes I wonder if, as she created Janie more than sixty years earlier, Zora Neale Hurston had the Creed Project in mind. In *Their Eyes*, Hurston gives us a character who, despite not having known her parents, and being raised by her grandmother, a former slave, conceives a vision for her life—at the age of sixteen. As the novel resolves, with Janie ripened into her forties, fifteen- and sixteen-year-old students can see her reaping the personal rewards of having achieved some of that vision:

> Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (184)

It was Duron Aldredge, my student thinking-partner you may recall from Chapter One, who first pointed out to me how perfectly the novel
Sophomore English at American High School
Interweaving Academic and Personal Learning:
Two-Legged Design

September               June

**Academic Leg: Entry Projects**
Reading and Writing  Diagnostics

**Academic Exit Projects**
Diagnostics/Sophomore Portfolio

Weaving Academic and Personal Learning Through the Year

Tracing Big Questions   Thought Log          Two-Legged Writings

**Personal Leg: Entry Project**
Wisdom Project

**Exit Project**
Personal Creed Project

Envisioning . . . a Life
fit the Creed Project. It was about then that I settled on “Envisioning a Life” for our course theme.

To represent the two-legged nature of the course I was also envisioning, I created the not-very-artistic graphic you’ll see in Figure 14-2. This graphic will serve as an organizer for most of the rest of this chapter. As I did for the ideas in Part Two, I’ll explain how this all comes together as if things fell in place in some logical and linear fashion, when of course only in hindsight can I see how it all made sense.

In the overview of the Two-Legged idea in Chapter Ten, I mentioned the practice of using entry and exit projects on the personal leg of curriculum, just as on the academic leg. You can see this clearly in Figure 14–2. Keep in mind that what you see is only a design for one sophomore English class, not some divinely ordained pattern. When I began thinking that Moffett’s culture and consciousness could be translated into academic and personal, and the idea of two curricular legs took shape in my mind, I already had the Creed Project as the natural exit for the personal leg, and had been working on the fall Wisdom Project for two or three years. Your choice of entry and exit project, of course, depends on the level you are teaching, the developmental realities of the age group, the themes your curriculum can support, your own personal interests (since you want to feel passionate about your course), any colleagues with whom you collaborate in teaching this course, the degree of freedom you are granted or can claim, and more. Little equipped to advise you in all these areas, I will have to be content to explain what I have done, give you a flavor of my process, and invite you to trust your instincts, inklings, and powers of reflection. Since most teacher training revolves around academic learning, I’ll concentrate on the personal leg.

A Personal Leg Entry: The Wisdom Project

What makes the most sense to me in the Two-Legged Design you see in Figure 14–2 is the entry-exit design concept. How do we begin designing personal learning into a course? We create sound starting and ending points. And then? We find sound ways of connecting the dots between them. It’s simple but solid. Course evaluations suggest that students are indeed making connections between the Wisdom Project that begins the course with a generalized study in the fall and the Creed Project that brings this study home to a personal level in the spring. As it turns out, themes, motifs, and other literary elements that arise in the varied short pieces we read in the Wisdom Project surface all year in our novels, poetry, and plays. Although you see the Wisdom Project at the head of the personal leg in Figure 14–2, in reality it is not strictly a personal learning experience. It is a two-legged project,
because it provides good supplies of both personal and academic learning. At this point, you may want to read over the student instructions for the Wisdom Project (see Appendix II).

Until 1997, Holt, Rinehart, and Winston’s *Elements of Literature* at the sophomore level included only a half dozen selections from the Bible that one could say fit the category of wisdom literature. In their 1997 edition, suddenly the anthology sported an entire section called Sources of Wisdom. Containing five selections from the Bible, two from the Qur’an, five short sayings and one longer tale from the Sufi tradition, one from Omar Khayyam (making nine selections in all from the Islamic world), three Taoist anecdotes, two Zen parables, and a beast fable from the Hindu Panchatantra, plus a number of excellent supplementary selections from around the world, the section actually represented a cross section of world wisdom. It was an enormous advance, and makes it possible for me, supplementing with a few additional pieces, most of which I can find in the anthology itself, to offer my students at the beginning of the year at least one piece of literature that connects in some way with most of their global backgrounds. This new material has enabled me to transform a limping effort at exploring wisdom with my students into what Atticus Finch might call “a living, breathing reality.”

To emphasize that we are addressing academic standards, I have begun adding a page of state standards to instruction packets for this and other projects to indicate specific academic skills the project helps students develop. It’s a pretty impressive list for this month-long project, as you can see in Appendix II. As the project develops, I’ll stop and refer students to the list; for example, we’ll look over the Speaking Applications skills when we embark on one of the project’s most engaging activities, the Wisdom Project interviews. And in the project we’ll thoroughly address most of the reading and writing standards.

