

# CONNECTIONS

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# Books Worth Reading

## Reaching Higher: The Power of Expectations in Schooling

by Rhona S. Weinstein  
 Harvard University Press: Cambridge,  
 Massachusetts, and London, England, 2002.  
 ISBN 0-674-00919-3

*"What things do you think need to be done in this room? Because it's our room. You know we all live here."*

— Mrs. Kay, 3rd grade teacher

*Interviewer: What is school like for kids that are smart in school?*

*Kevin: You really want me to say it?*

*Interviewer: Yes, sure. I'm really interested in your ideas.*

*Kevin: Sorta like heaven.*

*Interviewer: What is school like for 'not-so-smart'? What is that like?*

*Kevin: Boy! [sigh] Not so smart? They feel like they can do better. They don't know how.*

*Interviewer: They can do what better?*

*Kevin: Their work and stuff. They don't know how.*

*Interviewer: But they don't know how. What is school like for them?*

*Kevin: Well, actually one of my friends in school is just a bump. Kinda like a bump, like they all like to drop out because they don't know too much. They feel like they don't belong in school. That they don't know.*

— Kevin, 4th grade student, ranked low by his teacher.

Considerations of power in the educational system are rarely discussed in public conversations about schools. *Reaching Higher: The Power of Expectations in Schooling* provides just the right opening for such a conversation. Rhona Weinstein has had the great forethought to draw heavily on interviews with children, and a full third of her book is devoted to lessons learned from children. By not changing their words, she gives us an intimate, innocent, hopeful, and heart-wrenching glimpse into the expectations of these young people.

In the Introduction, called appropriately enough "Reframing the Debate," Weinstein raises important questions regarding power and prejudice. She quotes Gordon Allport's definition of prejudice as reflective of man's "normal and natural tendency to form generalizations, concepts, categories, whose content represents an oversimplification of his world of experience." Because we are prone to categorize and simplify the world around us, and validate these constructs by our association with people much like us, we can create self-fulfilling prophecies. One of the key questions this book sets out to address is "Can the beliefs and actions of powerful others actually cause outcomes that confirm the original prophecy?"

Weinstein calls for us to begin to talk together more deeply about the quality of thinking that is taking place in our schools. She wants us to broaden our conversations with one another to draw in the concerns and ideas of the public "about the conditions that nurture intellectual accomplishment..." She urges us "to celebrate ideas and processes of discovery, and to chart the uneven, the messy, and even the serendipitous in creative efforts. Further, we must change our ways of teaching to highlight active learning, whereby students take on the roles of historian, writer, and scientist as they learn the process of doing scholarship, not simply changing the facts of scholarship."

While promoting positive outcomes for all students may seem to be an unimaginable task, this book takes us much farther down the road of understanding what questions to ask. David Mathews' book *Is There a Public for Public Schools?* finds a companion here. Sharon Robinson, former assistant secretary for the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, gave the following response to an imaginary scenario in which a graduate student was asking for ideas for a dissertation. "The question I guess that I have is can we really tolerate having all students learning? Is the principle that all students can learn and live productive and fulfilled lives so threatening to some basic aspects of our identity and fears as individuals and as a society that we just can't accept it? Because I am wondering what's keeping us from getting there."

*Reaching Higher: The Power of Expectations in Schooling* is a welcome springboard for us to take up such questions.

— Ruth Yellow Hawk, co-director, Indigenous Issues Forums

Rhona S. Weinstein

## REACHING HIGHER

The  
 Power  
 of  
 Expectations  
 in  
 Schooling



## Thanks for the Memories: My years with the Dartmouth Conference

by Alice Bobrysheva

Dayton, Ohio: Kettering Foundation Press, 2003  
ISBN 0-923-993 09-6

this sustained effort to create a modicum of understanding between two peoples possessed with the ability to destroy the world. It was clearly written with joy, and it gives us an important glimpse into the world inhabited by the participants at those early conferences.

