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Goals Project. Goals seminar, 1994.

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SOME NOTES TOWARDS THE FOX/PEKARSKY AND PEKARSKY SESSION IN THE MORNING OF DAY 1 OF THE SEMINAR

Between Seymour Fox and myself, the initial session is designed to lay out the problem-statement, and the next session is to clarify key concepts, using Dewey as an example. The document that follows, which is a working draft in which I try to articulate a variety of strands that jointly reflect some of assumptions and issues that define where we have come to date, offers an account of what I would hope to accomplish in the morning of the first day. The relevant sections are "GOALS AND EDUCATION," "GOALS AND JEWISH EDUCATION: SOME ROUGH GENERALIZATIONS," AND "VISION" (through point 3). I am aware that even these sections, considered by themselves, contain a lot of material, and that some choices will have to be made concerning what to present and emphasize. But I thought it important to include all of it at this point, so that you would see the larger conceptual/empirical context in which I think I am operating. For similar reasons -- that is, in order to see the relationship of particular pieces to one another, to develop a map of the territory - I am also including the rest of the document in the hopes that it will prove helpful and/or will elicit suggestions.

Notice that while this document speaks to the conceptual issues. it says nothing about what I am planning to say concerning Dewey. I have appended a brief statement at the end of this document that speaks to this issue.

GOALS AND EDUCATION: WHAT GOALS ARE AND WHY THEY'RE IMPORTANT

1. No sense of direction, no adequate deliberation. Absent a clear understanding of what one hopes to accomplish via one's educational efforts, it is impossible to make intelligent decisions concerning the design of social environment, the determination and interpretation of content, and the appropriateness of different kinds of curricular choices and pedagogical decisions.

2. What are goals. "What one hopes to accomplish" could plausibly be understood as "one's goals." By "goals" we understand general statements of purpose that identify specific kinds of skills, attitudes, understandings, beliefs, commitments, values, dispositions (and so forth) that are to be imparted, encouraged, or cultivated through the process of education. An educational philosophy is likely to include a number of distinct, though inter-related goals, each of which is tied to the other in a meaningful way.

3. Critical role of goals. Goals play a critical role in the educational process: a) as intimated above, they are an indispensable guide to the design of educational environments and practices, to the determination of curriculum content and objectives, and to the selection and training of personnel; b) goals offer a lens, or organizing principle, for scanning the interests,

capacities, understandings, and skills of the students; c) without clear goals, serious evaluation of one's efforts to educate are impossible, and this makes systematic effort as improvement hard to achieve; d) a corollary of c) is that in the absence of clear goals, accountability is not possible.

GOALS IN JEWISH EDUCATION: SOME ROUGH GENERALIZATIONS

Like many - indeed, most - general educating institutions, most Jewish educating institutions fail the test of being, in any serious sense, goals-oriented. In many instances, institutions have not developed a mission-statement that articulates their goals; and even when such a mission-statement does exist that purports to articulate the institution's educational goals, these goals fail to be adequately related to the world of practice. This failure reflects one or more of a number of problems, some of which are articulated below.

1. Vague and decontextualized. They are often so vague as to offer no real guidance to practice. To be helpful, goals have to be clear and concrete enough to offer a sense of direction and to communicate what it would mean to succeed or fail in a meaningful way. The phrase "in a meaningful way" is meant to underscore the importance of thinking about goals in a broad and generous sense. Specifically, the goal of, say, "Hebrew proficiency" must include not just abstract abilities; it must also consider the contexts in which this ability is to be exhibited and the attitudes that should accompany the development of this proficiency. Dewey's comments concerning "collateral learnings" in EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION are germane here -- particularly his concern that students may acquire a given skill in ways that lead them to hate the context in which they learned it and to be despising of the skill itself.

2. Achievement of goals not central to articulation of the educator's task. Many educators are not in any serious way encouraged to approach their teaching assignments with clear goals in mind. They may be told to teach a particular body of subject-matter, e.g. Hebrew, Bible, Israel, Jewish Holidays, but without any specification of what goals are to be achieved via this subject-matter. The result is that how educators approach the subject-matter is often very idiosyncratic and thoughtless. The guiding principle is often "what will keep them interested," rather than "How will the learning experiences I am designing fit into a comprehensive sequence of learning experiences that will move the students towards achievement of particular goals that we think important.