Thanks to a May 2000 *Newsweek* devoted to what it called the “Millennial Generation,” I got the idea to make the study not only a general exploration of wisdom—addressing essential questions like What is wisdom? How do we know when a person is wise? How can we learn from the wisdom of the past? The Wisdom Project has also become an inquiry that asks students to explore what their generation appears to stand for. In a sense, this aspect of the Wisdom Project is a Creed Project prequel, on a generational rather than a personal level. Now that the *Newsweek* material is getting a little dated, we’ll need more current data to gain perspective on this generation, and may need to do some Internet research this fall.

I re-tailor the project every year to reflect current events as well, and you’ll see the invitation to consider the Bush administration’s War on Terrorism and contemplate, based on our exploration of wisdom, to
what extent the administration’s actions can be called wise. Students appreciate the opportunity to ground such a discussion in our study of wisdom, rather than to let the usual crosscurrents of unfounded political opinions run loose. As you see in the instructions, the project includes a set of criteria (adapted from *The Urantia Book*) for three Levels of Wisdom, providing a way to judge whether a given action can be regarded as wise on ground, intermediate, or higher levels. (Did I really just refer to a set of standards for wisdom?)

The project culminates with students writing an essay on wisdom, basing their ideas on a series of prewriting activities, including the interviews, which I collect in a separate packet, and three brainstorm sessions. The entire project, which I think is increasingly helping students develop both academically and personally, now includes more materials than I am able to touch on here. You can find additional materials relating to this project at www.universeWired.com.

**Weaving the Personal Through the Year**

Because our existing programs are for the most part designed around academic learning, it is not possible to move suddenly to programs perfectly balanced between academic and personal learning. In fact, as with most worthwhile changes, the transition is best when it is deliberate yet gradual. Connie White, our wise, funny, and beautiful principal, reminds us that any change worth making takes at least three years to bear fruit worthy of the name. Rather than the two legs of equivalent weight I aim for ultimately, I think first in terms of beginnings. Figure 14–2 suggests that as we move through the year’s labor of developing students’ academic skills, we weave “personal strands” around and through the various academic activities that develop students’ reading, writing, conversing, and thinking skills. To carry their personal growth through the more skill-oriented work, students develop and revisit their Big Questions, react to and converse about expanded perspectives on course themes and topics using their Thought Logs, and engage in self-discovery through Two-Legged writings. Descriptions follow, along with student insights into each of these approaches.

All this begins in my classes with a course introduction in which I attempt to convey the two-legged nature of the course. In fact the first handout students get from me is itself “two-legged,” since it contains two different colored double-sided sheets, the top one in which I try to introduce the personal elements of the course, the bottom one the academic requirements. Below you can see the top page of the personal introduction sheet. We read this together on Day One in the fall:
Envisioning a Life
Course Introduction

ENGLISH 10cp  WORLD LITERATURE
2002-2003  Mr. Creger

Without the vision and the power, this learning will do no good.
Lame Deer, seeker of visions

What students want to learn is as important
as what teachers want to teach.
Lois E. LeBar

What I do is me.
For that I came.
Gerard Manley Hopkins

Welcome to your second year of high school English! I’d like to begin by wishing you a fun and challenging experience in this class. I hope you will let your hopes run high. For one of my main goals this year is to rely as much as possible on your ideas and input in decisions about how we run this class—and even what we study. I thank you in advance for your involvement and for the pleasure of being your teacher. —Cheers, Mr. C.

I. What This Class Is About

ONCE upon a time, human beings thought the world was a flat disk at the center of the universe. The planets, moon, sun, and stars, people thought, revolved around the earth. Life revolved around families, clans, and villages. Today we know the world is a sphere, a spinning ball not at the center of anything really, and that it orbits a star we call the sun. The countless millions of stars we see on a clear night away from city lights are only a small fraction, a tiny slice, of the actual number of stars in the universe. Recent discoveries suggest that most stars are in fact suns, centers of their own solar systems, each sun orbited like ours by its own planets. So the number of planets in the universe far exceeds the number of stars, probably reaching into trillions.

During the first half of the twentieth century, people had even less idea of the true size of the universe. Most scientists assumed the conditions necessary for life had come together on earth only by chance, and so it was highly unlikely that life as we know it existed on any other planet. But today, the odds seem slim indeed that among all those trillions of worlds, living creatures have appeared on only one—this one. More and more of us today look beyond villages, cities, even beyond nations. Peering beyond this small world, some of us even prepare to meet neighbors among the stars. As our
lives on earth get increasingly complicated, we reach for an enlarged vision of life and the universe in which life unfolds.

