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Membership in the Society is open to anyone interested in the profession of education. Only members may present papers at the annual meeting. Dues vary in accordance with the vote of the membership and may be mailed to the Secretary-Treasurer or the current Program Chair. Other SOPHE information may be obtained from: http:// sopheconference.com

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## Table of Contents

### In Memoriam
- Spencer J. Maxcy, 1939–2010

### Dedication

### 2010 Presidential Address
- Morris Berman and the Twilight of MacWorld
  - James Swartz

### From the Editors

### Social Capital & Education
  - Charles J. Fazzaro
- Post-Industrial Boys, Education Debates, and the Knowledge Economy in Millennial US Public Culture
  - Kathryn A. Cady
- Communities, Schools, and Social Capital
  - Mike Boone

### Arts & Education
- Informed but Not Bound: Social Studies, Art, and the Quest for the Possible
  - Neil O. Houser & Rachael Province
- “Progressive” Education in Baroque Italy: Philosophy of Education at the Carracci Academy
  - Wayne Willis
- The Educational Foundations Classroom and Resistant Aesthetic Sensibility
  - Don Hufford
- The Bigger Picture: A Critical Look at Art’s Role in Alternative Schools
  - Keith Higa

### Science & Techology
- The Fitness Problem: Rhetorical Ambiguity and Physical Fitness Post-World War II
  - Rafael Cervantes
- James P. Barufaldi: Teacher of Science Teachers
  - Martha May Tevis & John W. McBride
Religion & Education

Dark Night of the Soul: Analyzing Roberts’ My Heart and My Flesh as Philosophy of Education
Sharon M. L. Peelor ................................................................. 109

Juxtaposing Progressive Education and Organized Religion: Flora White’s Story
Linda C. Morice ................................................................. 123

The Death of Religion and the Rebirth of the Spirit: The Implications of the Works of Joseph Chilton Pearce for Transforming Modern Education
Bartley L. McSwine................................................................. 133

Education & Democracy

Torpification in the Academy: The Land of OZ Revisited
Catherine Kinyon................................................................. 143

Navigating the Contradictions: Relationships between Male and Female Peers in Nursing
Donna M. Sayman ................................................................. 151

The Care and Feeding of Assistant Principals: Leadership Development or Squandered Potential?
John W. Hunt ................................................................. 163

Private Belief and Public Life
John F. Covaleskie ................................................................. 173

Pestalozzi and His Significance in Democratic Education
Maria Laubach ................................................................. 185

John Dewey and Thomas Jefferson: Education for Democracy
David Snelgrove ................................................................. 195

Guarding Against Complicity: Educating for Democratic Privilege
Todd P. Loftin ................................................................. 207

Ludwig Feuerbach versus Max Stirner: What a Few Old Germans Can Tell Us About Our Present Educational System
Angelo Letizia ................................................................. 217

Talking About Sunlight in the Cave: Working Toward a Democratic Approach Spiritual Reality in the Public School Classroom
Peter A. Theodore ................................................................. 225
In Memoriam

Spencer J. Maxcy
1939–2010

Last November, the SOPHE community lost Spencer Maxcy. From the early 1970s through the turn of the century, Spencer consistently presented thorough and thought-provoking scholarship at SOPHE meetings. Spencer served as President of SOPHE in 1980–81 and hosted SOPHE’s annual meeting at Louisiana State University (LSU) in 1981.

In the summer of 1995, I was a recent graduate of the M.Ed. program and a newly-admitted doctoral student at LSU. Spencer called me into his office one day, handed me a call for proposals for presentation in Austin to a group he described as “a small, scholarly, but nonetheless friendly and welcoming organization called SOPHE.” He encouraged me to modify and submit a paper I had written for his philosophy of education class the previous spring. Spencer told me he would provide me transportation (in his own vehicle) and allow me to share a room with him. The experience of attending SOPHE early in my doctoral program, along with the years of caring mentorship Spencer provided me, changed the course of my life. Spencer guided me into an academic career and always challenged me to read scholarship, critically
reflect, think more deeply, and always write. Among many of the many qualities Spencer had as a teacher and scholar, he truly modeled the scholarly craft through dedication, hard work, intellectual integrity, humility, and caring. More than any other single individual, Spencer taught me what it means to be a professor; he was the best kind of teacher.

Spencer served 33 years as a professor in the LSU College of Education teaching philosophy of education, history of education, and ethics. He was a prolific scholar who published 13 books and published over 75 articles. During his career, Spencer was a leading (and rare) postmodern voice in the fields of school leadership, educational policy, and ethics. Throughout the 1990s, during a time when standardization, bureaucratization, and systemic accountability were driving educational change, Spencer waved the banner of an alternative approach based on pragmatism, democracy, aesthetics, and ethical practice. Three works authored during this period stand out and remain relevant today. Describing the first work, *Educational Leadership: A Critical Pragmatic Perspective* (1991), Henry Giroux writes: “Maxcy provides a devastating critique of existing models of educational leadership and an original reformulation of the meaning, potential, and practice of educational leadership informed by notions of self and social empowerment.” *Democracy, Chaos, and the New School Order* (1995) has become a classic examination of postmodern approaches to education. Finally, *Ethical School Leadership* (2002) remains one of the most relevant critiques of the conceptualization of ethical leadership practice, and how we might better prepare ethical school leaders, ever written.

For me, Spencer Maxcy idealized and realized what SOPHE is. During SOPHE’s 61-year history as a small, scholarly association, the dedication of a small group of individuals has made SOPHE into a unique and precious organization. Spencer was a leading member of this group of scholars, and I will always be grateful. In response to my request for a photo for this issue of *JoPHE*, Spencer’s wife, Dr. Doreen Maxcy, said, “Please share with your colleagues our family’s appreciation and thanks for honoring Spencer. He always greatly valued SOPHE for its wonderful people, ideas and discussions. The first time he attended SOPHE he had just finished his doctorate and was amazed at how nice and supportive everyone was to each other. He always felt your meetings were a breath of fresh air and inspiration. Please keep up the good work you all are doing.”

Douglas R. Davis
Dedication

We dedicate this issue of the *Journal of Philosophy and History of Education* to our friend and colleague David Snelgrove. Having begun the JoPHE editorship this year, we realize the incredible amount of work David has done with neither reservation nor complaint. We appreciate him, his work, and his wisdom; we trust that he will allow us to draw upon that wisdom as we move forward in the years to come. Thank you, David, for your service to this journal and the members of the Society of Philosophy and History of Education. It is our honor to serve alongside you.
2010 SOPHE Presidential Address

Morris Berman and the Twilight of MacWorld

James Swartz, Miami University of Ohio

The following statements were taken from essays submitted by university students in the United States and Europe. Some were students at Ivy League schools:

- The park Service is a big fat example of government waste. Citizens don’t need the government telling them where to park.
- The moon is a small ball that rotates the earth. Originally it was a chunklet that broke off of the earth. The Grand Canyon is a scar from this.
- The Arctic Circle is a dogsled race held every year.
- The rain that falls in the desert is usually not very wet.
- Mozart had to compose his requiem posthumously.
- Burma changed its name to Miramax.
- For every action there is something new to avoid.
- The Boxer Rebellion began the struggle for animal rights.
- The English Parliament declared women invisible in 1884.
- The Eighteenth Amendment enforced prostitution.

These statements may seem amazing, but they were submitted on essay tests for a grade.

When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when a cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility. (Postman, 1985, p. 155)

Postman’s ideas may be somewhat dated, but they are still relevant today. As Keith (2011) challenged us to think about ethical problems emerging from technological efficiency, Postman does the same. They
encourage us to think through the issues connected to technology instead of taking them for granted. The debate about technology in education is an example (Belland, 2009; Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007; Plumm, 2008; Wharburton, 2009). Educators take our arguments about technology to the very basic and elemental levels. Our arguments about what is appropriate never end. William Easterly (2007), an economist, urges us to think forward and imagine the role of humans in technology, and he urges us to forge our role carefully. Many of the references I use for this paper are foundational works on the subject of how we deal with technology and how the technology we use may overwhelm us.

Morris Berman (2000, 2006, 2010, 2011) is a historian and sociologist who writes poignant books about the relation between technology and the social fabric of the United States. He holds that the US is in decline. Berman (2000) notes four factors that are present when a civilization collapses: (a). accelerating social and economic inequality; (b). declining marginal returns with regard to investment in organizational solutions to socioeconomic problems; c). rapidly-dropping levels of literacy, critical understanding, and general intellectual awareness; (d). spiritual death—that is, Spangler’s classicism, the emptying out of cultural content and the freezing (or repackaging) of it in formulas—kitsch, in short. What happened to bring this about? For Berman it was not just the concentration of power or the reduction of real learning to the testable curriculum that is hurting us; it is the reduction of communication to technically palatable bits. The promotion of symbols and slogans over content concerns him.

The question may be related to the well-known subject/object split. It was a branch of practical science, a kind of shirttail relation to theoretical science that Aristotle created. As a branch of practical science it was isolated from any concern with truth or good or beauty except as devices to throw into an argument. The separation of essence and object had begun, according to many theorists like Richard Rorty and others, as an important part of objectifying things and separating them from their meaning. To understand how the subject/object split seeps into everyday language, one has to understand Martin Heidegger’s (1977) notion of “enframing.”

Heidegger contends that the language user’s intent must be dominant above all else, that a language must be bounded by the perceiver and not by some outside description. For example, a dam may be beautiful as well as a technical achievement. Heidegger claims that if we do not pay attention, language may enframe us and not the other way around. An example of how we can be enframed by language can be found in Arnold Pacey’s (1983) discussion of progress. In order to have
progress, it must be measured. Scientific progress is defined by time, money, expertise and the power to set an agenda. These elements combined to form the idea of “progress.” For Pacey, progress is inevitably what is being measured.

The language of measurement permeates every part of science and technology. Time, money, expertise, and power dominate education, industry, the economy, and who has and who does not. Progress in sales and politics produces slogans and symbols that suffice for actual consideration of issues. Technologies of politics and education can enframe the discussion of any substantive debate. Expertise, time, money and power eventually develop into rules, policies, laws, and edicts that all strive to end discussion and enforce accountability over responsibility for Langdon Winner (1977) who speaks of an “autonomous technology.” Autonomous technology is the belief that somehow technology has gotten out of control and follows its own course, independent of human direction. Winner (1977) holds that science succeeds over rival ways of knowing—poetry, religion, art, philosophy, the occult—not by its ability to illuminate, not even by its ability to organize knowledge, but by its ability to produce solid results.

An autonomous technology emphasizes the perils of an unfinished, imperfect creation, cites the continuing obligations of the creator, and describes the consequences of further insensitivity and neglect. Technology, then, allows us to ignore our own works. It is license to forget (1977). Autonomous technology is the part of our being that has been transferred, transformed and separated from living needs and creative intelligence. A good example is nuclear warfare that has seemingly grown far beyond our ability to control. Any effort to reclaim this part of human life must at first seem impractical and even absurd. Winner (1977) proposes that we disassemble technology, its language, its systems and its artifacts.

To paraphrase Richard Rorty (1991), we must constantly guard against all attempts to force closure and to maintain “the argument” as an open and living entity. When we cease to engage in conversation of any question, we die as a vital community. We become accountable (Taylor & Johnsen, 1986) to an externally imposed set of rules, laws, and prepackaged “truths.” Those external and final definitions define who we are and how we behave. Responsibility, on the other hand, requires active engagement in the definition of rules, laws, and what we believe to be true. In responsible action, the conversation about what is right and important never ends. Accountable action creates entitlement for some and accountability for others. Responsible action results in a never-ending engagement in definition and action.
References


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From the Editors

We trust the membership will be as pleased as we are with the new design and format of *The Journal of Philosophy & History of Education*! Stacy redesigned the cover, format, and contents, and together we chose how to organize standard features for this and future volumes. We have loosely divided this issue into five sections, each opening with a lead article. Charles Fazarro jump-starts the volume with his critical inquiry, “US Public Education and the Hegemony of ‘The Best and the Brightest,’” leading the section on an ever-present question for scholars of social foundations of education: “Social Capital and Education.” Neil Houser and Rachel Province lead the section, “Arts and Education,” Rafael Cervantes, the section, “Science and Technology,” Sharon Peelor, “Religion and Education,” and Catherine Kinyon, “Education and Democracy.” Because many authors in this issue in some way write about education and democracy, we ask ourselves if the manuscripts merely reflect authors’ life-long interests and lines of inquiry or if world events, events in the US, and, particularly, events and politics around US education, schooling, high-stakes testing, and accountability have incited authors to focus on the meaning and value of democracy and citizenship; on countering rigidity of form and content by fostering students’ creativity and open-mindedness through the arts; on looking to the spiritual and/or to how the process of finding one’s center might lead to educated rather than schooled men and women, and on how, similar to neglecting the imagination, failing to exercise the body in schools carries heavy consequences for individual children and society alike.

We offer our most sincere gratitude to David Snelgrove for his continued support and advice throughout this year’s publishing process and Martha Tevis for lending an ear and proposing suggestions even when pressed to meet her book-publishing deadline. We thank those who reviewed and commented on manuscripts thereby assisting authors wanting to improve their work—many authors in this issue extend their thanks to reviewers. Most of all, we thank this volume’s authors for their patience and gracious correspondences with us while we were learning how to organize and edit this journal. It was and is our intention to design and compile *JoPHE* best to showcase authors’ works.

We look forward to working with SOPHE scholars in the years to come!