3. Problems of non-identification with goals and/or despair of achieving them. Even when educators are familiar with the institution's goals, and even if the curriculum comes with specific goals (itself a significant achievement!), implementation of the goals is hampered by a variety of typical circumstances: i. the educator does not in any personal way identify with the goal or embody it in his/her life; ii. the educator despairs of the very

possibility of realizing the goal, given the cultural and familial environment from which the students come and to which they return and the available time.

4. Symbolic rather than systematic efforts to achieve avowed goals. There is no systematic effort to design the environment and the curriculum so as to accomplish goals that have been identified. By "systematic effort" is meant a thoughtful, careful assessment, informed by honest good judgement and whatever empirical data are at hand, of whether the practices in place or proposed have a reasonable chance of achieving the desired outcomes (in the face of constraining conditions). On the contrary, oftentimes the relationship between avowed goals and educational practice is primarily "symbolic"; that is, the institution feels comfortable if it can show that there is some educational practice which corresponds to the goal in question, but does not ask what constellation of efforts would be required if the goal is to be meaningfully achieved. corollary of this is that there is no serious and honest effort to evaluate the success of our efforts.

5. Too many goals. One of the reasons why any particular goal identified in a mission-statement is not meaningfully achieved is that oftentimes there are too many goals, a circumstances that diffuses any sense of purpose or direction. Institutions would often be better off committing themselves to the attainment of a few clearly articulated goals (or else deciding what is essential and what peripheral), rather than trying to cover the water front.

VISION

Many of the weaknesses identified in the preceding section (points 1 through 5) speak to problems in the relationship between goals and practice. But some of these weaknesses also reflect a more fundamental difficulty, and that is that the goals identified by an educating institution are often not anchored in a coherent, organic vision of the kind of Jewish human being and the kind of Jewish community it is hoping to cultivate through its educating efforts.

1. A vision of the kind of person one is trying to cultivate does the following:

a) Elements:it identifies the attitudes, understandings, skills, dispositions, beliefs, commitments, knowledge, and so forth that are important;

b) Integration of elements:it explains how these various ingredients hang together and support one another in pattern of life; inevitably this integration identifies the nature of the ideal community of which the individual is a part. That is, there is a social dimension to the

envisioned state-of-affairs.

c) Meaningfulness criterion: it makes evident why the kind of life that is represented in b) is "meaningful" in a twofold sense: i) it is a "worthy" way of living Jewishly; and ii) it is experienced as personally meaningful "from the inside", that is, by individuals who in their own life embody this vision.

2. A vision interprets traditional Jewish categories. A vision of a meaningful Jewish existence takes a position on the significance of key concepts like "God", "Torah", "the Jewish People," "Mitzvot," and "the Land of Israel." In the vision these concepts are interpreted, assigned a value, and understood in their inter-relationship.

3. The distinction between fixed visions and process-visions. Typically, we think of a vision as specifying an outlook and way of life, organized around certain fundamental beliefs, concerns, and values. It is, so to speak, a picture of what life at its best is like, a snapshot of a way of life viewed as ideal. But it is also possible for a vision to have a more open-ended, dynamic quality. What might be called a "process-vision" is one that specifies attitudes, skills, and abilities that engage the individual in an ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing his or her relationship to Jewish culture and tradition. A process-vision is not necessarily, as its critics might contend, agnostic about what is important Jewishly. A process-vision might well specify the importance of studying Jewish texts (narrowly or broadly understood) or experimenting with Jewish celebration in one's efforts to develop as a Jew; it might also stress the importance of understanding diverse views that Jews of different kinds and periods have taken on critical issues and the different ways they have lived. Chances are, any process-vision one will encounter will implicitly or explicitly endorse certain bottom-line moral and intellectual virtues. Still, the emphasis (within this framework) is on growth, development and change in one's understanding of an ideal Jewish life -- and the ideal Jewish life is one that allows for and encourages such growth. In general education, Dewey represents a kind of process-vision; in the Educated Jew Project, it is arguable that Menachem Brinker represents such a position.