What does it mean to live in a universe as vast as this one now appears to be? What has been said, what is being thought about such things? What exactly is the universe, anyway? Does it exist only outside us, or also inside us? Is it like the earth, only bigger—endless galaxies of injustice and suffering, loneliness, greed, and war? Will we always be cut off from it, lost, abandoned? Or is it a place of love, of compassion? Does the universe somehow care, and speak quietly in each of our hearts as a loving parent to a treasured child? Is American High School part of the universe? What are our lives for? What does it mean to live in a way that is wise? What does it mean to serve others? The reading and discussions, the thinking and artwork, the drama and writing we will do together this year will be about helping each other ask and explore questions like these.

Big Questions

Students begin the course by identifying and writing about “Big Questions”—questions about life, the world, the universe—that they sometimes think about. As new studies commence through the year, I try to remember to invite them to revisit and possibly revise or update these questions. The goal is for students as much as possible to navigate the curriculum of this World Literature and writing course using their own genuine deep interests—well-developed in some students, of course, and just emerging in others—as compasses. Students are regularly encouraged to bring their Big Questions to the year’s work of developing reading, writing, thinking, speaking, listening, and study skills. Students relate them to our studies when possible, incorporating them as feasible into essays and final exams. This strand, if you will, of weaving the personal through the year begins with the homework assigned on Day One, “Inquiry 1: Big Questions.” (I describe the getting acquainted activity we use on Day Two, the Big Question Meet, at the beginning of Chapter Ten.) Following are the instructions for Inquiry 1, the Big Questions writing:
kinds of things actually interest you. Please carefully read the instructions below and write a thoughtful response to the one you are assigned tonight. Carefully and thoroughly answer the questions you are asked. Each of your responses should be well-developed. By “well-developed,” I mean that it contains examples and is at least one full page in length. If you are unsure how to write more, try adding another example or two. If you still need help, try rereading the instructions and letting ideas come.

Inquiry 1 - Big Questions

A. Make a list of big questions—about life, the world, reality, the universe—that you sometimes think about. Let your mind stay on this as long as you can, and make this list as long as possible. Try a few deep breaths when you get stuck, or do something else for a while. You may find it helpful to reread the first page of our Course Introduction that we read together in class. If you give it time, ideas will flow, and surprising new ones may suddenly come to you. Write each question in a complete sentence, ending in a question mark. Once you have a long, satisfying list, choose ONE of these questions that most interests you.

B. Write a paragraph explaining why this particular question holds your interest most of all. Try to come up with several reasons for your interest in this question. Why do you think it matters more to you than other questions? Say as much as you feel comfortable sharing. Which question might come in second for you? Why?

C. On a separate sheet of paper that you will keep in your binder after you turn in Inquiry 1, copy your list of Big Questions, with your first and second most interesting questions marked.

I collect students’ responses to Inquiry 1 on Day Two, and try to return them as soon as possible, with comments complimenting the questions they are asking and encouraging them to keep asking them through the year. If and when I am feeling especially ambitious and enthused, in the second or third week I assign Inquiry 2, “Dear Universe,” which turns into what amounts to a creative writing assignment for me. Though it takes a powerfully long time, some years I’ve actually written each student a response signed “Your Friend, The Universe,” in which I freewrite what I imagine a friendly, compassionate universe would have to say in response to his or her Dear Universe letter. Well, it’s one way for a teacher to get in a little writing! And have you ever imagined the voice of the universe coming through you?

Inquiry 2—Dear Universe

A. Take another look at your Big Question, from Inquiry 1. Let your mind think further about this question. Does anything about it especially bother you? Confuse you? Mystify you?
B. Make a list of things about your question that puzzle you. In other words, what are some of the hardest parts of your question to answer? [If nothing about your question puzzles you, you may want to try another question from your list.]

C. Imagine that the universe has a personality, that it is a person you can talk with. Imagine you’ve recently learned that the universe especially enjoys getting letters from its creatures. Imagine that the universe can actually answer any question you ask, and is glad to do so. Write a letter to the universe in which you ask for help understanding some of the things about your question that puzzle you. Simply begin with the salutation, “Dear Universe…”

D. Optional: Search the web to explore your Big Question. In your letter, incorporate any information from your web search you think might be interesting to share with your correspondent, the universe. You may want to start by going to Ask Jeeves (ask.com) or Google (google.com).