Charles J. Fazzaro, University of Missouri–St. Louis

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats through unseen among us—visiting
“Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” (1816)
Percy B. Shelley (1792–1822)

Introduction
Since the late 19th century, select academic institutions have strategically positioned themselves at the center of academic excellence. Having been dubbed, euphemistically, “The Best and the Brightest,” graduates of these institutions have dramatically influenced both the structures and technologies of core institutions including business, industry, finance, law, and virtually all dimensions of the Federal government, in particular for this critical enquiry, the US Department of Education (ED). Currently, the ED is pressuring the massive bureaucratic power of the executive branch to coerce hitherto state-controlled public schools to conform to federal-government-sponsored, national academic “standards” coupled with particular teaching structures and technologies.

Under the ED hegemonic siege, US public education is exhausting itself to the point where it is willfully surrendering to a future where it can be used as an instrument to promote partisan political discourse instead of its historically-defined, intended purpose, to prepare children for democratic citizenship through exposure to a broad range of discourses. This enquiry is a brief exploration of how the character of this hegemonic tour de force was born, nurtured, and became dominant in the 20th century. The argument present herein is that this 21st century attempt to control US public education is a product of the epistemological ideology established and nurtured in the 19th century and the early 20th century by, in particular, Ivy League-class institutions. Beginning with a brief history of the nature and origin of “The Best and the Brightest” label, the enquiry proceeds to a search for the epistemological foundations upon which those who lay claim to the “golden fleece” justify the educational structures and technologies.
they mandate through the terror of threats of professional and financial ruin for public school educators.

**“The Best and the Brightest”**

Although the phrase, “The Best and the Brightest,” has long historical roots, it was popularized by David Halberstam’s 1972 book by that title. His book is about the Vietnam war policy crafted by academics and other intellectuals who initially advised President John F. Kennedy. Later, presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Gerald Ford sought some of the original advisors’ advice or advice of others with a similar academic heritage.¹ Labeled by Halberstam as “The Best and the Brightest,” these presidential advisors effectively argued, albeit unfortunately, for intellectually-rigorous but untested diplomatic and military tactics and strategies and dismissed seasoned advice from career US State Department employees.

Perplexing to Halberstam was how this group of presidential advisors, recognized for supreme intelligence, evidenced by their academic achievement at prestigious universities, could be so wrong in their advice on conducting the Vietnam war. Could it have been that the elite academic institutions they attended privileged and passed on a body of knowledge consistent with a culture that was, until recently in the history of political master-narratives (qua, the master “isms,” Socialism, Capitalism, Communism, etc.), enamored by the promises of the positive knowledge certified by the consensus-forming dialectics of the metanarrative of science but inconsistent with human agency² generally and democracy specifically? Fredric Jameson gives a compelling argument for this view in his “Foreword” to Jean-François Lyotard’s 1984 classic, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.*³ Here Jameson is critical of Lyotard for being unwilling to posit “not the disappearance of the great master-narratives, but their passage underground as it were, their continuing but now unconscious effectivity as a way of ‘thinking about’ and acting in our current situation.”⁴ Jameson’s view is consistent with Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony.⁵ Gramsci contends that force and coercion alone are insufficient for the powerful to maintain control of society. Control can only be maintained if the people willingly discipline themselves because at the cognitive level of reason, at least, they believe the powerful are acting in the people’s best interest.⁶ Although in this particular text Jameson was critical of Lyotard for not presenting an argument for this view, Lyotard nonetheless provides an appropriate intellectual framework for this enquiry into the hegemonic *tour de force*’s birth, nurturing, character, and rise to dominance in the 20th century.

**Lyotard and Knowledge**

Lyotard begins the *Post Modern Condition* with the working hypothesis: “…the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter
what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age.” In short, the essential issue he addresses is the legitimation of knowledge in the modern era. That is, how does one know “true” from “false” statements? At the end of his argument, he openly rejects the notion of *consensus* through such strategies as “communicative interactions” proposed by Jürgen Habermas and instead argues for “dissension” (now generally referred to as “dissensus”) through “paralogy” which concerns the legitimate central role that narrative knowledge, not scientific knowledge, ought to play in politics. Lyotard’s paralogy is not the common, dictionary definition of false thinking or reasoning but means movement different from an established way of thinking. He distinguishes paralogy from innovation because innovation “…is under the command of the system, or at least used by it to improve efficiency; the former [paralogy] is a move (the importance of which is often not recognized until later) played in the pragmatics of knowledge.”

**The Hegemony of Modern Thought**

The intellectual character of the hegemony of “The Best and the Brightest” is that of modern thought, codified, so to speak, by Immanuel Kant who inaugurated the modern era near the end of the Enlightenment. At the core of modern thought is a particular form of high rationality and its technologies, including, but not limited to, division, classification, hierarchy, quantification, normality, and the ubiquitous “systems” notion. Mirroring Plato and his allegory of the cave, any particular form of rationality is governed by an *a priori* (qua, metaphysical) assumption of what constitutes reality. Calling this view into question, Lyotard instead argues that

> Reality is not what is “given” [in a metaphysical sense] to this or that “subject,” it is a state of the referent (that about which one speaks) which results from the effectuation of establishment of procedures defined by unanimously agreed-upon protocol, and from the possibility offered to anyone to recommence this effectuation as often as he or she wants.9

For “The Best and the Brightest,” reality is simply the objective positivity of the metaphysical notion of nature. Having assumed the stability of this foundation, they subsume the subjective discourse of humanity within this objective discourse of the natural material world. This subsumption allows “The Best and the Brightest” to consider humans to be merely elements of the natural world and thus can be studied and treated as such. This core notion was evident early in the 19th century when Belgium astronomer Aldophe Quetelet applied statistical analysis to data regarding the height of conscripts into the French army. Quetelet claimed that because his analysis revealed that there were far more conscripts whose heights would have precluded
their conscription than the principle of “normal distribution” would have predicted, many of these conscripts were simply cheating, casting doubts about their character. The effect was to replace subjective human judgment with assumed objective numerical calculations. Quetelet’s work lives today in the notion of the “normal man.”

**The Case at Hand: The US Secretary of Education**

The current US Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, is among the current “The Best and the Brightest” serving in strategic government policymaking positions. His reform policies are consistent with the tenets of modern thought. For example, he blames teachers—although at the lowest level of “production” and at the bottom of the schooling policy hierarchy—for low student academic achievement in public schools that serve primarily low-SES communities. Duncan bases his policies on the false assumption that teaching is a science and teachers are not using scientifically proven “best practices.” In short, he maintains that improving student achievement is merely an engineering, systems-efficiency problem introducing science-based, innovative techniques will solve. Could simply having little or no classroom teaching experience account for Duncan’s simplistic views of the teaching-learning dyad, or could the answer be more organic, fundamental such as that suggested above by Jameson and Gramsci? One possible answer could be that Secretary Duncan acquired his science/engineering views about schooling practices through the academic culture of his Harvard experience.

As a Harvard graduate in sociology, Duncan was subjected to the specter of Talcott Parsons (1902–1979), the highly-regarded sociologist who was a strong advocate for “social systems theory.” Parsons’ academic credentials were so significant that he was made head of the Department of Sociology at Harvard in 1946 (He retired from Harvard in 1973). Parsons was not alone in promoting social systems theory. Another important academic who had a profound impact on the intellectual foundation of the social sciences was Karl Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901–1972). After serving on the faculties of both the University of Vienna and the University of London, Bertalanffy took positions on several universities in both Canada and the United States including the University of Montreal, the University of Ottawa, the University of Southern California, and SUNY-Buffalo. Bertalanffy was responsible for bringing General Systems Theory (GTS) into many academic fields of inquiry, in particular the social sciences. In his words, through his work he was “...trying to derive, from a general definition of ‘system’ as a complex of interacting components, concepts characteristics of organized wholes such as interaction, sum, mechanization, centralization, competition, finality, etc., and apply them to concrete phenomena.” On the other hand, Lyotard argues that:
...systems theory and the kind of legitimation it proposes have no scientific bases whatsoever; science itself does not function according to this [systems] theory’s paradigm [an order of “reason”] of the system [which claims that events are predictable], and contemporary science excludes the possibility of using such a paradigm to describe society.12

Nonetheless, the culture of this non-science was introduced into the newly-developing “social sciences” at Harvard long before Parsons got there. In 1848, a century before Parsons was in a position to have a major influence on the social sciences with his “social systems theory,” Swiss scientist Louis Agassiz (1807–1873) began his Harvard career. Agassiz had a profound effect on the epistemological foundations of knowledge at Harvard and beyond in academe.13

Immersed in this culture of modern thought, with the epistemology of a distorted view of science serving as the foundation of its technology of order and innovation, Secretary Duncan would enter the field of politics. Never holding an elective office, in 2001 he was appointed by Mayor Richard M. Daley as the chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools, where he served until 2008 when the President appointed him as Secretary of Education.

Summary and Conclusions

In brief, the argument presented is based on the following set of beliefs:

1). The primary purpose of US public education is to prepare children to assume the primary political office of citizen;

2). Currently, the policies relative to how this is done are being authored and promoted by members of an elite group occupying strategic unelected positions in the Federal government;

3). The members of this elite group reflect the characteristics of a particular class of policymakers which have been labeled, “The Best and the Brightest,” in terms, at least, of academic preparation;

4). This group is promoting educational policies that are consistent with the epistemology of modern thought which, at base, is inconsistent with the US democratic ideals which US education is to promote;

5). For example, the use of standardized tests to measure teacher effectiveness is inconsistent with US democratic ideals because success on a standardized test requires students to know “standard,” or “consensus,” knowledge which precludes First Amendment rights of freedom of thought which must allow for “dissensus,” the essence of politics.
Regarding the plight of classroom teachers in US public schools, the French intellectual Jacques Rancière argues the importance of dissensus to politics.

The essence of politics is *dissensus*. Dissensus is not a confrontation between interests and opinions. It is the demonstration (*manifestation*) of a gap in the sensible itself. Political demonstration makes visible that which had no reason to be seen; it places one world within another—for instance, the world where the factory is a public space in that where it is considered private, the world where workers speak, and speak about the community in that their voices are mere cries of pain.¹⁴

Rancière would likely urge classroom teachers forcefully to insert their voices in the policy debates. Paraphrasing Plato, Rancière asserts that:

…politics begins when those who were destined to remain in the domestic and invisible territory of work and reproduction, and prevented from doing “anything else”, take the time that they “have not” in order to affirm that they belong to a common world. It begins when they make the invisible visible, and make what was deemed to be mere noise of suffering bodies heard as a discourse concerning the “common” of the community. Politics creates a new form, as it were, of *dissensual* “commonsense.”¹⁵

**Endnotes**

¹ This group of “The Best and the Brightest” included, for example, Yale graduates Dean Acheson, Chester Bowls, McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, and William Bundy. Those graduating from Princeton included John Foster Dulles, George Ball, and Nicholas Katzenbach. Those graduating from Harvard included, among others, President Kennedy himself and his brother Robert F. Kennedy.

² As used here, “human agency” refers to the power that individuals have to act in their own behalf regarding their view of what constitutes the “good life.”


⁴ Lyotard, xii.
Gramsci asserts that force and coercion alone are insufficient for the powerful to maintain control of society. Control can only be maintained if the people willingly discipline themselves because at the cognitive level of reason, at least, they believe the powerful are acting in the people’s best interest.

This view was also recognized by Michel Foucault in his 1979 classic *Discipline and Punish* when he quotes J. M. Servan.

> When you have [thus] formed the chain of ideas in the heads of your citizens, you will then be able to pride yourselves on guiding them and being their masters. The stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains, but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this link is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work; despair and time eat away the bonds of iron and steel, but they are powerless against the habitual union of ideas, they can only tighten it still more, and on the soft fibers of the brain is founded the unshakable base of the soundest of Empires.


Lyotard, 1.

Lyotard, 61.


By training, Quetelet was an astronomer, but he was to gain his fame by applying mathematical calculation in the form of the “astronomical error law” to a wide variety of physical data about humans. The error law was represented in the now familiar bell-shaped curve. The statistical concept represented by this curve would be standardized much later by the famous statistician Karl Pearson as the “Normal Curve.” But long before this, Quetelet would have already used "average man" (*l'homme moyen*) in his depiction of physical measurements such as chest size, weight, and heights. See, M. A. Quetelet, *Treatise on Man: And the Development of His Faculties*, English Trans., Research Source Works Series #247 (New York: Burt Franklin, 1968). First English translation published in Edinburgh, Scotland, 1842. Originally published in France as *Sur L'Homme, et le Développement de ses Facultés*, 1835.

Lyotard, 61.

Post-Industrial Boys, Education Debates, and the Knowledge Economy in Millennial US Public Culture

Kathryn A. Cady, Northern Illinois University

Introduction

Contemporary US politicians and voters have created a massive social disinvestment in children in general (Grossberg, 2005), but problems boys face in particular have gotten the bulk of recent media attention (Titus, 2004). In this paper I examine the gender politics of discourse concerning what antifeminist Christina Hoff Sommers (2000) labels “the war against boys.” Through analyzing Sommers’ book and mainstream US journalism published between 1999 and 2010, I argue that anxiety about boys’ educations converge with assumptions about work and gender in the US’ supposedly-new, post-industrial knowledge economy. Specifically, texts concerning boys’ struggles at school generally anticipate the US would soon face a crisis because these boys would lack intellectual abilities and education needed to become fit workers in the country’s post-industrial economy. I open this essay with a review of post-industrial society theory and continue with textual analysis. I first analyze mainstream press accounts of post-industrial work and the gender roles imagined as a function of this structural economic change. Second, I read The War Against Boys looking specifically at Sommers’ use of evidence and the connections drawn between post-industrial society and boys’ educational achievements. I conclude by showing the book’s impact on contemporary, public philosophies of education, finally examining the implications of such philosophies.

Post-Industrial Theory and the Knowledge Economy

Contextualizing the so-called “war against boys” amidst US economic change, I begin with one of the many theories that attempt to make sense of contemporary US economics: post-industrial theory. This theory with its concomitant idea of a knowledge economy is of particular interest to education scholars and practitioners. Such theories include a widely-believed set of assumptions on which some of Sommers’ significant claims hinge.