2. Why vision is important -- Vision is the anchor for goals. To say that vision is the anchor is to convey a number of important but inter-related points:

a. Goals are not self-justifying; rather, they are justified by showing how they are anchored in a vision of Jewish existence that the critical stakeholders genuinely regard as meaningful. Absent this showing goals exist in a vacuum; they may well seem arbitrary and meaningless.

b. Vision also anchors goals in that it interprets and

thus makes more concrete what the goals really signify. "Hebrew proficiency" a la Greenberg, Ahad Ha-Am, Menachem Brinker is not one thing but many: why Hebrew is important, the settings in which it is to be used, the attitudes that surround its use, and so forth are very different. The kind of clarity provided by vision gives direction to the educational enterprise of a kind impossible in the absence of vision.

c. Vision anchors goals in the sense that it explains not only the meaning and relative importance of goals, but also how the elements identified in different goals hang together to constitute a meaningful way of life.

3. What is a vision-driven institution? For reasons stated above, the Goals Project assumes that efforts at Jewish education will be substantially improved if educating institutions become significantly more vision-driven than they now are. A vision-driven institution is one that, down to its very details, Specifically, a vision-driven educating institution features the following formal elements:

a. The existence of a vision in the sense specified above. To say that the vision "exists" is to suggest that the critical stakeholders identify strongly with this vision, that they regard it as worthy and compelling.

b. The goals that guide educational practice can be explained with reference to the guiding vision.

c. The curriculum, as well as the physical and social environment, exhibit commitment to the guiding vision and the particular goals that are derived from it.

d. The educators who do the work of the institution strongly identify with and themselves exemplify the vision that the institution represents and thus approach efforts to actualize the vision whole-heartedly.

e. Because the institution cares deeply whether it is successful in realizing its goals and vision, it looks for gaps between intention and outcome and works hard to remedy them, There is here a tacit commitment to serious assessment and self-improvement -- this being a sign of a really serious commitment to the underlying goals and vision.

4. "Vision-driven" does not necessarily imply "planful" or "designed". Not all vision-driven institutions emerge through systematic efforts to translate a shared vision into a blueprint for an educational institution, which is then translated into practice under real world conditions. In some vision-driven institutions, nobody has thought systematically about what the guiding vision is or about the way to translate that vision into

educational terms.

a. Invisible hand institutions. Some such institutions have evolved more organically, spontaneously, and unself-consciously through a variety of cooperating circumstances over a period of time. [Such institutions come into being and exist in a way that is described by many "Conservative" social and educational theorists like Edmund Burke, Michael Oakshott, and Michael Polanyi. These thinkers are often skeptical, if not actually critical, of efforts to systematically articulate and then implant a vision.]

b. Sometimes institutional visions precedes the vision of ideal educational outcomes. Sometimes an institution grows out of someone's vision of what an ideal educational institution looks like (and not out of a vision of the product of the educational process). In such cases as well, while there may be an animating vision of the kind of person and community one is hoping to nurture, it will not necessarily be articulated or readily articulable by the participants.

5. "Visions" and "Visions-in-Use". While the participants in an institution may not be capable of identifying a guiding vision that is at work in the institution, an anthropologically-oriented observer may be capable of doing precisely that. That is, the observer may be able to tie the predictable outcomes of participation in the institution to the body of practices, customs, organizational structure, and norms exhibited in the institution. The delicate balance of institutional life seems to operate, as though and perhaps in fact invisibly, to maintain this state-of-affairs: the outcomes remain the same over long periods of time, and institutional arrangements, down to the very details, tend to support them. Efforts to change these patterns change. In such a case, we might want to speak of a vision-in-use. "Vision-in-use" is a conception of the outcome of the educational process which, were it actively subscribed to, would go a long way towards explaining the patterns of activity and organization and other features of the institution's living reality.

It is possible that when a vision-in-use is articulated, the participants will say, "Yes -- that is exactly what we're after -- except that now you've given voice to it." It is, however, also possible that the vision-in-use articulated by the observer will be disavowed by participants in the institution: "This is not at all what we're after," they might say. a) It is possible that this denial is an act of Sartreian "bad faith;" that is, they don't want to own up to the vision that they are in fact committed to. b) Another possibility is that they have simply failed up to now to understand the impact of the educational arrangements they have created and that they are truly disturbed by what they have discovered.