It is also possible, I’ve found, for teachers to use students’ Big Questions in designing courses. When time permits (and that has only happened twice in the first years I was developing the Big Question approach), I tally and group students’ Big Questions for a given year into categories and report results to classes. In Figure 14–3 you can see my tally of one year’s Big Questions. Figure 14–4 shows how I then used these results in choosing themes and literature for whole-class study, as well as titles for Literature Circles, which I then called the Outside Book Project. (If you are unfamiliar with Literature Circles, a team reading activity that often helps turn non-readers into readers, see Harvey Daniels’s Literature Circles. It’s a great resource on an activity that certainly deserves to be called two-legged, since it helps students develop reading skills at the same time it helps them learn to share responses and perception on what they read with classmates, which in turn builds enthusiasm for reading; to have students talk about books in a natural way is the very natural goal of the activity.)

My purpose in analyzing the students’ Big Questions was to get a sense of what kinds of questions they were asking, and then see whether I could use these kinds of questions to actually design our course. I first grouped the questions in categories while tallying them, as you see in Figure 14–5. Their questions do not come from a completely blue sky, of course, since on Day One students read the Course Introduction with me in class, and then read the instructions for Inquiry 1 that evening. Both of these pieces I intend to stimulate students to think in the most expansive terms they can as they ask these questions. So the questions they create may not reflect students’ average daily states of mind (a definite blessing in many cases). Still, you can see
## Big Questions Tally 1998–1999

The Big Questions 112 students in three English 10cp and one English 10general classes asked in response to the course description and instructions for the Inquiry 1 writing assignment break into the following categories. Listed by number of questions per class, in order of frequency asked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 4</th>
<th>Period 5</th>
<th>Total / %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Questions about life in the universe beyond earth.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20 / 18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Questions about afterlife (including soul and reincarnation)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17 / 15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Questions about destiny (incl. end of world, eternity, personal)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12 / 11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Questions about existence of God (creation vs. evolution)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 / 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Questions about personal future/career</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9 / 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Questions about the nature of /relations with the universe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 / 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Questions about individual life purpose/uniqueness</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6 / 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Questions about the challenges of life</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6 / 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Questions about racism, prejudice, respect</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>5 / 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Questions about beginnings, origins</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 / 3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Questions about humanity’s future, millennium</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 / 3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Questions about the impact of science/technology</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4 / 3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Questions about the problems of greed, money, war</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 / 3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Questions about love</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>2 / 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Questions about “true religion” (Truth?)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 / 0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Questions about beauty</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 / 0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Questions about gender issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 / 0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Questions about the limits of human knowledge</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1 / 0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 14–3** Big Questions Tally 1998–1999
Changing Visions of Life and the Universe

Themes as Focus Questions
(with student “Big Question” areas)

What Are Our Origins?
- Where do we come from?
- Are we created or evolved?
- Is there a God?
- What is the true religion?
- How best to live?

What Is Human Destiny?
- What is our purpose?
- What is humanity’s future?
- What of Afterlife and Soul?
- What of Eternity?
- What of personal and planetary destiny?

What Are the Nature and Limits of the Universe?
- Is there life beyond Earth?
- What impact science and technology?
- What are the limits of human knowledge?

How to Love?
- What is Beauty?
- What is Moral?
- What is Truth?
- What is Male/Female?
- What is Love?

What Is Our Nature and Relationship to the Universe?

How Best to Grow Personally?
- What is my purpose?
- How am I unique?
- How will I learn and earn?
- How to survive life challenges?

Literature

- Bible excerpts
- Koran passages
- Saadi, Khayyam, Rumi
- Taoist Anecdotes / Zen Parables
- Panchatantra
- Les Miserables
- Selected quotes, poems
- Outside Book Project:
  - Science Fiction/
  - Daedalus and Icarus
  - Near Death Lit.
- “Antigone”
- Cyrano
- Romantic/Contemporary poetry
- Their Eyes Were Watching God
- Macbeth, Lord of the Flies
- Selected poems/songs

Writing-Thinking Skills/Activities

- invention strategies
- general <-> specific
- Simple paragraph:
  - basic assertion & support
  - focus, coherence
- Inquiry journals
- Complex paragraph:
  - subordinate assertions
  - variety of support
- Inquiry journals
- Multiparagraph essay:
  - complex development
  - concessives
  - parallel structure
- Research skills
- 6–10 page paper
- Reflective essay
- Inquiry journal
- Multiparagraph essay
- Career Exploration
- Portfolio Project
- Personal Creed Project

Figure 14–4  English 10cp Course Plan Derived from Student Big Questions 1998–1999
that the top two categories in 1998–1999 were questions about life on other worlds (18%) and questions about afterlife (15%). In 2000–2001 (not included here), the top two kinds were questions about the meaning of life/self-discovery/life-purpose (20%) and questions about students’ personal future (13%). It would be interesting to keep this up consistently for five or ten years and see what longer-term trends might be observable.