An origin for post-industrial theory is sociologist Daniel Bell’s (1976) The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. His effort in “social
forecasting” (p. 3) begins from the idea that the US “economy is being transformed and the occupational system reworked” (p. 13). Just as the pre-industrial society based on agriculture and mining raw materials gave way to an industrial society focused on producing durable goods, a post-industrial society now supersedes industrial society. When Bell wrote his book, a larger proportion of the labor force was employed in service than in industrial work, and Bell puts particular emphasis on the rapidly-expanding sector of white-collar service work related to knowledge production.

Knowledge begins to act as a social catalyst in post-industrial society. The central organizing principle in this changed society is abstract theoretical knowledge that, rather than empiricism, births innovation: “theoretical knowledge increasingly becomes the strategic resource, the axial principle, of a society” (p. 26). In a society characterized by “organized complexity,” in which there are too many variables to be assessed in any decision for one person’s mind to keep track of and order, theoretical work leading to advances in technology and computing are vital. Overall:

The post-industrial society, it is clear, is a knowledge society in a double sense: first, the sources of innovation are increasingly derivative from research and development (and more directly, there is a new relation between science and technology because of the centrality of theoretical knowledge); second, the weight of the society—measured by a larger proportion of Gross National Product and a larger share of employment—is increasingly in the knowledge field. (p. 212, emphasis in original)

Bell identifies those working in the knowledge field as engineers, scientists, and teachers, particularly those within the professoriate. He attributes a decline in industrial job opportunities to this knowledge economy. Although Peter F. Drucker (1969; 1993) similarly conceptualizes a knowledge economy as one in which knowledge is the primary product sold and what people need to be employable, he does not detail the connection between a rising knowledge economy and falling industrial economy with the depth Bell does.

Ultimately, Bell (1976) praises the knowledge economy too highly. He often describes it as a product of an affluent society: “the post-industrial society is defined by the quality of life as measured by the services and amenities—health, education, recreation, and the arts—which are now deemed desirable and possible for everyone” (p. 127). He claims the Western working-class is shrinking, but with the benefit of time, we can see that shrinking is not entirely the case, unless one means the formerly-wage-earning, middle-class people shrink into the class sometimes called the working poor (e.g., Harrison, 1994). Bell also

K. Cady
admits his forecast may not happen as predicted, for any number of events or practices may turn the course of society in a different direction. His caution is one Sommers and others in education debates unfortunately do not heed.

**Post-Industrial Gender Roles**

Clear, post-industrial gender roles emerge from the vast amounts of public discourse exploring Bell’s conception of the US’ post-industrial, knowledge-driven society and economy. Two representative examples span the last decade that illustrate public perceptions regarding post-industrial economics and its relation to gender. First, a traditional association of women with style and ornamentation (de Lauretis, 1986, p. 13; Sutton, 1992) compels many to think of post-industrial work as both feminized and the kind of work women do. Journalist Susan Faludi’s (1999) book *Stiffed* and her analysis of working-class men provide clear examples of such thinking. Faludi connects a shut down, large, southern-California naval shipyard to another southern Californian group affected by economic crisis, a series of angry young men including the infamous Spur Posse whose predatory sexual misconduct gained them national notoriety during the early 1990s. Faludi describes these angry youths as a causal outcome of economic depression in the region, both figuratively and literally formed by their fathers’ job loss. She explains:

> It’s no coincidence that the same southern California territory that was producing economic despair for the nation’s fathers was also producing turmoil for their sons. …all around them, the steaming, clanking apparatus of industry was falling silent. (p. 102)

*Stiffed* presents middle- and working-class white men’s lives as thoroughly dystopian: job loss turning the older men into figures imbued with a defeatist *pathos* and the younger into unemployed slackers. Both groups of men are filled with aggression often directed toward women.

Some men interviewed in *Stiffed* blame women for men’s job losses. Interviewee Billy Shehan is startling both in his love of violent, erotic imagery of men controlling women and in his disdain for what he understands as women’s aptitude for a post-industrial world. He connects women with the new service-based, white-collar economic structure and, thus, with his economic impotence: “Everybody says boys control girls, but it’s the other way around. Girls have it a lot easier. They get the jobs easier. Because the jobs now are all about presenting yourself. It’s all presentation. Girls have it made” (p. 152). Faludi illustrates men’s feelings of economic impotence and an assumption of women’s economic prowess under a post-industrial, knowledge
economy. The next example relies on similar assumptions but is constructed entirely around the argument that the post-industrial world is more amenable to women than men.

In the summer of 2010, *The Atlantic Monthly* magazine featured a provocative cover claiming “The End of Men” (Rosen, 2010). Rosen asks:

What if the modern, postindustrial economy is simply more congenial to women than to men? ... The postindustrial economy is indifferent to men’s size and strength. The attributes that are most valuable today—social intelligence, open communication, the ability to sit still and focus—are, at a minimum, not predominantly male. In fact, the opposite may be true.

Rosen continues outlining ways in which women meet or exceed men in interpersonal and intellectual skills, employment levels, and entrance into political offices not only in the US but the world over. Echoing a number of other reports since the 2008 beginning of the Great Recession in the US, Rosen argues the current recession disproportionately affects men, and those hard-hit men working in construction or manufacturing may well be unemployed for good. Also notable, a number of comments posted in response to the online version of the article claim manufacturing creates wealth and services take wealth. *The Atlantic Monthly* article perfectly encapsulates a number of arguments coursing through US popular economic knowledge over the last few decades: core economic manufacturing jobs are being lost while peripheral service jobs grow, men are traditionally employed within core manufacturing and women within expendable service, yet in the current economy men flounder and women excel.

**Sommers’ War Against Boys**

Similar assumptions of women’s achievement in contemporary society and men’s ineptitude for it are a foundational assumption of Christina Hoff Sommers’ (2000) foray into education policy debate in her book *The War Against Boys*. Sommers, a former professor of philosophy at Clark University, left academe in 1997 to become a Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. In this book she takes aim at the research of Carol Gilligan, David and Myra Sadker, and the American Association of University Women (AAUW). In their research, these scholars (and researchers within AAUW) argue that girls face such chilling effects in US educational settings as seeing sexist representations in textbooks and experiencing sexual harassment in schools. Sommers claims it is boys who are disadvantaged in schools. She advocates that educators offer male students moral socialization through study of the Western canon. Such schooling will combat both
the cause of why “Johnny can’t, like, read and write” (p. 158), in the words of one chapter title, and the cause of school shootings, for to her, the Columbine perpetrators are “two badly socialized boys” (p. 198). Other Sommers texts have been previously analyzed (e.g., Gring-Pemble & Blair, 2000; Kinahan, 2001). In The War Against Boys, as in her earlier book Who Stole Feminism (1995), Sommers presents herself as “an independent ‘outlaw’ scholar” and “free-thinking hero” (Gring-Pemble & Blair, 2000, p. 365). She claims to be motivated by “Truth” which she presents as unquestionable common sense. She further claims that politics and ideology rather than Truth motivate her feminist adversaries.

Her first assumption, that the view she presents is unquestionable common sense, and not ideologically-motivated, is questionable. Her treatment of evidence is internally inconsistent and inconsistent with typical standards for the appropriate use of empirical findings. The internal inconsistency of her use of evidence can be illustrated by one complaint she voices regarding Carol Gilligan’s research in which Gilligan argues boys and girls have different moral outlooks. Sommers finds Gilligan’s work “very small in scope and the number of its subjects” (p. 107). Ironically, throughout her argument, Sommers herself uses a small number of studies as evidence of absolute sex differences including new neurological research showing gender differences in brain composition and activity. Given the vast body of research about sex and gender differences, her research is itself small in scope, and many of the studies she cites also have small numbers of subjects. For example, the exploratory neurological research she cites prominently has a mere 38 participants (p. 89).

Sommers neither presents the right type nor amount of evidence necessary to support an argument that men and women are biologically categorically different. Contrary to Sommers’ position, a wide variety of communication and psychological research with thousands of research participants has shown that males and females are overwhelmingly similar: “sex differences have little effect on personality and social behavior” (Wood & Dindia, 1998, p. 23; see also Allen, Preiss, Gayle, & Burrell, 2002; Canary & Hause, 1993; Hyde & Linn, 1986). Her critiques of feminists’ so-called political uses of evidence (e.g., Gring-Pemble & Blair, 2000) are curious given her own obviously ideologically-motivated misuse of evidence. She covers few studies other than Gilligan’s in any depth in the book; thus, Sommers’ claim that “we have yet to see a reasonable argument” (p. 134) for sex similarities and progressive education reform makes it seem that she simply looks neither hard nor far to uncover such arguments. Sommers offers no research of her own, just an ideology (what she calls the “common sense” notion that “biology is destiny”) and improper claims generalizing attributes to all
men and women based on small-sample-size research. By creating double binds (e.g., she speaks truth and common sense while Gilligan speaks falsehoods and ideology), she makes ideologically-motivated arguments that promote readers’ identification with her (Gring-Pemble & Blair, 2000). In fact, Sommers and Gilligan have much more in common than not as they both make generalized claims about men and women with inadequate appropriate evidence.

A second significant assumption in Sommers’ book, and one that makes it different from her other publications, is her reiteration of post-industrial gender roles: the assumption that women and girls excel in the knowledge economy while men and boys falter. The educational achievements Sommers associates with a post-industrial, knowledge economy are literacy and college attendance, and she bemoans women’s supposed excellence at both. That the current US college population is composed of more women than men is a dangerous trend according to Sommers in regard to men’s earning potential in the new economy. In addition, Sommers claims research showing boys lag behind girls in literacy skills describes a problem of national scope that US citizens know little about because of their myopic focus on girls. She exclaims:

…the looming prospect of an underclass of badly educated—even barely literate—American boys has yet to become a cause for open concern among American educators, not to speak of politicians. Nevertheless, the day of reckoning cannot be far away. Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Lester Thurow observes, “Within the developed world, the under-educated and under-skilled are going to be left out, or perhaps more accurately, thrown out of the global game.” In a 1995 article in Science, University of Chicago education researchers Larry Hedges and Amy Nowell warned about the bleak employment outlook for the “generally larger number of males who perform near the bottom…in reading and writing.” (pp. 160–161)

According to Sommers, this “underclass” includes men who are white and middle-class, not just underprivileged youth.

This notion of a male underclass leads her to conclude that, regardless of evidence of sexual harassment suffered by women or continued discrimination in hiring and wages faced by women (e.g., Sommers, 2000):

In fact, our society does not favor boys. It certainly does not favor the growing number of boys who are disengaged, barely literate, and without the prospects of going to college. These young men have very little access to “the good things in life.” (p. 172)
In her discussion of education for a knowledge economy, Sommers again creates double binds. If boys as a group are doing poorly in reading, then there are no problems that we may say hinder girls. If women make up a higher percentage of college students than men, then there is cause for alarm. If you favor “progressive” education, then you are ignoring the “basics” of “traditional” education, such as “high expectations,” “teacher-led work,” “a structured environment,” and “homework [with] consistently applied sanctions if work is not done” (p. 161). Finally, she blames progressive pedagogy for boys’ decreased literacy skills.

The view Sommers presents of a post-industrial knowledge economy and men’s and women’s relative positions in it mirrors the assumptions of other writers and advocacy programs. For example, in 2004 as President Bush’s disastrous foreign policy occupied the front page, the First Lady introduced an advocacy program for boys’ literacy that mirrored much of the discussion Sommers presents. After Laura Bush’s announcement, Newsweek ran a cover story, entitled “The Trouble with Boys” (Tyre, 2006), featuring arguments similar to Sommers’ on biology, sex differences, and the post-industrial knowledge economy. In addition, similar such news stories surfaced in the US, UK, and Australia (Titus, 2004). Consequently, a minor industry in worrying about boys’ education emerges as a cursory search on amazon.com will show. In this discourse:

The claims-makers’ conclusions appeal for gender equity for boys through pedagogical practices and curriculum deemed to be [sic] meet [sic] boys special needs. The warrants employ a language of gender equity to oppose discrimination against males; yet paradoxically, in a language of biological essentialism, posit innate inequities of human nature as a basis for social differences that favor males. (Titus, 2004, p. 147)

Conclusion

In this essay has I have examined one author’s role in a recent social panic about boys’ educational struggles and their struggles’ connection to widely-believed assumptions about the somewhat-new and ongoing post-industrial knowledge economy. Authors’ arguments that women flourish in a post-industrial economy and men struggle often ask us to overlook ways in which gender-, race-, and class-based workplace justice is not a current and ongoing reality. Finally, if one is taken in by Sommers’ logic, the real struggles that post-industrialization posit for all working people get overshadowed in another short-sighted playing out of the so-called gender wars. There are two broader implications coming from the analysis I offer here with which I will conclude.
First, the reigning assumption in Christina Hoff Sommers’ (2000) addition to this debate, *The War Against Boys*, is that education is a zero-sum game based on gender. If girls are winning, it must be the reason that boys are losing. Learning and securing good work is unfairly characterized antagonistically as a war. Such a position flouts the common sense that it is in all of our interest for people to learn in any way that they can. Sommers also largely ignores the impact of race and especially social class on educational and workplace achievement (Titus, 2004). Finally, a recent report by the National Center on Education and the Economy (2007) indicates that all US students, not just boys, need to improve literacy, math, science, abstract thinking, and creative knowledge and skills beyond those they now possess in order to be competitive in a global, post-industrial economy. The harm of a public philosophy of education too greatly influenced by views similar to Sommers’, one that attests to men’s primary decline in post-industrialization, rather than seeing the current economic turn as everyone’s struggle, cannot be overstated.