Suppose now that, disturbed by what they have learned, they set about trying to improve things but that these changes come to nought. It is an open question which of the two possibilities discussed above this state-of-affairs would support. Concrete study into the particulars of the case would probably be necessary to make a determination as between these - or perhaps other - possibilities.

TOWARDS COHERENT, SHARED, AND COMPELLING VISIONS

Jewish educating institutions typically serve an extraordinarily diverse clientele. Many of those who are tied to an institution have not ever engaged in trying to clarify their own visions of a meaningful Jewish existence, and to the extent that they have, what they discover is that there is great diversity of views amongst them. If vision-driven institutions are to become more prominent features of our educational landscape, the problem of how to generate shared vision must be addressed. Two very general approaches to the problem will be articulated: A. Trying to transcend diversity; B. Structural reforms that make it unnecessary to try to dissolve diversity.

A. Towards Shared Vision where none has heretofore existed.

1. Most generally, assume for the moment an institution featuring at least the impression of significant diversity of outlook among the critical stakeholders. Through what kind of process can a group of individuals be brought together under the umbrella of a vision that will be both shared and compelling? A multitude of overlapping questions cluster around this general issue. For example:

1. Assuming that there is more than one process that lead to this achievement, are there reasons to encourage one or some among them and not others?

2. What is the role of professional, lay, and denominational leadership in this process?

3.. To what extent, if at all, should some variant of the "democratic process" guide or define the outcome?

4. Is it the leadership's job:

a. to guide the rank-and-file towards an appreciation of a vision they judge appropriate?,

b. to help draw out from their constituencies a vision that reflects "where they are and want to be", that is, to work towards the development of a vision that integrates the visions of the key stakeholders?

c. to encourage a process that guides the membership towards disciplined, content-based reflection concerning what they want to be educating towards?

5. In what way does serious study enter into the process of working towards a shared vision? Must it be insisted on?

6. To what extent and in what ways should some variant of the democratic process enter into the process of developing a shared vision?

7. Who are the key stakeholders that must buy into a vision - and at what stages - if an institution is to have a meaningful chance of becoming more vision-driven?

8. Is it possible that the attempt to define an institutional vision -- of the kind of institution we'd like to see - should sometimes precede the attempt to define a guiding vision of the kind of person and community we want to cultivate?

9. To what extent will appropriate answers to these various questions depend on a variety of local circumstances, e.g., the nature of the leadership, the attitudes of the constituency, the history and culture of the institution, the desire of denomination leaders to be involved, etc.?

10. Through what process can members of an institution be brought to appreciate the importance of working towards vision-drivenness and to agree to make the effort?

11. Through what set of activities/processes should the stakeholders of an educating institution take stock of the institution's present state-of-affairs -- its structures, its impact, its vision-in-use, etc., and how can participation in such activities and processes encourage the effort to move towards vision-drivenness?

B. STRUCTURAL REFORM AS A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF GENERATING SHARED VISION

The immediately preceding section pointed to different strategies by which an institution lacking a coherent and compelling guiding vision might move - or be moved - towards one. Briefly and crudely summarized, the three strategies suggested involved: a) through a carefully devised process, a vision predesignated by the leadership comes to be shared by the critical stakeholders; b) an effort is made to elicit from the key stakeholders what their own visions are and then to develop a vision which integrates their respective visions into a coherent whole; and c) a process that involves the

interplay between efforts to clarify one's own vision and efforts to understand and struggle with the articulated visions of thoughtful individuals who have wrestled with this problem in a penetrating way over a long period of time, e.g. Greenberg, Brinker, Twersky. The actual process may lean in one direction or another but may involve elements of all three strategies.

Here I'd like to suggest an altogether different approach to this problem - an approach that works from the assumption that it may be very difficult if not impossible to move people holding diverse views towards a shared and compelling vision of what they would hope to accomplish. The intuitive idea at the heart of the two proposals summarized below is that it may be easier to create structures that will encourage individuals who share a common vision to self-select into a congenial educational environment than it is to develop a shared vision among people who may begin light-years away from each other.