The course plan you see in Figure 14–4 was an early draft that I didn’t follow terribly closely. But it was an interesting experiment, and I think it had a large influence on my commitment to continue using Big Questions. I took the eighteen kinds of questions into which I had grouped students’ questions (Figure 14–3) and grouped them in turn into just six larger categories, turning each of the six into a Focus Question. These Focus Questions then became thematic studies. I sequenced, added in our course literature where it seemed to fit, and added the course writing development. Of course I claim no scientific accuracy, since I subjectively chose all the categories in both grouping exercises. But the funny thing is how closely the themes this process yielded resemble the themes of the course I had already been teaching. Perhaps there are only so many themes in a universe. At any rate, students seem interested when these charts go up on the screen as we discuss the Big Question emphasis. Here are some insights from students on the value of the process:

One of my “big” questions was “Why do people believe in a god and put their whole life in a god that no one has seen or know exists?” This question still applies to me, but readings from this course have helped me realize why people do believe in a god. God gives them hope, security, and just to have someone always there to turn to. This quote [She probably means “question.”] is still important to me because I have started to want to turn to God for my problems or my “big” questions.

—Melissa Townsend, June 2001

The Big Questions assignment made me think about how I see the world and what is important to me. My list had questions like “Why are we here?” and those questions made me think about who I am as a person and how I see things. Those questions had a significant impact on my year this year, and without those questions, I don’t think that I would have been able to write my Personal Creed or my wisdom essay. They are still meaningful to me because I still want to know if there is an answer to them. If I didn’t do those questions, then there is no telling what kind of shape I would have been in now and after the year is over.

—Tony Caraballo, June 2001
Lately, I have thought about many new “Big” Questions: Who made God? What is my destiny? Etc. This course has helped me realize that these questions were in my mind. It has helped to further develop my thinking process. It has brought up questions about destiny, mainly because of *Les Miserables*.

—Danielle Adams, June 2001

If you want a better answer, you’ve got to ask a better question.

—Anthony Robbins

**The Thought Log**

The provocative quote from James Baldwin at the beginning of this chapter and the one above from Tony Robbins are a fine way to introduce yourself to this activity for weaving personal learning through the year. Like the Wisdom Project, the Thought Log is Two-Legged. It helps students address numerous academic standards—in close reading skills, thinking skills, speaking and listening skills—and asks them to engage in regular personal reflection on “deep” issues. Twice a week or so, students respond in their Thought Logs to quotations intended to offer expanded perspectives on the themes and literature we are engaged in. Thought Log discussions are consistently among the most popular activities of the year. You may want to re-aquaint yourself by rereading the two paragraphs of introduction to the Thought Log at the beginning of Chapter Ten.

In Appendix II you can see some sample quotes we have used during the Wisdom Project to cast our conversations in new galaxies of thought. In the collection of Thought Log quotes I hope one day to offer as a booklet, I organize quotes by topic. Most of the samples you see now come from the section on Level 3 Wisdom (see Wisdom Project instructions in Appendix II for a description of the Levels of Wisdom). Beyond a study on wisdom, these particular sample quotes will fit anywhere in the year, especially as preparation for the Creed Project.

As you read in the Thought Log preview in Chapter Ten, once I’ve put a quote on the screen the Thought Log process consists of three steps: quiet reflecting on paper, pair or small group discussions, and whole-class conversation. Until recently, my only instructions for the reflecting step entailed the predictable—Paraphrase, Agree-disagree, What does this remind you of? What part is confusing? Then, some time after I began to learn more effective methods of reading instruction through Reading Apprenticeship training, I created Quote-Crackers, which you’ll find in Appendix III. It’s a two-sided sheet with a wide variety of sentence starters on one side and two approaches to using them to “crack” tough quotes on the other. I like to ham up intro-
ducing the QuoteCrackers by throwing a few walnuts out for sleepy or distracted-looking students to catch and asking the class how these folks should go about opening them. Depending on the level of cynicism or inertia in the room, I might get lucky and someone will mention the word “nutcracker.” Pulling a nutcracker out of my back pocket, I hold it up and say, “Yes, it’s true. To crack a walnut you need a nutcracker. But what tool do you need when your English teacher gives you a tough quote to figure out, as I am about to do?” You see where this is going. In my other hand I hold up the stack of QuoteCracker handouts and up goes a particularly tough quote while a volunteer passes the handouts around.