Second, it may well be that more than a return to didactic pedagogy, like the one that Sommers advocates, is needed to help boys achieve in school. Paul Willis’ (1977) landmark study *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* powerfully illustrates that working-class young men hampered their own social mobility by aggressively rejecting learning. They actively choose life trajectories that diminish the role of education and rebuff precisely the kind of didactic teaching, discipline, and moralizing that Sommers favors. Willis found that in the patriarchal ideology of their community, mental labor and manual labor were coded as feminine and masculine respectively. Such a deeply-ingrained worldview leads these young men to choose manual labor over mental labor. Willis’ findings illustrate that it is not just educational institutions, but also boys’ ideology and community members’ ideologies that might have to change in order to persuade young men to value education and in order to prepare young men for knowledge-based industries.

**References**


Communities, Schools, and Social Capital

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Introduction

Writing in 1897, John Dewey defined the school as a small social community located within the context of a larger geographic and relational entity. Dewey understood the local community as grounded in face-to-face relationships and associations, the most important of which, the neighborhood and the family, “have always been the chief agencies of nurture, the means by which dispositions are stably formed and ideas acquired which laid hold on the roots of character” (1927, p. 211). The school is both an extension and a basic institution of its community. As a community institution, the school is responsible for creating in the next generation, the community of the previous generation. The school’s contribution to reconstructing communities and societies is seldom an acknowledged institutional goal but should be.

McMillan and Chavis (1986) note the term, “community,” has two distinct connotations. The first refers to a specific geographic area and the people who inhabit it; the second refers to the nature and quality of human relationships. In this later regard, Block (2008) suggests a community’s identity is most clearly defined by the conversations it has with itself about its present conditions and future possibilities. These possibilities include the kind of education a community wants for its children. The close connection Dewey first describes between the school and its surrounding community continues to affect our understanding of school-community interactions.

Recently, scholars exploring the health of urban and rural communities find a shifting and frequently-deteriorating landscape (Block, 2008; Coleman, 1988; Kretzman & McKnight, 1997; McKnight, 1995; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Putnam, 2000; Warren, 2001). Changes in ethnic composition, family structure, and age distribution; accelerated population movement from rural to urban settings; immigration patterns; growing economic disparities, unemployment and underemployment; lack of health care; low educational achievement; crumbling infrastructure; and a general feeling of isolation seem to characterize many local communities and the schools which serve them. Their changing natures require a reconsideration of how school leaders work in and with local communities.
Traditional approaches to preparing school leaders to work with communities position schools primarily as beneficiaries of community support. The beneficiary model gives primacy to the school. It emphasizes one-way, school-centered and school-directed communication patterns designed to “market” schools and their programs to local communities. While community involvement is encouraged, the nature of involvement is limited to supporting the work of the school and teachers. The relationship of the school and its community is that of expert provider and passive client (Mediratta et al., 2009; Warren, 2001). However Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) and Cambron-McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, and Koff (2005) suggest alternative, theoretical models of school-community interactions that position schools as equal partners with the community providing education to children and acting as co-creators of the social capital required for students to benefit from educational services. A partnership approach to school-community interaction relies on active, two-way communication channels, trust-building, and open-ended engagement with the community. In this paper I explore the changing context of school and community connections and its implications for school leaders using a theoretical framework of social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1985; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Patton, 2001). While social capital entails both private and public benefits (Putnam, 2000), I focus on the public benefits of social capital, especially those benefits a school accrues through the presence of high levels of social capital in the community.

**Social Capital Theory**

Communities collectively and families particularly possess various resources that can be brought to bear to support the academic success of students. Porfeli, Wang, Audette, McColl, and Algozzine (2009) refer to these resources as *community capital*. Community capital includes *financial capital*, defined as the wealth available to the community as a whole and to individual families to provide a stable environment and the resources needed for learning; *human capital*, consisting of community members’ skills, capacities, and adaptive behaviors accumulated through education, work, and life experiences; and *social capital* which refers to human capital “realized through the dynamic exchange between people establishing and maintaining relationships” (p. 73). Social capital is created, for example, when a parent reads to a child, or affirms the importance of education to the child, or when parents and other persons significant to the child establish high expectations for education and provide the value systems that assist the child in his or her school successes. The generation of social capital does not necessarily depend upon one’s race or social class:

Even after controlling for parents’ education and income, adolescents who experienced favorable social capital (at the
family or community level) were more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in college, be working, be economically stable, avoid teenage pregnancy, avoid criminal activity, and/or maintain functional mental health relative to their peers who were exposed to less social capital. (Porfeli et al., 2009, p. 74)

Importantly, the sources of social capital from which students benefit can be derived from either their families or the community at-large.

Social capital theory contributes to our understanding of how families, communities, and schools support the academic success of students. Generally understood, the term “social capital” refers to the benefits an individual gains through the social context of community life (Mediratta et al., 2009). French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu (1985) theorizes social capital as derived from trust, shared values, and a sense of connectedness by which community members benefit and through which they facilitate benefits for others. Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) define social capital as “a construct that links individuals to group action” (p. 385). Social capital becomes available to individuals as a result of their connections to a larger group or social network. Putnam and Feldstein (2003) identify the benefits of social capital as the “social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance, and trustworthiness” (p. 3) that connect members of a group or social association. Individuals benefit from social capital through forming connections with other individuals that satisfy public and private personal needs. Social capital accrues through the creation of trust relationships, acceptance of norms of reciprocity, and expectations of mutual assistance that strengthen group coherence and identity (Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999).

The connection between schools, communities, and social capital has long been recognized. Linda A. Hanifan (1916), a Progressive era reformer, applies the concept of social capital theory to describe the individual and group benefits of community involvement in rural schools in West Virginia. In the 1980s James S. Coleman and his colleagues use the term to explain differences in educational achievement between public and parochial high school students (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Coleman offers an explanation of the nature of social capital when he says:

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors...within [a] structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible.... [S]ocial capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors. It is
not lodged either in the actors themselves or in the physical implements of production (Coleman, 1988, p. S98).

Coleman links the concepts of human capital and social capital identifying social capital as the enabling factor for the effective utilization of human capital.

Like Dewey, Coleman identifies the family as the primary mechanism for the creation of social capital. Social capital is accumulated primarily through relationships between children and their parents and other family members with whom the child interacts. It is the mechanism by which human capital is manifested in social and educational settings. Thus, “if the human capital possessed by parents is not complemented by social capital…it is irrelevant to the child’s educational growth that the parent has a great deal...of human capital” (Coleman, 1988, p. S110). Outside one’s family, social capital is generated by “the social relationships that exist among parents...and the parents’ relations with the institutions of the community” (Coleman, 1988, p. S113). The social capital necessary for a child’s development is the product of relationships beginning in the family but extending necessarily to other adults outside one’s family and to community institutions with which the child’s family interacts.

Putnam (2000) notes social capital’s dual nature: it functions as both a private and a public good. An individual member of a particular social network may receive a private benefit from his or her connection to the network—e.g. business opportunities, one’s job, friendships—while the public-at-large may benefit from the positive aspects of such social, group activities as support of community causes, high levels of civic involvement, and an atmosphere of trust and mutual obligation among community members. In the school setting, social capital is reflected within the level and quality of parental participation in the child’s school and in the value parents ascribe to education.

In its public aspect, social capital manifests in a number of ways, including the reciprocal obligations and expectations shared by members of a social entity; the information channels embedded in a group; effective norms and sanctions that encourage a particular set of behaviors among group members; and the authority relations that exist within a group (Coleman, 1990). Reciprocity of obligations and expectations provides the foundation for a level of trust among group members. Reciprocity reinforces individual members’ confidence that mutual obligations will be honored and shared behavioral expectations will be met. Information channels supply the knowledge needed for action on the part of social-group members. For example, in Coleman and colleagues’ (1987) comparison of parochial and public high schools, they find the information parents share about the school and its programs permits parents to make crucial decisions about the education
their children receive. Norms and sanctions prescribe guidance for the appropriate behavior of group members by reinforcing acceptable behaviors and punishing unacceptable behaviors and establish parameters of acceptable behavior rather than addressing specific actions. Authority relations are created when a group member transfers his or her rights to act to another group member, thereby ceding right of control. The ability to control group activities creates social capital for the person or persons to whom that task is transferred (Coleman, 1990).

Social capital may serve either exclusive or inclusive purposes (Block, 2008; Putnam, 2000; Warren, 2001). Exclusive or “bonding” social capital is inward-looking and tends to reinforce exclusive group identities and homogeneity; “bridging” social capital looks outward and is inclusive of persons of diverse social, economic, political, and religious identities. Both “bonding” and “bridging” forms of social capital can serve specific legitimate group and individual needs. Bonding social capital enhances group identity and is useful for reinforcing specific norms of reciprocity and developing feelings of solidarity, whereas bridging social capital provides access to external resources and support and opens up “cooperative connections across...lines, particularly those of race and class” (Warren, 2001, p. 25). Bridging social capital rests on the assumption that when people work cooperatively, they will discover their common interests and develop a sense of the common good. Bridging social capital is essential for community cohesion and the proper functioning of a pluralistic democracy (Warren, 2001). Both bonding and bridging social capital are necessary to a well-functioning community.

Social capital theory has been criticized as ignoring the inequalities of power relationships—both internal and external—and their influence on the context of local communities (DeFilippis, 2001). As Mediratta et al. (2009) point out, while the creation of social capital is certainly necessary for community development, it does not guarantee communities will have the corresponding political capital required to remedy existing social, economic, or political inequalities. “How political capital flows, and to whom it flows, determines who reaps the benefits of the wealth of economic resources in the United States” (Mediratta et al., 2009, p. 4). What hampers the development of many communities, especially communities of color and impoverished communities, is “the lack of democratic control over how economic and cultural resources...are distributed and deployed” (p. 4). Warren (2001) also recognizes the existence of deeply-rooted “structures of inequality” in American society and notes “Efforts to harness social capital...must confront the reality of oppression and inequality” (p. 29). Since schools are deeply-imbedded in the social and economic structure of local communities, school improvement efforts must take into account and
be linked to community action in order to build political capital (Mediratta et al., 2009).

Putnam (1993) notes the impact of political capital imbalances on the distribution of social capital. Those relationships that create social capital occur in two directions: horizontal relationships among equals and vertical relationships among individuals of differing social and political statuses. Horizontal relationships enhance qualities of trust and mutuality and encourage the free exchange of information, while vertical relationships create inequalities because they consist of interactions between persons who are not social equals and “cannot sustain social trust and cooperation” (Putnam, 1993, p. 175). Vertical relationships inhibit the flow and quality of information available to group members and are inherent in the hierarchical structure of public schooling.

Schools and Social Capital

The work of James Coleman and colleagues elaborates the connection between social capital and schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hofer, & Kilgore, 1982; Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Coleman and Hofer (1987) argue parochial high schools are more effective at educating minority and disadvantaged students than public high schools. While Coleman and colleagues initially assumed the reasons for parochial school advantage could be attributed to such school policies as strict discipline, rigorous homework requirements, and a common curriculum, they ultimately conclude the actual educational advantage resides instead in the close-knit relationships among students, parents, teachers, and the school. Relationships among teachers, parents, and students create levels of social capital that contribute significantly to the overall effectiveness of the school. Similarly, Driscoll and Kerchner (1999) point to the level of shared parental knowledge about the school, high levels of parental involvement, and a strong sense of community identity reinforced by parochial and religious ties as significant factors in student success. By comparison, many public schools lack these characteristics. Public school students and their parents tend to have fewer connections to other school families; the fund of shared knowledge about the school and its programs tends to be low; and there may be fewer intersections between the worlds of the school and the home. The educational advantage attributed to parochial, and perhaps to some charter schools, derives from shared parental knowledge, high levels of parental involvement, and a strong community identity that generates a level of social capital to support children in their efforts to learn.

A number of indicators of social capital are available to students in a school and community. These include the degree of parental involvement and participation, the level of shared community knowledge about the school and its programs, and the existence of norms of trust,
caring, and support extant in the school and the community. Recognition of the role of social capital in school effectiveness has led to efforts to create social capital in communities where it is absent or insufficient. For example, Warren (2001) describes the work of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in creating the Alliance Schools Network and fostering school improvement in Texas. Mediratta and colleagues (2009) detail the work of community organizations nationwide to improve schools in low-income, urban neighborhoods and rural areas through community organizing and the creation of political capital. Their work is especially useful for understanding how the development of social and political capital can facilitate school reform.

**School and Community Interactions**

Schools occupy a unique position in the community as both the beneficiaries of community support and as agents of social capital development (Driscoll & Kirchner, 1999). Viewed from one perspective, schools are the recipients of the financial and human resources that communities provide to support educational programs and services. Contributed resources consist primarily of taxes, parental volunteers who serve the school in various capacities, and partnerships with various community organizations, social service agencies, and business enterprises. Essentially a one-way relationship, the efforts of professional educators are concentrated on maintaining the flow of human and financial resources by convincing the community of the worth of the educational programs and services the school offers. The contribution of the school to the community is confined to providing educational services and the relationship between school and community is that of client to expert-service provider.

I argue an alternative perspective on school-community relations involves the re-consideration of schools as agents of social capital and contributors to the public good. From this perspective, schools both benefit from the accumulated social capital of the community and play a pivotal role in creating and sustaining the community’s fund of social capital. The school engages with the community in a network of trust, reciprocity, and mutual obligation. This relationship between school and community calls for two-way rather than one-way communication. From this perspective educators may focus on building mutually-beneficial relationships with the community based on the establishment of mutual purposes and shared values.

Crowson (1998) suggests educators themselves may constitute a barrier to a more inclusive approach to community involvement. Many educators fear enlarging the scope of community involvement in the school will expand the influence of parents and community members and result in a corresponding loss of power and authority for educators.
themselves. Loss of exclusive influence over the school contravenes norms of educator professionalism and expertise. While a diminution of power and authority by professional experts is of course a possibility, especially in the short-run, ultimately the willingness of professionals to engage with community members will increase the political capital of professional educators by creating shared ownership of and responsibility for the school. In the long-term, both professionals and the community benefit from meaningful community involvement.

