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Section 1

Flexibility in Thinking: The Capacity to Shift Perspectives, to Generate Alternate Approaches, and to Change One's Mind

An amazing discovery about the human brain is its plasticity—its ability to “rewire”; to continually change and even repair itself; to become even smarter. Flexible people have the capacity to change their mind as they receive additional data. They engage in multiple and simultaneous outcomes and activities. They draw upon a repertoire of problem-solving strategies and can practice style flexibility, knowing when it is appropriate to be broad and global in their thinking, and when a situation requires detailed precision. They create and seek novel approaches and have a well-developed sense of humor.

Flexible people can approach a problem from a new angle using a novel approach. Edward deBono (1991) refers to this as *lateral thinking*. Flexible people consider alternative points of view or deal with several sources of information simultaneously. Their minds are

open to change based on additional information and data or reasoning that contradicts their beliefs. Flexible people know that they have and can develop options and alternatives to consider. They understand not only immediate reactions, but also perceive the bigger purposes that such constraints serve. Flexible thinkers are able to shift, at will, through multiple perceptual positions.

Some people have difficulty considering alternative points of view or dealing with more than one classification system simultaneously. They perceive situations from a very ego-centered point of view: *their* way to solve a problem seems to be the *only* way. Their minds are made up.

The first section of this book opens with three authors who urge us to employ flexibility in thinking as we consider reform in education. Peter Senge draws on vast experiences in helping industries and corporations with the complexities of mindshifts, and makes applications for a similar need for educators. Renate and Geoffrey Caine show how such shifts in perception help individuals see more clearly and unleash newfound power when individuals have the stamina to change their perceptual stance. In the final chapter of this section, I suggest that our traditional curriculum practices are based on an archaic precept and that curriculum will change only when educators are able to shift out of old paradigms.

All the authors invite an openness to new and different perspectives; they ask individuals to see problems from a different point of view and to relinquish old categories, stereotypes, and structures that restrict thinking. They urge educators to promote the intelligent behavior of thinking flexibly about educational practices and purposes.

Systems Change in Education

by Peter Senge

I do not spend my life in schools and school systems and school districts. I do spend a great deal of my time working with businesses. I didn't actually start off in business because I had an inherent interest in it. As a child of the Sixties, I actually had no interest in business whatsoever, and at some level today that's probably still the case in a very particular way. I've grown to have a great deal of interest in the people with whom I've had a chance to work, and I have a great deal of interest in the health of their enterprises. I'm involved in a consortium, a group of organizations that have been working together now for seven or eight years. It probably has some similarities to James Comer's project at Yale in the sense that we came to a belief, maybe about 9 or 10 years ago, that collaboration was absolutely critical. No institution working by itself could ever overcome the extraordinary range of hurdles involved in bringing about significant change. I do care a great deal about those people and those human communities that represent those enterprises, but my interest in business at some level was and still is instrumental.

In our present day society, business is probably the most influential institution. If you want to bring about some sort of fundamental change as an indicator of what's possible, business is a good place to look. That's neither good nor bad; that's not a statement of preference. In some ways I wish that weren't the case. However, I've had enough opportunity in a variety of settings in public education to know that it's a lot harder to bring about the kind of changes that are needed in the institution called public education than, in fact, it is in the institution called business. And it's not easy in business. I've had this notion for a long time that we could build momentum in the world of business, that we could give a kind of credibility to some

Adapted from *ENCOUNTER: Education for Meaning and Social Justice*, September 1998, volume 11, no. 3, pp. 60–66. © 1998 by Psychology Press. Reprinted with permission.