I’ve noticed that the pair discussions are a little more active since the advent of the QuoteCrackers, as students make use of the ready-made response options. As the year goes on, I ease off on requiring them to use the quadrants as instructed, since they hopefully have internalized a few more response options. Higher-level classes, of course, have less need of them, though they’ll spark even bright minds. Some students report using the QuoteCrackers for tough passages in nightly reading assignments. Once I’ve finished the joys of roll taking, and the pair discussions are winding down, I’ll ask who would like to make the first footprint in the morning sand of a whole-class conversation. And we’re off. Before the whole-class discussion winds down, if I’ve chosen the quote to connect with our class readings or current events and the connection hasn’t already come up, I’ll simply ask if anyone can make a connection to our reading, or to current events, and let things develop, often to a natural segue into the main lesson. As you can see from some of the sample quotes, the Thought Log can be an effective way to equip students to discover for themselves the deeper values connections (to recall the learning continuum) in our course literature. And it makes for some rich class conversations. Here are some reflections from students on the activity:

The thought logs were something I looked forward to each week. I didn’t always share my views, for fear of being attacked by fellow classmates. But I did when I had something I couldn’t hold back. But I always got a kick out of hearing my fellow classmates try to persuade others [of their] view. Towards the end of the year people were less shy in my opinion, so the conversations were much more interesting. The thought logs let us all stand up and fight for what we believe in. It was like little practices for standing up for your rights. . . . It’s like we worked on a whole different part of our brain, feelings. Everyone’s point of view, no matter how out there, was added to the conversation. Thought Log discussions were like building blocks to the Personal Creed Project. It forced us to look at things
in a different way, and to find a part of us we might have not known existed.

—Beth Stockcamp, June 1999

The thing I will value the most from this class are the thought logs. I learned many new ways to think of things. I learned how to really understand the reading from practicing my skills on the quote logs. It also got me interested in reading poems.

—Ken Magtoto, June 1999

The other part of this course that I really loved was our class discussions. I love arguing with people and the thought logs gave us good ground.

—Monica Gallos, June 1999

Two-Legged Writings

Two-Legged Writing assignments call for academic skills—such as supporting an assertion with carefully chosen, specific evidence and commentary, writing with focus, development, and flow, according to language conventions—to be demonstrated in the writing of a topic created to promote personal discovery. Remember that I separate academic and personal “legs” of curriculum mainly to remind myself of my goal to give as much attention to students’ personal learning as to their academic learning. But in practice, the two legs often work together. Below is the prompt for the English 10cp Fall Semester Final Exam Essay:

**Sample Two-Legged Writing Assignment**

**English 10cp Fall Final Exam Essay Prompt**

Write about an important change you passed through in 2001. As you follow the instructions below, you will select a change to write about, form an opinion about this change—your essay’s assertion—and write your essay supporting that opinion. You will learn how to introduce your essay by discussing one of the themes we have explored in our reading this semester, as the theme is developed in at least one selection of our literature. The theme you choose should connect to the change you are writing about. Conclude your essay by making an allusion to one of these pieces of literature, showing, in a sentence or two, how the theme of this piece of literature relates to your change. Clinch your essay with a related question to which you’d like to know the answer.

I won’t blame you for taking this as hyperbole, but this assignment, even though it is a final exam essay, is one of the most popular activities of the year. As you see from the prompt, it asks students to demonstrate the academic writing skills they’ve learned in the first semester.
It asks them to develop an assertion and support it with specific evidence and commentary. It asks them to analyze the term’s literature, and be conversant with themes and literary allusions. The assignment becomes two-legged when it also asks them to analyze their own lives over the past year, find a significant change they have experienced, characterize that change with the perfect adjective for the essay’s assertion, choose a literary theme to connect with this change, and allude in closing to a work of literature. In a sense, this assignment has personal learning at the center with academic strands woven around it.

Students receive carefully scaffolded instructions that take them step-by-step at home through prewriting—generating ideas, brainstorming, visual planning, outlining—and, on the day of the final, drafting in class. As you can see in the sample essays on the website, students write about different sorts of changes such as moving to Fremont, meeting their boyfriend, getting better grades, and on and on. From extensive lists of possible adjectives we brainstorm in class, each chooses the perfect adjective to fit their change. And they form their assertions on the somewhat dramatic pattern: “No change I have experienced during the past year has been more ___ than ___.“ The adjective, of course, fills the first blank; the change fills in the second. Since sophomores are by definition changing creatures, this assignment is just their cup of tea.