**Leadership Implications**

Social capital theory has several implications for how school leaders understand and interact with the community. An important ingredient of social capital is trust, and trust is created and sustained when members of a social entity share norms of reciprocity and mutual obligations that permit individuals to rely on the integrity and ability of others to act in expected ways in given circumstances. Trust is the foundational characteristic of social capital. At the school level, trust building begins with educators re-conceptualizing the school as constituting more than just a physical facility or a collection of professional experts gathered together in one place at one time to deliver a professional service. Instead, educators contribute to the development of social capital when they view themselves as persons bound together in a network of relational trust, mutual obligation, and authority with parents and the community (Driscoll & Kerchner, 1999). Parents, families, and other community members may rightly lay claim to a legitimate interest in the education of children and assume a role as significant partners in the work of educating. As Bryk and Schneider (2003) conclude, building a network of trust within the school and beyond to the community and reciprocating from the community to the school requires respect for one another’s role in educating children, performing professional roles competently, exhibiting care for others, and acting with integrity.

At the school-district level leadership efforts need to be directed to establishing channels for public engagement (Pendleton & Benjamin, 2005), and this framework emerges from the work of Daniel Yankelovich (1991) and the Public Agenda Foundation. Essentially public engagement involves district-wide leaders in a two-way conversation with the community. Requisite to participating in this conversation is the commitment of each party to listen respectfully to the other as they explore such questions as: what do we want for our children; how can we work together to help children achieve; how do we increase student learning, and what do we have to do to make democracy work (Pendleton & Benjamin, 2005)?

Public engagement represents a significant cultural shift for public schools and their leaders. It requires school leaders to move away from top-down, authoritarian control of education and toward greater reliance
on shared governance. For professional educators it is also a shift from seeing children “solely in schools to seeing them as part of a community committed to the proposition that educating the young is important” (p. 261). But the reality is that, in schools where students are failing to learn, where professional educators and the community are disconnected and sometimes hostile to one another, and where the social capital needed to support student learning is absent, a shift in perspective is the only option available to bring about significant change.

**Conclusion**

It is well understood that students benefit from attending schools embedded in strong communities, with high levels of parent engagement and participation, and an ethic of caring and support exhibited by adults both inside and outside the school. The concept of social capital, with its emphasis on trust, reciprocity, and mutual obligations, provides one theoretical framework for restructuring the relation between schools and the communities they serve.

**References**


Informed but Not Bound: Social Studies, Art, and the Quest for the Possible

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Introduction

Art scholar and historian Mark Getlein (2005) argues the essence of creativity is the ability to move beyond rigid views of what has been or should be in search of what could be. As teacher educators who offer social studies and art education courses to elementary and middle school pre-service teachers, we are interested in promoting critical, civic understanding needed for the development for a more just and equitable society. We value historical understanding (understanding of what has been—of past events and dialectical processes) as well as the search for more just and ethical ways of social life (the search for what should be); yet, at times, the weight of what has been and what should be feels so heavy that it is indeed difficult to contemplate what could be. We believe the arts can help facilitate understanding of what has been and what should be while fostering a genuine search for what could be.

In this paper we address the capacity of the arts to promote both critical consciousness (a sense of what has been in relation to what should be [Freire, 1970]) and an authentic sense of hope and possibility (what could be). First, we identify some of the pressing issues that concern us and discuss the context within which we currently teach. Then we explain several of the ways we have utilized the arts within our teaching in an effort to promote social and historical understanding as well as the search for new possibilities. As we proceed we examine various characteristics of the arts as well as the ways in which we have attempted to use these characteristics to foster growth and development among pre-service teachers.

Social Concerns and Educational Context

Like many others, we are deeply concerned about the personal, social, and environmental challenges currently facing our society and world. Within the last decade alone we have experienced rapid population growth, accelerating patterns of marketing and consumption, aggressive corporate globalization, devastating conflicts in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East Egypt, catastrophic terrorism in Spain, Great Britain, India, and the US, contentious military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq, soaring costs of food, oil and healthcare, loss of
manufacturing jobs in industrialized nations, and vitriolic intolerance among religious fundamentalists. These tensions are not isolated among the poor and unindustrialized but are spread among the wealthiest nations on earth, many of which lead in rates of violence, stress, anxiety, substance abuse, divorce, and suicide. In addition to troubling political and economic conditions, such environmental disasters as hurricane Katrina, the Deepwater Horizon (British Petroleum) oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and the accelerated melting of the polar icecaps have refocused international attention on global climate change, population growth, industrial abuses, and excessive accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Today, few credible scientists doubt whether a lethal combination of social and environmental factors threatens not only our way of life but the very health of the planet.

In light of these and other concerns, we work to model critical pedagogy (Baldwin, 1988; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1985; Greene, 1988; Nieto, 2000; Noddings, 1992) for our mostly-white, middle-class, female, pre-service, elementary school teachers encouraging them to utilize similar approaches in their teaching. While our experiences support Ayers, Mitchie, and Rome’s (2004) observation that beginning teachers face significant difficulties when attempting to use deep and critical pedagogy, we find, for the most part, that our students seem willing to consider our suggestions, to question, to reflect, and to learn. We have observed resistance, to be sure. We have heard our students dismiss Al Gore’s (2006) An Inconvenient Truth as “political propaganda”; challenge President Obama’s much-publicized and opposed talk to children as an attempt to create a modern-day “Hitler youth” movement; critique Daniel Quinn’s (1992, 1997) Ishmael series as being “disrespectful” to their religion; and express surprise when learning of Columbus’ genocidal treatment of American Indians (Zinn, 1980/1995). Nonetheless, they are generally quite interested in learning about others and engaging in critical reflection even if not always able fully to understand others’ thoughts and feelings. A recent self-study reveals a strong majority believes the disequilibrium they experience to be productive rather than counter-productive.

Although we often see our pre-service teachers using critical approaches in their own teaching, something seems to change as they proceed through the program (consisting of four field experiences, culminating in a semester-long internship) and find themselves confronted with both the problems of social and cultural “others” and such personal challenges as a tightening job market and the steadily-increasing pressures of teacher deskilling. In our ongoing deliberations about what may be happening, two factors continually rise to the surface. First, although many are willing to consider different people’s experiences and perspectives, our students often find it difficult to
understand what others are thinking and feeling. Moreover, textbooks, scientific reports, and summary statistics do not prove particularly helpful to increasing their understanding of others. Second, as new teachers, our students may be especially susceptible to self-criticism believing they are not making a difference. Many experience pessimistic discourse surrounding teaching and schools, an experience that seems to intensify their feelings of inadequacy. Such experiences appear to increase their sense of helplessness and inevitability, or fatalism, when it comes to altering our world’s current conditions (Greene, 1988).

Our students’ feelings of despair concern us deeply. However, we are equally distraught by the continuing ignorance of the causes underlying our most pressing social and environmental problems. Thus, we have sought to address these issues, including our limited social understanding and our students’ growing sense of helplessness, through informed action. Ayers, Mitchie, and Rome (2004) provide valuable insights into many of these conditions poignantly describing the nuances required to see pre-service teachers and interns fully and fairly:

Many of them understand all too well that the system is pathological, but dismantling it, at least for the moment, is beyond their reach. So they do what they can, taking small steps, creating little disruptions, trying all the while to keep their eyes on the bigger picture, the road ahead. (p. 128)

In order to fuel a collective change, we educators need incremental change to inspire us—pockets of peace and pathways of resistance—rather than taking for granted all who are doing “small” things (Ayers, Mitchie, & Rome, 2004). Parker Palmer (1998) posits the only way out of the tangles of teaching is to go further in. One way to go further in is through the arts.

**Using the Arts to Promote Understanding and Hope**

Hope is desperately needed in contemporary society (Freire, 1994). Scholars such as Maxine Greene (1988, 1993) and Cornell West (1997) have associated various forms of movement and hope. Greene (1988), for example, explores the complex relationships between the opening of physical, social, psychological, and dialogical spaces and the imagining and enacting of new possibilities. West explains that many African Americans whose ancestors arrived on the continent in chains have also historically associated movement with hope. A small action (of mind or body) can be a prelude to a larger action which can lead to greater action still. The critical moment, the vital line of demarcation, is between moving and not moving. Without the initial impulse and tentative, first step, no subsequent action can follow. This realization has been—and continues to be—essential in the ongoing struggle for freedom. It is a means of actively challenging paralyzing either/or thinking whose logic suggests we must do everything at once or nothing at all.
Soviet activity theorist Alexei Leont’ev (1981) posits that deep interconnections exist between various forms of human activity, that these differing activities often exist on a kind of continuum, and that they often unfold in rough sequence with the effect of satisfying human needs that are not always evident at the onset of the sequence. Unlike Western constructs that often build one-on-one correspondences between actions and outcomes, Leont’ev insists that human actions do not always satisfy immediate and observable needs. Rather, varying forms of action (psychological, physical, social/collaborative, symbolic, sustained) contribute to the eventual fulfillment of needs that may not be seen or even initially imagined at the sequence’s onset. This view challenges narrow conceptions of cause/effect relations as well as the prevailing assumption that social conditions can be directly traced to individual, physical activities.

Incorporating the arts into teacher education is one means of promoting not only a deeper social understanding but also a genuine sense of hope. Although the arts are difficult to define, they can be characterized as “imaginative activity utilizing various media for expression and critique” (Houser, in press). Three additional characteristics are especially relevant to our argument. First, because they deal in metaphor and paradox, the arts challenge one’s single-vision perspective thus helping disrupt the paralysis often associated with all-or-nothing consciousness (Perry, 1970). Second, because the arts have the capacity to stimulate emotion, engaging with the arts can promote a deeper appreciation of others’ thoughts and feelings (Eisner, 1991). Third, because the arts draw upon such active impulses as imagining, intending, composing, and creating, they can help generate a genuine sense of movement and hope.

One characteristic of the arts that enables them to help promote hope and understanding is the fact that they often deal in metaphor and paradox. To demonstrate this capacity, we use lyrics from Mississippi Slim, Big Bill Broonzy and Sonny Boy Williamson’s musical collaboration: *Blues in the Mississippi Night* (Lomax, 1990). Here, we call upon the words of Memphis Slim to demonstrate how paradox can open the listener to meanings that transcend binary logic.

> You got to cry a little, die a little.
> Chorus: O life is like that,
> Well, that’s what you’ve got to do,
> Well, and if you don’t understand,
> Peoples, I’m sorry for you.
> Sometimes you’ll be held up, sometimes held down,
> Well, and sometimes your best friends don’t even want you around,
> You know…(chorus)
There’s some things you’ve got to keep, some things you gotta repeat,
People, happiness, well, is never complete,
You know...(chorus)

Sometimes you’ll be helpless, sometimes you’ll be restless,
Well, keep on stragglin’, so long as you’re not breathless.

(Memphis Slim, recorded by Lomax, 1990, p. 16)

Although at first one identifies a classic blues theme—life is associated with pain—upon closer inspection nuanced meanings begin to appear: in order to be fully alive, one must understand the pain life can hold; in order to live, one must die a little (“and if you don’t understand, Peoples, I’m sorry for you”). The power is in the paradox. Why should anyone feel sorry for another who does not understand that “you got to cry a little, die a little,” and how in the world can dying lead to living? Yet, the listener does understand. Understanding the paradox is the point. Uses of metaphor and paradox provide access to meaning that transcends binary logic. This profound observation stands in sharp contrast to the binary logic of Western society through which one associates might with right, force with virtue, and ignorance with bliss. Far from ignoring challenges, these musicians fold challenges into the fabric of life insisting that coping with the blues is part of what it means to live in the first place. Because the arts deal in paradox, they challenge Western cultural predispositions toward single-vision and binary logic disrupting the paralysis of all-or-nothing consciousness (Perry, 1970).

We use these musicians’ collaborations within the context of a multidisciplinary examination of factors influencing Black migration out of the South between the 1920s and 1950s. After viewing physical and political maps, reading original letters and poetry of the time, and analyzing photographs of the working and living conditions of Black Americans in the United States, students are asked to listen to the opening portion of Lomax’s compilation. We typically pause after the last stanza cited above and ask our students: “What do they mean, ‘You got to cry a little, die a little and if you don’t understand, I’m sorry for you’? Why should they feel sorry for us if we don’t understand?!” There has not been a single occasion in which multiple students have not demonstrated that they clearly understand—and are moved by—these paradoxical lyrics.

In addition to dealing in paradox, the arts often involve the use of metaphor. Such is the case with Hyemeyhosts Storm’s (1972) fascinating analysis of Native American stories and perspectives in Seven Arrows. Storm begins by asking readers to imagine they are sitting in a circle observing an object located at the center. He notes that what we see in the object is a reflection of ourselves. Our observations can tell us about our physical position in the circle, our past experiences (or lack of experiences) with similar objects, the webs of relations we associate with
such objects, and so forth. Storm asserts that the circle is the universe and that every object (subject, idea, or relationship) we contemplate is a mirror reflecting the various aspects of our personal identities.

We use Storm’s work in our social studies classes. After reading his introduction, we ask our students to sit in a circle. Placing such objects as coffee cups, keys, a water bottle, or motorcycle helmet in the center of the circle, we ask simply: “What do you see?” We encourage our students to contribute spontaneously and as often as they would like building upon others’ observations if they wish. After exhausting the possibilities, we pause and ask our students to consider the ways in which their many observations might mirror not only their personal identities and experiences but also our class communities’ emerging identities. Toward the end of the exercise, we ask a final question: “Which of these numerous responses was best?” The students immediately recognize the inappropriate nature of the question that calls for a reductionist assessment of a holistic experience. We conclude by asking them carefully to consider the kinds of questions they intend to ask their own students.