PROPOSAL 1: This proposal is modelled on magnet-school programs and choice-plans found in general education. In community X, a decision is made to dissolve the existing educational system which assigns children to educating institutions based on congregational affiliation. Instead, the community self-consciously establish a number of educating institutions, each informed by a different guiding vision. One institution might heavily emphasize text study as the heart of Jewish existence; another might emphasize social action, yet a third might make spirituality its core theme, etc. Parents, who have heretofore been expected to send their children to their congregation's educational institution, would be told that by virtue of their membership in the congregation they are eligible to attend any one of the educating institutions in the system. Their job is to pick an institution whose guiding vision they identify with. Through a process of self-selection different institutions tend to attract a population of individuals who share values, outlook, and aspirations. Under this system, parents wishing to enroll their child in a particular vision-driven institution would need to apply, and they might well be asked to agree to various ground-rules and expectations as a condition of admission. In such a system, we would not have to create shared visions; rather, individuals already sharing a vision would, through the operation of the system, be brought together under one roof.

PROPOSAL 2: A congregation announces that within its existing educational system - say, a congregational school -- it is about to open a smaller and very selective "school within a school." All members of the congregation are eligible to enroll their children in the school-within-the-school, with the qualification that they must understand the vision animating the experimental institution and agree to its ground-rules and expectations.

Like Proposal 1, the arrangements identified in Proposal 2 operate to draw in a select group of families who understand and identify with the guiding vision of the educating institution -- in

this case "the school within the school". The advantage of this strategy enjoys, as compared with the first, is that it does not require elaborate structural changes on the order of dissolving the institution of the congregational school.

FROM VISION TO EDUCATIONAL DESIGN

1. Having a vision does not guarantee the ability to create a vision-driven institution. Having a vision of a meaningful Jewish existence, even one that is shared and compelling, is no guarantee that one will be able to develop educational institutions that ably express and guide students in the direction of this vision. Indeed, although it sometimes happens that a single individual is adept both at articulating a powerful vision and at developing educational arrangements that nurture that vision into being, there is no reason to think that typically these very different skills go hand in hand.

2. No unique translation. There is no unique translation of a vision into educational terms. It is not just that the elements of the vision will inevitably be somewhat differently interpreted, but that the translation into goals and educational practices necessarily relies on a variety of beliefs concerning human nature and education, e.g., the way, and the conditions under which, human beings learn and grow. Different beliefs concerning such matters will give rise to very different educational arrangements, even if one begins with the same vision of the ideal to be striven for.

3. Dimensions of the translation. To translate a vision into practice involves attention not only to curriculum and pedagogy but also to the organization of the social and physical environment -- to what some describe as "the culture" of the institution.

3. The how question. Through what kinds of processes and expertise can a vision, once agreed on, be meaningfully translated into goals, and from goals into the design of curriculum, institutional norms, patterns of physical organization, etc.? Where is the appropriate expertise to be found?

4. Variations in one's conception of the process of translation. While, as noted above, one's translation may vary depending on one's interpretation of the vision and one's assumptions about human nature, human growth, and human learning, translations may also vary because people understand the process of translation itself in very different terms. For example, one school of thought may insist that one begin with vision, then move in linear fashion to goals, and then to objectives, and then to concrete learning experiences spread over X number of years. Regardless of the wisdom of that approach, it is worth noting that there are others. For example, Dewey's approach would probably be to use the guiding vision as an observational and planning tool. Meeting up with a new group of children, the educator interprets their impulses, behaviors, understandings and skills through the lens of the vision. Keeping the vision clearly in mind, the

educator struggles, in true progressive fashion, to guide the young into activities that they will find exciting but that will help to develop understandings, desires, and dispositions that will incline the individual towards the world that the vision represents. Impulses and desires that might heretofore =have been viewed as distractions from the educational process are now suddenly viewed as wrestling with some critical questions.

FROM EDUCATIONAL DESIGN TO EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

As brilliantly conceived as the translation of vision into educational design may be, the attempt to implement the design under real-world conditions may fail dismally. The concrete reasons may vary from case-to-case, but the underlying general reason picks out a simple but important design flaw. There is no inherently good design; rather, the design must itself, at some stage in the process, take into account and adapt itself to the conditions under which it will be implemented. Knowing the attitudes and understandings of parents, the cultural environment in which students spend their time, the kinds of teachers now working in the community -- such matters are decisively important from the standpoint of design, and we ignore them at our peril.