With help from the learning continuum idea, I can now understand more of why this assignment is so popular with students. As they list changes and choose one to write about, students are considering the facts of their lives. As they characterize this change with the perfect adjective and distinguish it from other changes in their lives, they are creating meanings (judgments) from the facts of their lives, as they will next semester during the Creed Project. And, though not specifically asked to do so in this midyear assignment, many students in reflecting also discover that, as a way of dealing with the important change they wrote about, they relied on or discovered something very much resembling a principle or a belief. And they have made a values connection. When this happens, of course, they have connected the three regions of the learning continuum, creating an experience with the potential to be inherently satisfying (see Chapters Seven and Nine for more on the learning continuum). Indeed, as time goes on the Two-Legged idea may well become three-hubbed.

Jamie Phipps would not have been in the college prep class had not the district, fearing lawsuits from parents claiming that Fremont schools failed to prepare their students to pass the new high school exit exam, canceled all remedial English courses, offering no other alternative. Jamie had struggled all semester to keep up with the reading and writing load, and was not looking forward to the final exam essay.
Surprised to find that something actually about herself was the final exam, Jamie did well. Later, she reflected:

For the first time I was interested in doing a test.
—Jamie Phipps, January 2001

As well as other sample two-legged final exam topics, you can find other two-legged prompts on the website. You can also create your own two-legged writing assignments, especially once you’ve set developmentally appropriate personal learning goals for your students. Although you can begin doing this, as I have, without grade-level or schoolwide personal learning goals to connect to, making your own choices in the context of a carefully put-together department, grade-level or schoolwide personal learning plan would make the most sense. How to begin making such choices? The following is adapted from my California English article on Two-Legged Curriculum (see www.universeWired.com).

Designing a Two-Legged Schoolwide Program

Let’s imagine, then, that a given department, grade-level team, or school has decided to begin devoting some time and care to designing personal learning into students’ experiences at school. The more democratic the process the better, as long as focus can remain clear. While it may make sense to standardize academic goals by community, state, and even nation, personal learning goals should be created with the particular students and community in mind. One approach that makes sense to me is to first choose a select number of key challenges, issues a given generation of students will face in their lives in this community. Some communities might settle on challenges like preserving traditional values. Here in the East Bay, one of several challenges that will confront every generation for the foreseeable future is the opportunity to bring increasing racial healing and understanding.

Schoolwide grade-level themes—as long as they are arrived at democratically—can make it easier to address such an issue across disciplines and develop it up through grade levels. Such themes focus students’ and teachers’ attention on finding links between the challenges students face and their growth as persons. Thoughtful Choices for freshmen and Expanding Horizons for sophomores are two potential grade-level themes a number of colleagues agree may make sense at our school. Widely applicable, flexible, and developmentally interconnected grade-level themes could support a healthy curricular conversation, in and beyond the classroom. Figure 14–5 shows a schoolwide thematic curriculum that has been under discussion at American High School.
Proposed Personal Leg of Curriculum

American High School
Possible Grade-Level Themes, 9–12

12th—Making Connections?

11th—Focusing: Personal Future?

10th—Expanding Horizons
society, world, universe

Spring Personal Creed Project—Students undertake mid–high school personal rite of passage: What do I stand for and how might I choose to serve others? (English)

Fall Project on World Wisdom—Students gather/analyze data on teen lifestyles—nationally, internationally. What does my generation think about, care about, and believe? How do these qualities compare with previous generations, and with traditional and nontraditional ideas of wisdom? Student Big Questions as learning guides. (English/World History/Math)

9th—Art and Process of Choice-Making
class, school, community, society

Students observe and analyze choices made by: characters in literature, by society, by themselves (English); by individuals, by society in environmental and other science matters (Science). They explore connections between Essential Questions and Choices?

Students gather/analyze data: on student backgrounds, on student choices and choice-making—at class and school levels (Geography/Health/Math)?

Figure 14–5 Proposed Personal Leg of Curriculum
Conversations among, say, social studies and English teachers about race and racial healing could lead to freshman social studies classes spotlighting nations that choose to be involved today in the slave trade, or underscoring episodes of “ethnic cleansing” as they pertain to shifting national boundaries, or discussing an article on the challenges of reconciliation in South Africa or creating a homeland for Palestinians. Better yet—and rarer still in the media—students could examine materials that highlight actual (read positive) examples of racial healing where it’s happening around the world today. At some level, of course, each of these situations involves a choice, made or unmade, which freshmen can examine in connection with their year-long study of thoughtful choice making. At the same time, in their English classes, freshmen could explore the issues—and choices—of race and racial healing through a variety of activities, including, for one example, the analysis of poems by contemporary black authors and student poets, and through a study of a novel often used to address such issues, To Kill a Mockingbird.