Another characteristic of the arts we work to identify is their capacity to evoke emotion (Anzaldua, 1999). In our social studies classes, we look to Eisner (1991) who argues that the emotion the arts stimulate can lead to empathetic understanding of the human condition not expressed through scientific or didactic means of communication:

Different forms of representation provide different kinds of meaning. What one is able to convey about a society through a literal or quantitative form of sociology is not the same as what is sayable through a novel.... What all of the arts have in common is their capacity to generate emotion, to stimulate and to express the “feel” of a situation, individual, or object.... Feeling is a part of all human encounters and all situations and objects. When the feeling tone is incongruous with the content described, understanding is diminished. (1991, pp. 552, 554)

Without feeling it would be impossible to care about the obstacles we face, and genuine concern must precede the imagination of alternative possibilities (Greene, 1988). Because the arts express emotion, they can help us feel people and life. Today, in an age of heightened specialization and technical proficiency coupled with increasing insensitivity toward social and cultural “others,” such scholars as Parker Palmer (1998) advocate educational approaches that embrace our capacity to feel the “largeness of life” (p. 5).

To demonstrate the arts’ power to incite emotion, we utilize Kathe Kollwitz’ chilling image, *Death Seizing a Woman* (1934), representing the victims of genocide during Hitler’s regime (Figure 1). Kollwitz’ message is unnervingly personal. Although Death, who eventually claims us all,
hunches over the woman’s shoulder, the woman’s panic is not for herself alone. Greater still is the terror she feels for her child to whom she desperately clings, unwilling to leave her behind. Works like these can help put a human face on such activities as war and aggression that have become increasingly glamorized not only in movies and video games but on the evening news.

Figure 1. Kathe Kollwitz. 1934/35. Death Seizing a Woman. Lithograph. Collection of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, reproduced by permission.

Other emotions pre-service teachers experience involve feelings of helplessness, uselessness, inevitability, and despair. Many seem resigned to the belief that perceived conditions are inevitable ones—are “just the way things are” (Greene, 1988). Such emotions are reflected in George Tooker’s (1956) Government Bureau, in which faceless patrons dejectedly wait their turn in line to meet with impersonal government employees who, in turn, despondently await the end of the day (Figure 2). In their Sounds of Silence, Simon and Garfunkel (1965) raise such despondency to even greater heights: people “talk without speaking” and “hear without listening.” No one “dares disturb the sound of silence,” and “silence like a cancer grows….”

Figure 2. The Government Bureau. 1956. George Tooker. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY, reproduced by permission.
A third characteristic of the arts we work to identify is their capacity to invoke such active impulses as intending, imagining, creating, and actualizing. Such impulses are needed to generate a sense of psychological movement which may ultimately be manifested in collaborative social transformation (Leont’ev, 1981). At their core, artistic processes are generative in nature (Anzaldua, 1999; Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1991; Greene, 1995). Insisting that humans have a basic orientation toward growth, development, unfolding, and actualization, Aristotle held that a fundamental human trait is the tendency to realize one’s innate potential. Since the arts are based upon similar impulses, they are capable of stimulating physical, social, and psychological movement within and among their observers. For example, 19th-century Impressionist painters imagined alternative representations of light, movement, and color. Similarly, one can describe music as sound in time (Greenberg, 2007); the performing arts as unfolding in time, and poetry as opening one to envision change over time, as in Robert Frost’s (1916/1990) famous poem, “The road not taken.”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
Way,
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
I—
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
(pp. 212–213)

These evocative words generate a profound sense of identification on at least two levels. Many readers immediately identify with the unseen author, a specific person faced with a difficult choice—a person who reflects on the unanticipated consequences of a momentous decision and can never know what “might have been” had he chosen otherwise. However, it is also possible to extend identification in a more abstract and generalized way: across cultural, geographical, and even historical boundaries to unnamed others who have experienced similar emotions in the process of making difficult decisions. In the case of “The road not taken,” Frost uses an illuminating metaphor to represent simple yet profound aspects of human existence. His sensitive execution helps “release the imagination” (Greene, 1995) evoking an almost-visceral identification with others who have similarly struggled with difficult choices and lived to celebrate profound results. Again, because the arts are based on active impulses, they are capable of fostering the
psychological movement required for social transformation, and social transformation provides a basis for hope. As earlier noted, the critical moment is between moving and not moving. The point is that we must begin simply by doing something and then incrementally build upon our movement and energy.

Resistance and opposition can lead to the realization of new possibilities including substantially-altered structural relationships. Given the nature of the challenges we face, how might we more-consciously resist either/or logic to imagine and enact better alternatives? Among other things, social transformation requires a change of consciousness toward existing political and economic arrangements. One way to change public consciousness is to acknowledge the contributions of those previously-excluded from the official histories of societies and nations. This is what Judy Chicago (1979) expresses in her gigantic installation, *The Dinner Party* (Figure 3). In their 48-foot, triangular construction, Chicago and her colleagues created place settings for thirty-nine prominent women in history and mythology whom, they argued, had been written out of the historical record.

![Figure 3. The Dinner Party. 1979. Judy Chicago. Brooklyn Museum. Brooklyn, NY.](image)

Such examples as these 39 women are particularly poignant to our students, most of whom are white, middle-class women like Chicago. Observers are attentive to this metaphor's ironic juxtaposition between domestic elements and grand-scale social critique. Chicago’s choice is so effective because one typically does not view dinner parties as sites of social critique. Many of our students have experienced feelings of pain based on social exclusion and lack of recognition. As we begin to delve into the possible causes of past and present patterns of exclusion, our
students cite personal experiences and express increased concern for the children with whom they will soon work.

We frequently couple such images as *The Dinner Party* with discussions of such complementary resources as Jean Kilbourne’s (2000) insightful video presentation *Killing Us Softly* and John Berger’s (1972) analyses of the portrayal of women in art in his book *Ways of Seeing*. Among other things, Berger addresses the burden of dual consciousness those who are simultaneously observer and observed experience. These combined resources often trouble and intrigue our students, and they frequently engage in lively conversations about the persistence of gender inequalities and how they might begin to address these inequalities within their own classrooms.

Our last example of how the arts contribute to structural transformation is John Steinbeck’s (1939) epic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which we read and discuss in our social studies foundations courses. This novel provides a richly-contextualized portrayal of one Oklahoma family’s plight as sharecroppers during the Great Depression/Dust Bowl era. Utilizing vivid metaphor, nuanced detail, and keen sensitivity to the conditions of poor, White Americans, Steinbeck provides a stark contrast between the human needs of working-class families, the mechanistic-efficiency of the existing economic system, and the greed and fear of those who profit from conditions they cannot help but know are unjust.

Briefly, in Steinbeck’s *Grapes of Wrath*, the Joads, like other families in the Oklahoma Dust Bowl, flee before the bulldozers arrive and head for the promise of a new life in California. Rather than finding better opportunities, the Joads are confronted with new forms of greed, rejection, and unexamined privilege. Demonstrating remarkable courage and a tenacious desire to preserve the family, the Joads come to realize that only through solidarity can groups of ordinary people hope to change their material conditions and preserve their humanity, and only through collective opposition can they begin to transform the system itself.

Maxine Greene (1988) argues that the plight of the Joads represents a sort of collaborative existentialist project, a critical coming-to-consciousness that can only have unfolded as the result of a shared search for—and opposition to—the social and historical causes of oppression. Here psychological movement associated with the construction of consciousness originates as a response to material conditions, is elaborated through substantial and sustained social interaction, and is ultimately manifested in collective activity intended to resist and transform the system itself.

Similarly, Freire (1970) contends that many displaced victims in society have been able to sense, but never fully articulate, the nature of
the conditions they face. Steinbeck’s (1939) petulant Muley Graves exemplifies this inability fully to articulate the nature of the conditions one faces when she confronts the hapless drivers of bug-like tractors, owned by nameless, faceless, but all-powerful corporations:

> Well, the guy that come aroun’ talked nice as pie. “You got to get off. It ain’t my fault.” “Well,” I says, “whose fault is it? I’ll go an’ I’ll nut the fella.” “It’s the Shawnee Lan’ an’ Cattle Company. I jus’ got orders.” “Who’s the Shawnee Lan’ an’ Cattle Company?” “It ain’t nobody. It’s a company.” Got a fella crazy. There wasn’t nobody you could lay for. Lot a the folks jus’ got tired out lookin’ for somepin to be mad at—but not me. I’m mad at all of it. I’m stayin’. (p. 61)

Conversely, others, prodded by a desperate need to understand their circumstances and a willingness to engage in critical reflection, eventually begin to unravel the conditions that ensnare them. Steinbeck’s protagonist, young Tom Joad, recently released from prison, has managed to survive through keen observation, keeping his nose out of the business of others, and simply “puttin’ one foot in front a the other” (p. 223). Joining his family in the move to California, Tom notes the searching reflection of the strange Reverend Casy and the dogged tenacity with which Ma tirelessly resists the disintegration of the family. Unable to deny the fruits of Casy’s relentless “figgerin,” Joad gradually begins to perceive the powerful mechanisms, both gross and subtle, by which the “Okies” are kept subservient first in Oklahoma and finally in California.

In the end, Tom must choose between maintaining a philosophy of personal survival (“I know—I know. But—I ruther not. I ruther jus’—lay one foot down in front a the other.” p. 227) and continuing the work of Reverend Casy who has concluded that only through critical reflection and collective opposition can working-class people hope to resist and transform the conditions of their own domination. Here is perhaps the clearest parallel to the current situation in education: although it may be preferable to mind our own business, only through honest analysis and collaborative activity can we hope to transform our present conditions. Such ideas are at the heart of the social studies’ emphasis on preparing critically-conscious citizens capable of working together to ensure not only the rights of individuals but also the greater good of society at large.

The structure of Steinbeck’s plot is strikingly similar to the four stages of social movement Palmer (1998) describes near the end of *The Courage to Teach*. The first stage in this process our students discuss prior to their internship is to make a personal decision to live “divided no more.” The next step is to join with others of like mind in what Palmer calls “communities of congruence.” Here, people who have decided to
live by new rewards find one another and gain strength in community. Next, Palmer suggests the need to “go public”—to be open and honest with others about the alternative plan. Going public provides an important means of checks and balances as well as an opportunity to work through potential weaknesses. Finally, as new habits begin to take hold, it is important to celebrate the heart’s reward, to appreciate the fruits of one’s labor, especially the feelings of satisfaction we experience as integrated selves. In this way the movement will not end but will instead continue to gain strength and momentum.

Our experiences suggest it is important to explore what has been in order more effectively to comprehend what should be and more creatively to imagine what could be. The arts can tap personal feelings and creative impulses while also generating a deeper and more comprehensive appreciation of others’ feelings and concerns. Moreover, since various forms of human activity (psychological, physical, and social) are interrelated, what begins as personal impulse can ultimately generate collective action needed for structural transformation. It is in this sense that movement and hope are inextricably bound. We believe it is entirely possible to be informed but not bound by the insights we gain. This possibility speaks not only to the creative nature of the arts but also to the dynamic impulses at play in such diverse and democratic societies as our own.

References


**Endnotes**

1 Transforming social “reality” is neither a mysterious nor unobtainable objective. Not only is structural social transformation possible, it is inevitable, and there are identifiable mechanisms by which the process occurs (Hewitt, 1991; Mead, 1934; Wertsch, 1991). The question is not whether humans transform their environments but in which direction, for which purposes, and with which levels of clarity and control regarding the causes and consequences of our actions (Greene, 1988).

2 The arts evoke emotion because they are immediate or at least less mediated by rational thought than are other forms of communication. As empirically-based forms of expression, the arts appeal more directly to the senses (Eisner, 1991; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2002; van Halen-Faber & Diamond, 2002).
“Progressive” Education in Baroque Italy: Philosophy of Education at the Carracci Academy

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Introduction

In Vasari’s classic Life of Michelangelo, the biographer writes of Michelangelo:

The benign ruler of heaven mercifully turned his gaze to the earth, and seeing a vast wasteland of artistic effort…took it upon himself to save us from these errors by sending a spirit into the world who would be able to show what was perfection in the art of design by his use of line, contour, light, and shadow in order to achieve the effect of relief.¹

Conversely, in his biography of Ludovico, Agostino, and Annibale Carracci, originally published in 1678, Carlo Cesare Malvasia begins with this quotation from Vasari and then makes the remarkable claim that these words better fit Ludovico Carracci than Michelangelo. It was Ludovico Carracci who was sent from God to correct our artistic errors and show us perfection, not Michelangelo.

The claim is remarkable, if not astonishing, for two reasons. One, Michelangelo is almost universally-admired as one of the greatest artists of all time, whereas only the tiniest fragment of the population has ever even heard of Ludovico Carracci. Consider that Ludovico was neither the greatest Bolognese artist nor even the greatest in his own family. Even within that family context, he is generally considered only the third best artist. Cousin Agostino was second, and Agostino’s little brother Annibale was widely-deemed first.

The second remarkable thing about Malvasia’s claim about Ludovico’s importance was the fact that it was based not so much on Ludovico’s work as an artist, but rather his work as an art teacher. When else in western history has a teacher of something been more celebrated for his genius than a doer of that thing? Malvasia’s claims about the greatness of Ludovico’s achievement are a rare testimonial to the cultural importance of teaching, and it invites a more careful look at the Ludovico’s school.

The school which Ludovico Carracci helped found (with the two cousins mentioned) in 1582 was in Bologna, originally called the “School
of the Desirous” (those who want to learn), but was later renamed the “Academy of the Progressives” (Accademia degli Incamminati). Incamminati literally translates as those who have “set off.” For those of us in the academic disciplines of education, incamminati’s common translation as “progressives” is particularly provocative. Despite its official name, the school was routinely (and more prosaically) referred to as the Carracci Academy.