Bobrysheva came to Dartmouth as an interpreter for the Soviet Peace Committee, an organization whose purpose had less to do with peace than with spreading Soviet influence. She did this even though, like many of her contemporaries, her life had been touched by Stalin's terror. Her father-in-law had been arrested and spent a decade in the prison camps, and three of her uncles were shot by the regime. Her experiences remind us of the great difficulties experienced under Soviet rule, but in her memoir of the conferences what particularly stands out is her perspective on the participants, especially the Americans.

In June 1959, she organized the meeting between the leadership of the Peace Committee and Norman Cousins at which Cousins made the proposal that led to the first Dartmouth Conference a little more than a year later. In many ways these early conferences were the most significant. The kind of dialogue that took place there had rarely taken place before, and these discussions set the stage for the conferences that followed. Yet we still have too little information, particularly from the Russian side, about what took place then. We have documents that give us a sense of what happened at the conference table, but we have almost nothing about what happened between the sessions. And as anyone who has taken part in a Dartmouth Conference will tell you, what happens between the formal sessions is often what is most important.

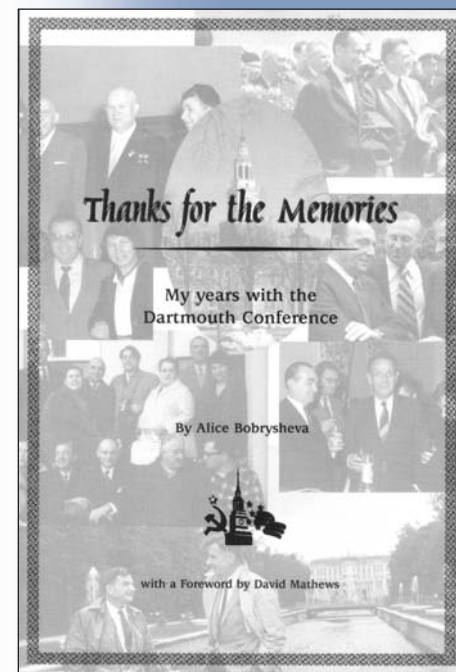
Bobrysheva is able to fill in some of these gaps. Probably the greatest service she does is in giving us a better understanding of the humanity of these historical figures. Judged solely by his biography and his pronouncements, someone like Aleksandr Korneitchuk — a Soviet playwright lauded by Stalin — can appear as simply a cardboard cutout of an apparatchik, a mere instrument of Soviet power. But Bobrysheva brings him to life, recalling the memorable discussion between Korneitchuk and George Kennan where she served as interpreter. She also recounts the time when a famous Soviet film director oversaw the making of *Pelmeni* in Odessa. She provides vignettes of American participants as well, most notably David Rockefeller and, of course, Norman Cousins.

Cousins, as Bobrysheva shows, was a fascinating character. At first she thought him to be unimpressive and shy, but she soon found him to be a good speaker and a skilled raconteur. He was an enthusiast by nature, and Bobrysheva captures his spirit; indeed, in some respects she shares it. She also gives us a memorable portrait of someone who did not take part in the conferences even though he shared a great deal of responsibility for creating them. The first time Bobrysheva met Nikita Khrushchev, she served as the interpreter for a meeting with W.E.B. DuBois. Although he was tired and ill tempered in that conversation, Khrushchev was “a different person” the next time she met him, and his humanity and charm come through in her depictions of subsequent encounters.

Norman Cousins wrote about the early Dartmouth conferences in articles in the *Saturday Review* not long after they occurred. Filled with Cousins' fervor, these articles captured the spirit of the conferences as the Americans saw them. Now, 40 years later, Alice Bobrysheva has done the same for the Soviet side. Her memoir is overdue and fascinating. It is thoroughly enjoyable and makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of those unusual and important early dialogues.

— James Vorhees

Alice Bobrysheva was there at the beginning, in 1959, when Norman Cousins proposed what became the Dartmouth Conference, and she has been a constant presence ever since. For more than 40 years now, the Dartmouth Conference and its offshoots have brought Russians, Americans, and others together to reduce conflict. The all-too-slim volume under review here is her account of the beginning of



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