Having enabled students at a given grade level, in this case the freshmen, to consider an issue like racial healing from the perspectives of several disciplines, we could also design the personal legs of our programs to help students continue their exploration of such issues as their minds and hearts develop up through the grade levels. To this end, Mockingbird, with freshmen, and Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God, with sophomores, make a powerful sequence.

Told through the eyes of a tolerant white family looking out at racial injustice around them, last spring Mockingbird provided my freshmen examples of the kinds of choices that are prerequisites for tolerance. Atticus impresses his children and the reader with the need for such choices: “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view . . . until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” (Lee 34).

This spring, Their Eyes will take many of these same students, now sophomores, further along this road to healing, beyond simple tolerance toward true understanding. Told through the eyes of a black woman in a world where color differences dictate relations even among African Americans, the novel helps my nonblack sophomores climb imaginatively into the experiential skins of black Americans. And Hurston helps black sophomores (and all their classmates) understand and appreciate themselves and their special history more fully. On the social studies side, in World History, students could probe more deeply into these issues as they relate to specific topics on the world scene, perhaps elaborating more deeply on those issues touched the previous year in freshman social studies, or exploring the background to the current events that have plunged us into an urgent new need for racial and cultural understanding between the West and the Arab and Muslim world.
This “deep” approach could allow a school community to settle on a small number of core issues students will face in their lives, and create a curriculum around them. Racial healing, gender fairness, societal class issues, environmental challenge, and spiritual unity are only some possibilities. A more conservative community may assemble an altogether different list. Students would approach these issues from several directions:

- across disciplines at a given grade level,
- according to developmental readiness, and
- vertically up through the grade levels.

So, in an “articulated” series of purposes, each grade level could explore an issue with a slightly different focus. For example, when my freshmen explore racial healing, reading *Mockingbird* in connection with the yearlong theme Thoughtful Choices, they essentially study a sub-issue of racial healing—*tolerance*. At the end of the following year, now as sophomores preparing to begin creating their own visions of life in their Creed Projects, these same students, assisted by the insights Hurston weaves so brilliantly into *Their Eyes*, are taking the next step in their multyear study of racial healing—toward *understanding*. And, in light of Riane Eisler’s notion of an emerging global culture based increasingly on the linking of partnership rather than the ranking of domination, if slavery is considered one of the ultimate expressions of the dominator model of society (along with genocide and war), students can see racial healing as part of the transition to a world based increasingly on partnership. This is just one example from the first two years of high school. Further development of racial healing or other issues could be designed into the junior and senior years, beginning with developmentally appropriate, democratically determined grade-level themes created for the second half of high school. In addressing these themes, of course, students would at the same time be engaged in reading literature, writing, and speaking, developing specific skills in these areas to meet the standards of the academic legs of their programs. See Figure 14-2 for a picture of this interweaving.

**Walking on Two Legs**

The dust of exploded beliefs may make a fine sunset.

—Geoffrey Madam

Just as bipedalism has worked effectively to carry our bodies, carefully conceived Two-Legged approaches to teaching and learning can work to carry twenty-first century children into the world more ready to cope
and contribute. It is the kind of learning experience that inspired Frank to write in the preface to his end-of-year portfolio:

For me, this course was about finding who I am and my purpose here on Earth, but to the Board of Education this course was about improving my ability to read and write. I believe that they have succeeded in their goal, and as you read these works, I hope you will see that I have met mine as well.

—Frank Whipple, June 2000

Frank’s words suggest that a concerted, long-term effort to bring such an approach into widespread practice would do much to stabilize the wild swings of the education pendulum—from today’s “objectively measurable data only” end of its travels, to the various equally unwise experiments at the opposite “it’s all personal growth” end of the swing. Stacey, reflecting in her portfolio, offers one of many student insights that validate the intuitions that lead me to persist in developing this Two-Legged approach:

The class as a whole was one of the best experiences I have been through in school. The class was based on something beyond the education of English and I really enjoyed myself.

—Stacey Teixeira, June 2000

Frank and Stacey also echo James Moffett’s vision of twenty-first-century education, an approach to learning that rests on two new foundation stones: culture, and consciousness. Such a vision, and the approaches and practices that flow from it, including those I hope to have shared in this book, lead beyond the destructive ranking of a former age, to learning that prepares learners to grapple with the world that is, and create the world that’s coming.
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