The Academy was in those days, like other art academies, less a formal institution than a kind of club, formed around one or more established artists. Students gathered to study, to practice, and to learn from each other. This informal, amorphous identity is reflected in the fact that followers of Annibale in Rome are often considered a part of the Carracci Academy though they may have never set foot in Carracci’s studio in Bologna. The school, informal entity that it was, survived and thrived even after the deaths of Agostino, then Annibale, only closing after the death of Ludovico in 1619.

Given Malvasia’s great praise of Ludovico and his school, as well as the reputations of its alumni, one might well wonder what made it so successful in changing the artistic values of the culture. Even a cursory reading of the literature about the school might suggest at least three reasons for its success: its emergence at just the right moment in art history; the extraordinary individual and cumulative talents of its three main teachers, and the actual pedagogy of the school itself. In this essay we focus on the latter, and particularly on four factors that seem especially important to the character of the school: an informal, playful environment; a driven work ethic; a mix of diverse personalities and temperaments among the teachers and students, and a shared aesthetic vision.

The Playful Learning Environment

The social atmosphere of the Carracci Academy was quite informal, playful, and warm. Carracci biographer Giovanni Bellori, writing for his work first published in 1672, attributes this atmosphere in no small part to Annibale, whose demeanor often struck those who first met him as melancholy (Annibale did in fact suffer from periodic episodes of debilitating depression), but was generally perceived by those who knew him well as very funny routinely pulling pranks on his brothers, students, and clients.

This light-heartedness he built into his teaching, mixing his “jests and pleasantries” with the most serious study of art. He was not only witty with words but with his pen originating “the delightful burlesque portraits…of figures altered according to their natural defects, making us laugh by their ridiculous likeness.” In fact, Annibale Carracci is often considered the inventor of the caricature. He also developed the habit of giving a human likeness to animals or even inanimate objects. Among
the other “merry jests” Bellori attributes to him are drawings that seem to be what we now call cartoons.4

Bellori tells us that Annibale “dressed and lived respectably and with cleanliness” but was too distracted by matters of art to pay much attention to his beard and collar. Malvasia gives a less-generous depiction of Annibale indicating he “took little pride in his appearance, was never very clean, and was carelessly dressed, with his collar askew, his hat pulled down haphazardly any which way, his cloak awkwardly draped, and his beard unkempt.” Malvasia adds he “seemed like some eccentric philosopher from ancient times.”5 This was a sore spot with Agostino who was taken with the ostentation of the courtiers with whom he liked to associate.

Annibale’s casualness of style carried over to his teaching. When one new student arrived “all dandified and decked out” and asked Annibale for some drawings to copy, the teacher observed the youngster closely then went to his room to draw. There he drew from memory a caricature of the student ridiculously exaggerating his dandified appearance. He gave the drawing to the youngster who apparently got the point and changed his habits.6

To the modern reader some of these kinds of lessons from Annibale seem pointed, if not cruel, but Bellori did not interpret them so. He said of him, “The love with which he instructed his pupils was very great. He taught them not so much with words as with examples and demonstrations, and he treated them with so much kindness that he often neglected his own works.”7

This emerging picture of Carracci pedagogy is a striking contrast to the art education of his day. Twentieth-century art historian A. W. A. Boschloo argues that whereas art instruction elsewhere in their day tended to be rule-driven and artificial, the Carracci Academy’s instruction was based upon the “deeply rooted conviction, of fundamental importance for their life and thought, that the artist must not cut himself off from the outside world, either in his work or his daily life.”8

At other schools, “An elite group displayed its education and distinction by listening to profound discourses on various subjects and eruditely discussing cultural matters.”9 The Carraccis’ by contrast focused their students’ lessons primarily on actually drawing and painting. That is not to say that the curriculum at the Carracci Academy was narrowly utilitarian, a fact to which I shortly turn.

The Carraccis used a variety of tools and techniques in their teaching and gave students significant choices in how they would pursue their art. Boschloo writes (summarizing the conclusions of his predecessor, Bodmer) that the Carraccis did not confront students with
standard examples and elaborate theories, but “let them look and work at everything that they could see and wanted to see with their own eyes.”\textsuperscript{10} He further argued that such an attitude and such freedom were rare in an academy during the latter half of the sixteenth century.

**Work Ethic**

In modern educational thought, a playful learning environment and a vigorous work ethic are often assumed to be conflicting educational ideals, but the Carracci Academy saw no contradiction between them. Here in this environment of playfulness and foolishness, there thrived an intense work ethic in which students and teachers alike worked long hours on very demanding tasks, not because some punitive master stood over them with rods to beat them, but because of their own passion for the work. Malvasia writes “everyone studied day and night, without regard for pain or discomfort.”\textsuperscript{11} That work included drawing from models, copying from rich collections of drawings by masters, studying anatomy through learning names of bones and ligaments, the examination of live models, as well as actually dissecting cadavers.\textsuperscript{12}

**A Diversity of Teaching Styles**

While Annibale’s playfulness and informality may have set the dominant tone of instruction at the Academy, his kinsmen did not slavishly follow his pedagogical style. Agostino was a broadly-educated intellectual, gifted not only with visual talent but verbal. He was strongly disposed not only to modeling his considerable artistic skills for the students, but also lecturing to them about the theoretical and technical aspects of art, as well as all manner of intellectual pursuits of his day. Writes Bellori,

> From childhood, burning with a very ardent love of learning, [Agostino] set out on the pursuit of the sciences and the arts. He dedicated himself to mathematics and philosophy and from them he went to rhetoric, poetry, music, and other liberal arts, in all of which his rare intellect appeared.\textsuperscript{13}

The fact that he eventually developed his exceptional artistic talent did not lead him to abandon these other intellectual pursuits, but rather he continued, as a professional artist, to spend all of his spare time on literary scholarship. Indeed, Bellori argues that Agostino’s broad intellectual abilities were a major benefit to the school attracting intellectuals from all manner of disciplines to the school to study art.\textsuperscript{14} Agostino was known as a well-rounded intellectual, a talented poet, a gifted lecturer, and a fine specimen of what became known as a “renaissance man.” In his teaching he not only used his broad talents to lecture, but in praise of his best students, he often played the lyre and sang songs he wrote celebrating their works.\textsuperscript{15}
While Agostino may have had a more direct and verbal style of teaching, the overall tone seemed to match Annibale’s warmth. At his funeral oration, Lucio Feberio described Agostino as “gentle in action, graceful in speaking, amusing in conversation, grave in discourse, flexible in disputes, subtle in questioning…courteous in teaching,” and “modest in correcting.” Ludovico was similarly described as a warm-hearted and student-friendly teacher. Malvasia describes the overall atmosphere of the school as having a “general spirit of play” and indicates that in their studio there was “always so much joking, wit, gossip, and lively exchange that the difficulties of the discipline seemed lightened by the constant merriment.”

On occasion Agostino’s literary pursuits and gift for verbal instruction were cause for tension between his brother and him, for Annibale considered words an inferior tool in the teaching of art. In any case, the differences between these two teachers may have served to enrich the learning environment and provide a variety of approaches from which students of different temperaments may have benefited. In fact, Malvasia suggests there sometimes occurred between Agostino and Annibale not only debates about their individual artistic practices, but also debates about the school’s working methods and approach to difficult artistic problems. These debates were typically brought to a close (sometimes late in the night) by appealing to Ludovico, who played the part of an oracle.

While the Academy focused heavily on drawing and painting from models, the school did not omit the theoretical from its work. “Certain hours were set aside for the study of theoretical questions, perspective and architecture, all of which Agostino was especially adept at demonstrating in condensed form in a small number of maxims.” Boschloo argues that it may well have been “precisely because of the many-sidedness of its education, both practical and theoretical, that the young Accademia quickly became the center of interest.”

The Shared Aesthetic Vision

One might wonder how teachers with such different temperaments and pedagogical styles could “team teach” effectively, and the answer to that problem may lie in the fact that despite their temperamental and pedagogical differences, they shared a unified aesthetic vision. That shared vision is reflected in the way that they on occasion painted upon each others’ works in ways that were undetectable to the untrained eye. Ludovico often “corrected” the early works of his younger cousins, and on the ceiling frescos in the Gallery Farnese, Annibale’s Roman masterpiece, Agostino did extensive work when Annibale’s depression got the best of him. Machati wrote that when the three Carracci “worked together in a location where one could see the works of all
three of them all at once and side by side, one could clearly recognize something distinctive and particular to each painter, but when it came to judging the comparative excellence of their works, men of discrimination were unable to find any difference between them.”

It is a remarkable claim, especially given the fact that early in their careers, Agostino and Annibale were characterized as stylistic opposites. Agostino was diligent, studious, timid and cautious, whereas Annibale was quick, impatient, bold, and effortless in his approach to art. Writes Boschloo, “In spite of differences in character, the Carracci knew themselves to be linked by common ideals, which they propagated as one man.” He adds that there was no division of roles, but each acted spontaneously to “acquire his own task.”

This shared aesthetic, it should be noted, was not one generally shared by the artistic community of their time, but was their distinctive vision, one for which they were often criticized by the art establishment and about which they were sometimes insecure and defensive. They sometimes doubted whether their distinctive manner of painting was a good one. Going against the current was a risky move, and Agostino himself once said to Ludovico, “Let’s hope to God that in our way of painting, which is so attached to nature, we aren’t making some terrible blunder.” Ludovico answered, humbly acknowledging that he lacked Agostino’s oratorical skills and broad education, but insisting that “common sense assures me that we are on the right track.” He adds, “If only one of us had adopted this way of working, one might well have doubts about it, but I simply can’t believe that an equally corrupt taste could exist in all three of us.” Annibale listened to this discussion for a while without comment then burst into speech saying, “But let us carry on, let us continue and have no doubts; if we are not appreciated today we will be some day.” Indeed, Annibale’s ceiling frescos in the Gallery Farnese may be second only to Michelangelo’s Sistene Chapel.

Their conversation concerning the rightness of their vision is reported as having occurred before they opened the Academy. Once the Academy opened, its immediate growth, the enormous success of its students, and its fame among men of letters surely eased their fears. Writes Malvasia, “The combination of Ludovico’s learned foundation in art, Agostino’s labors, and Annibale’s passionate involvement that the academy offered for the public good had an almost magical appeal and attracted people in large numbers.”

Attracting large numbers of students is in itself a notable achievement in the history of education. Traditional education during the Baroque period, as in many centuries before and since, was a toilsome and unpleasant affair. Theologians from St. Augustine in the fifth century to John Calvin in the sixteenth emphasized the idea that human beings (particularly children) are inherently evil and lazy and need
to be controlled and punished to get them to do anything worthwhile. The Biblical warning, “Spare the rod and spoil the child,” was a typical sentiment in much educational history, and schools were often places of fear and punishment. 

In such an educational world, just two decades and 283 miles removed from Calvin’s Geneva, it is no wonder that the lighthearted atmosphere of the Carracci Academy was so appealing. In light of that, its dramatically different pedagogy may strike us as distinctively modern. Indeed, it evokes a twentieth-century movement with which it (coincidentally) shares its name. The Academy’s appeal suggests that the Carraccis not only were innovators in their painting aesthetic but also in their pedagogy. In their own age, there are few educational thinkers whom historians recognize for anticipating modern, active, student-centered learning. Notably, the Moravian, John Amos Comenius, who was still a young man when the last of the Carracci teachers died, is the most recognized. Perhaps the history of educational thought should be rewritten to include at least one art school, the Carracci’s Academy of the Progressives.

References


**Endnotes**


3 Bellori 62.

4 Bellori 62.

5 Malvasia 250.

6 Bellori 61.

7 Bellori 61.


9 Boschloo 40.

10 Boschloo 40.

11 Malvasia 118.

12 Malvasia 119.

13 Bellori 91–92.

14 Bellori 93.

15 Malvasia 202 and Bellori 93.

16 Malvasia 198.

17 Malvasia 257.

18 Malvasia 274.

19 While their differences may have enhanced their students’ education in Bologna, they were not always productive. Like many brothers, they fought vigorously, and later in their careers, their collaborations often ended in fights that resulted in their living in different cities.

20 Malvasia 119.

21 Malvasia 120.

22 Boschloo 40.
23 Quoted in Malvasia 302.
24 Boschloo 43.
25 Malvasia 114.
26 Malvasia 115.
27 Malvasia 117.
28 Malvasia 118.
29 The adage is a consolidation of sentiments from Proverbs 13:24 ff.
The Educational Foundations Classroom and Resistant Aesthetic Sensibility

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Introduction

I interpret my teaching responsibility in the only educational foundations course in a university School of Education to involve intellectually exploring outside the confines of an institutionally-defined “best practices” mind-set. This interpretation means exposing future teachers to provocative and intellectually-fertile ideas that stimulate and stretch their creative possibilities. I have an obligation to encourage ways of thinking that help liberate students from pedagogical rigidities resulting from an overexposure to “unimaginative practices, policies, prescriptions, principals, and politicians” (Simpson quoted in Doue & Manning, 2006, p. viii). Although this essay reflects a personal philosophical perspective, there are implications that should have relevance to any teacher’s transformative role—in fact, to the creative possibilities inherent in anyone’s life journey.