QUESTIONS FOR THE GOALS PROJECT THAT CHALLENGE ITS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND ASSUMPTIONS

1. "Our pressing need today is not for conceptions or visions of the ideal product of a Jewish education. Rather, our principal need is to provide children and adults in our communities with experiences that bring home to them the life-transforming power of Jewish customs, understandings, and activities, so that they will develop a thirst for more and deeper such experiences. What we need is to catalyze a drive to seriously explore the resources of Judaism -- not a vision of the end of that exploration. Our energies should therefore focus on activities like Shabbatonim, Israel experiences, and text-study encounters that will awaken in adults and children alike a thirst for Jewish growth."

2. Do we really need an underlying "vision" in which our educational goals are anchored? Might it not be possible and enough for an educating institution to develop a clear and coherent set of guiding goals which are not wedded to any particular conception of "the Good Life" (Jewishly speaking)? Moreover, given the diversity of outlook among stakeholders within even most individual institutions, isn't it more realistic to think that we could generate widespread support for a set of general goals than for an over-arching vision of the kind of person we want to nurture? Perhaps we should be encouraging institutions to identify and commit themselves seriously to a small number of core-goals and give up the effort to develop an anchoring vision.

3. "Our problem is not 'vision', but something else. Many

educating institutions do have visions (i.e. conceptions of where they want to head, of the kind of person they want to cultivate). Their problem is not an absence of vision but that the conditions of life make it impossible to realize this vision (for example, the culture that surround the children day-in-day-out, the time available for Jewish education, the attitudes of their parents, the unavailability of educators who have any commitment to the institution's vision). These problems - not "the vision-thing" -- are what we need to address.

APPENDIX:the Dewey session on Day 1 of the Seminar

The conceptual and empirical points to be made in the morning of the first session are, as explained at the beginning of the document, included in the sections on "Goals," "Goals in Jewish Education," and "Vision". Here I want to fill in the Dewey content that will be used to provide a referent for the major concepts.

A. DEWEY'S CONCERNS and DEWEY'S VISION OF HUMAN WELL-BEING: with some attention to Dewey's own experience, I will stress two things:

- 1) his conviction that neither the lonely, isolating, exhilarating freedom of the city nor the warm but stifling sense of community found in Old World small towns was adequate to our lives as individuals and as a society. Dewey worked towards a vision of human life that offered an integration of these historically opposed ways of being: a society in which there is room for each to grow as an individual while yet feeling connected and actively

contributing to the community. A world in which work is meaningful in the sense that a. it is congenial to one's aptitudes and provides endless opportunities for personal growth, b. it's engaging, c. it contributes in discernible ways to the welfare of the community.

2. his commitment to the experimentalist ideal as applied not just to science but to social and individual life. Dewey's belief that an experimentalist ethos is the key to stability in a rapidly changing world and to success in realizing one's own purposes gives rise to an image of the individual as a being who possess the habits of mind and attitudes that make him/her adept at approaching his/her activities in an experimentalist mode.

B. HOW DEWEY'S VISION IS EMBODIED IN THE SCHOOL HE DESIGNED.

With special but not exclusive attention to the place of the kitchen in the Dewey School, I will exhibit the ways in which Dewey's vision is expressed in the life of the school. Some critical points are the following:

1, The experimentalist ideal is embodied in particular activities kids engaged in (like baking and deliberation); in the ways that teachers approach curriculum design and pedagogy; in the way Dewey thinks about the significance of the school itself.

2. Dewey's vision of the relationship between individual and group is exhibited in the ways in which baking goes on in the Dewey school. Each individual has a role in the baking of the cake which is personally rewarding and a source of personal growth; but simultaneously, each is contributing to the social welfare (the meal that they will share) and has a stake in the success of the others.

C. With their help, I will draw out from this description some central, indeed, defining characteristics of vision-driven institutions. As an aid, I will hand out a sheet that summarizes the central points; this sheet will prove handy, I hope, when they focus in the afternoon on other educational visions.

D. Time permitting, I will also engage them in thinking about the assumptions that intervened between Dewey's vision of the proper aims of education and the kind of educational environment he designed. Such assumptions identify, for example, stages of human growth, ideas concerning motivation, and also general pedagogical principles like the following: if trait X is intended for use down the road in a human context of a certain kind, it will be best acquired in a social context that resembles this future context of use and in which it functions in the same way. The point to be stressed is that variation in the assumptions would give rise to a very different educational environment.