If my classroom is to be a liberating and learning-inviting experience, I must continually find ways to refresh my personal educational—and life—philosophy. It is only as I continue an intellectual quest that I am able to challenge students to reinvigorate, rethink, and recalibrate their own ways of thinking, doing, and being. I have a responsibility to encourage—and facilitate—students creatively to map the pathways of their personal intellectual journeys. Each student must search for ways to be an independent, open-minded thinker who resists being pushed into those prescriptive pedagogical boxes that negate imagination, creativity, and authentic selfhood. As I search for some revitalizing intellectual energy with which to invigorate my own thinking processes, my mind returns to words from Kahlil Gibran’s (1929) poetic interpretation of life, The Prophet. I explore the words for new, or renewable, creative possibilities upon which to focus in my reflective moments:

> And a poet said, Speak to us of Beauty.
> And be answered:
> Where shall you seek beauty, and how shall you find her unless she herself be the weaver of your speech? (p. 83)

Where shall we seek beauty? How shall we weave beauty into a teaching-learning conversation? How does beauty penetrate the
dialectical experiences that enhance an authentic learning-community? Where is the beautiful to be found in the intersection of life’s paradoxical realities? These are, of course, philosophical questions. They are questions with axiological implications; questions incorporated into one’s personal philosophy of education. As a philosophical category, axiology asks questions about personal and social values. “Axiology deals with rightness and wrongness and helps us frame a consistent set of values to live by. It encourages us to examine what is beautiful” (Ozmon & Craver, 1999, p. 3). This examination includes an inquiry into what is beautiful in ideas, ideals, relationships, and lifestyles. Axiology is “beauty and decency hand in hand” (Freire, 2001, p. 38). To engage in axiological reflection is to struggle with value-laden questions; questions that require thoughtful, reflective analysis; questions that may have ambiguous answers. What is “the good?” How do we define that which is an ethically- or morally-good action? What is a good choice, a good relationship? Who is a good person?

Axiological inquiry also poses another intriguing question: “What is aesthetically good—how do we define the artistically beautiful?” We, who teach in the area of educational foundations, build upon interpretations of the ancient Greek word, kalon, which encompasses both beauty and goodness (May, 1985, p. 28). There is here a reminder that “at the heart of the aesthetic imperative we discern the moral imperative” (Sartre, 1949, p. 63). We enrich our classroom experiences by way of dialectically-empowered discourses that seek to bring beauty and goodness into a creative partnership. We understand that “human goodness comes within grasp whenever the perceptive powers of a person elicit some deeper quality of meaning, giving discourse a significance and beauty” (Meland, 1953, p. 5). Perhaps we might rephrase Gibran’s earlier-noted poetic imagery to remind us that beauty should be woven into the dialectical fabric of our classroom discussions even as it penetrates our search for meanings in life.

As a philosophical concept, “beauty”—an aesthetic reality—is an expansive possibility. “Beautiful means not only what is aesthetically pleasing, but more often what is morally good and metaphysically true” (Broudy, 1994, p. 20). W.E.B. Du Bois reminds us: “Beauty—its variety is infinite, its possibility is endless” (1983, p. 445). There is physical beauty to be found in people and in things. There is, as we all know and respond to, an exterior beauty; and there is an often-hidden, interior beauty. We may find beauty in the erotically sensuous, the visually pleasing, the emotionally stimulating. We also find beauty in the spiritually uplifting, in rational thought, in ideas, in intellectual reflection; even in the give-and-take of a classroom dialectical experience.

We recognize beauty in a sunset, a human face, a painting, a lingering melody. We also find beauty in a compassionate gesture, a
mother’s love, a social ideal, a sacrificial act, a teacher’s dedication and caring. And, as we reflect on our teaching, we may come to understand that, after all, “education is about beauty. It must first, and above all, be an affirmation of Life” (Covaleskie, 2002, p. 236). It must be an affirmation of the uniqueness of individual possibility. There may even be beauty in idiosyncratic ways of affirming life. There is beauty in those aesthetic experiences that awaken the inner self to new ways of perceiving and interpreting life. Therefore, as we interpret the meaning of “aesthetic,” we understand that

…(a)esthetic experience is not limited to the official art world. It can occur in any aspect of our everyday lives—whenever we take note of, or create coherences that are not part of our conventionalized mode of perception or thought. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 235)

We may find beauty in the unconventionally-artistic, that which is not ordinarily associated with aesthetic quality. An example: I recently heard a television sports commentator describe “an aesthetically-pleasing pass” that raised the excitement level of a football crowd. It is this aesthetic sense that provides a teacher the motivational strength intellectually to wrestle with the fecundity of ideas, and that allows him or her to contemplate the beauty of such ideas. We are reminded “beauty is, admittedly, the work of free contemplation, and with it we enter upon the world of ideas” (Schiller, 1967, p. 185). For the world of teaching and learning, there is intellectual beauty in, as Alfred N. Whitehead (1967) writes, “the beauty of ideas…an aesthetic sense.” (p. 12). It is this aesthetic sense that provides a teacher the motivational strength intellectually to wrestle with the fecundity of ideas, and that allows him or her to contemplate the beauty of such ideas. We are reminded that “beauty is admittedly, the work of free contemplation, and with it we enter upon the world of ideas” (Schiller, 1967, p. 185).

As John Dewey reminds us: “an experience of thinking has its own (a)esthetic quality” (1958, p. 38). To bring that aesthetic quality into our wrestling with ideas is to think beautifully. It is to open the mind to questions that have no prefabricated answers, to possibilities that require imaginative reflection in order to be given birth, to mysteries that challenge our worldview. It is such thinking that gives the individual permission to say, “I’m someone who is able to see the mysteries of life, but not have to fill it with quick answers” (Hecht, 2009, p. 13).

Inquiry into the what, how, and why of “beauty”—to that which constitutes aesthetic quality—should impregnate the curriculum of any teacher education program. We are reminded by Abraham Maslow (1971) that “ultimately, the best way of teaching, whether the subject be mathematics, history, or philosophy, is to make the students aware of the beauties involved” (p. 191). Future teachers should be encouraged to
explore the beauty involved in the teaching experience—the beauty that results from creative, imaginative thinking, from the “art of thinking beautifully” (Schiller, 1967, p. xxvii). We are reminded that: “all true education is education in beauty. Excellence of mind itself is expertise in beauty” (Gurdin, 1990, p. 61). An understanding of the aesthetic in teaching and learning should especially penetrate discussions in the foundations of education classroom. Such penetrations result in philosophical explorations, and such explorations frequently result in an intellectual adventure that leads the explorer into such unknown territories as rugged, cognitive landscapes that expose those who make the journey to new ways of thinking, questioning, and reflecting.

In addition to new ways of thinking, questioning, and reflecting, exposure to rugged cognitive landscapes expose one to new ways of believing, perhaps new ways of being. And so, there are risks involved for those who open-mindedly learn to reinforce the inner-self with aesthetic sensibility. There are risks to one’s personal worldview and risks to belief systems that have been conditioned to conform to rigid patterns of thinking. Such risks come when one unleashes an aesthetic sensibility, and—thereby—sets in motion a creative, imaginative, open-minded, non-conformist interpretation of life and its inevitable paradoxes, ambiguities, and uncertainties.

Even as future educators may be challenged to add “aesthetic sensibility” to the definition of a quality teacher, they should be helped to understand that such an addition to who they are becoming may stimulate the resistant rebel within. They may be emotionally stirred to challenge “the current obsession with effectiveness in education and the repeated attempts to reduce that which should be aesthetic and inspired to the wholly rational, diagrammatic and instrumental” (Pike, 2004, p. 20). Not all future teachers will accept the challenge to engage in the struggle to achieve an aesthetic sensibility, to become a teaching artist who creatively pushes against bureaucratically-designed systems and standardized recipes: “it takes courage to take risks. There is potential that you have to unleash” (Clark, 2009, p. 46).

Not all future teachers are willing to risk the unleashing of an aesthetic-resistant potential. Too many are preparing for a non-resistant professional conventionality. The majority who successfully complete a teacher education program will graduate, and—with conscious, willing intent—seek to conform to externally-imposed expectations, standards, and accountability systems. This is life in the “real” world. This is adaptation to the “what is” of educational and political orthodoxy. In this real world of standardized expectations there is recognition that an aesthetic sensibility, like “imagination, like emotion, is a threat to the status quo. We are not trained to welcome alternative possibilities, but to be afraid of them” (Mann, 1972, p. 33).
It is, however, the responsibility of an educational foundations teacher to be an intellectual catalyst for student aesthetic sensibilities—to “make possible a pluralism of vision, a multiplicity of realities” (Greene, 1978, p. 182). The foundations classroom is where we may encourage a certain creative malcontent. It is where we may metaphorically “open the door”—for all students—to the meaning and reality of a resistant aesthetic sensibility. “If many of the authoritarian and utilitarian trends are to be resisted, it is essential to have a better model of education” (Abbs, 1989, p. xiii). With an aesthetic model, the individual student may then make a personal, existential choice as to whether he or she will, or will not, choose to walk through the door that leads to “the courage to preserve sensitivity, awareness and responsibility…[to be] the creative artist who must fight the god of conformism, as well as the gods of apathy, material success, and exploitative power” (May, 1975, pp. 2–3, 26). In the final analysis, it is a student’s personal decision to walk into a risky adventure. But, by opening the door,

...foundations instructors can make a modest contribution to the overall preparation of vitally-creative teachers by helping our most committed and daring students to survive (as intellectual rebels)...and by encouraging the others to seek more than mere “competence” as teachers. (Reitman, 1988, pp. 110, 111)

It is an expressed hope that every student who completes a teacher-education program will be defined by more than mere competence and technical expertise. But…there is also another, hoped-for possibility. We hope that there will be (even if only occasionally) that vitally-creative, future educator who is forming a resistant aesthetic sensibility. This is the one who is creatively developing a “significant potential toward moving beyond static, frozen, either/or thinking,” and who is engaged in a way “of thinking and living that is more expansive and inclusive” (Forehand, 2006, p. 43) than the pedagogical conformist.

Teacher resistance is...a resistance to the oppressive, imbalanced power constructs of the ever-more centralized, technocratic (therefore dehumanized and alienating), and politically-driven system of public education. (Prendergast et al., 2008, p. 72)

When we add an aesthetic sensibility to a capacity to resist that which is inauthentic to the self, we have—in poetic terms—an educational desideratum, something devoutly to be desired: “learning can be deepened and be made more genuinely human if it appropriates the procedures of both creative artist and critic” (Meland, 1953, p. 81). The artist brings an aesthetic sensibility into his or her work. The artist uses a perceptive awareness of how imagination and reality may exist in a
viable, creative tension. The critic is a resister who challenges efforts to standardize a person’s efforts and results, and—thereby—the very personhood of the individual. The aesthetically-sensitive teacher is by definition a critic, a critical thinker, a creative individual who understands that

…the best thing you can do for yourself [as a teacher], is to think and speak honestly, registering in an unambiguous way your current position, while cultivating a certain openness to change, to the attitudes and approaches of others. Be respectful of every colleague and every student; listen to them, deeply and truly. But speak your piece when the time comes, letting the chips fall where they may. (Parini, 2005, p. 107)

To “speak your piece” is to be existentially authentic. It is to resist the social/political pressure to be a thoughtless conformer to established patterns. It often requires one to be the “dissenting voice (that) is sometimes needed to moderate the din made by the enthusiastic multitude” (Postman, 1993, p. 5). This does not mean one ignores the importance of professional teamwork, or of the ethical implications of loyalty to one’s organizational commitments, or of the teacher’s role as culturally-sensitive role model. It does, however, imply that one must continually think in axiological terms. What do I value? What is the ethically beautiful—the good—in any given situation? What is pedagogically beautiful? How do I resist the outside pressures that cause the teaching profession to prefer technical sophistication to aesthetically inspired innovation? “I could never treat education as something cold, mental, merely technical and without soul, where feelings, dreams, and desires had no place” (Freire, 2001, p. 129). We are, however, faced with a reality:

There is little recognition of teaching as an art form, requiring a carefully honed sensitivity and thoughtfulness, because teachers increasingly become technicians tending to the authorized lessons and administering the prescribed tests. (Miller, 2008, p. 28)

It is in the foundations classroom that future teachers may be exposed to alternative visions of what it means to be a teacher. In such classrooms, “we are concerned with possibility, with opening windows on alternative realities, with moving through doorways into spaces some of us have never seen...that allow for wonder and unease and questioning” (Greene, 2001, p. 44). Here is where the dialectic replaces the didactic, and the question mark replaces the period as a preferred teaching tool. Here is where the seeds of a resistant aesthetic sensibility may be planted and/or nurtured. Here is where:

The “art” of teaching is called to life by those unsettled assemblages of uncertainty that mark so many conversations....
This simple/complex field of conversational interaction is the terrain where the teacher’s “art,” an art of teaching, takes place. (Merod, 1992, pp. 154–155)

This conversational-field makes possible the opportunity for dialectical give-and-take, and for the questioning-uncertainty that flourishes in an aesthetically-sensitive classroom. Here is where aesthetic qualities and resistant tendencies are intellectually massaged into cognitive and emotional wide-awareness.

**Resistant Aesthetic Sensibility**

How does one define aesthetic sensibility and connect such sensibility to the “teacher as resister,” to the one who resists being pushed into a pedagogical box, and to the one who resists the temptation to take the easy road of conformity and standardized expectations? Is a definition in the eye of the beholder, or can it be universalized? Perhaps it is both. Perhaps resistance to authoritarian expectations and demands is inherent in aesthetic sensibility, and is individualized by one who possesses—or seeks—the aesthetic trait.

There are different ways of defining aesthetic sensibility, and of interpreting what it means to be a teaching-resister in the world of educational prescriptions and formulas. But, when we combine reasoned, critical resistance and an aesthetic sensibility in a teacher, we have one who reaches for possibility beyond the bureaucratically-given.

We have the one who resists being molded into someone else’s concept of who and what a teacher should be. We have a reflective thinker who understands that “teaching is not the application of a system, it is the exercise in perpetual discretion” (Barzun, 1991, p. 99). Perpetual discretion requires an open-mindedness that is constantly alert to options, to interpretive possibilities, and to alternative ways of viewing an educational truth. We have one who resists the inauthentic, and seeks an existentially-intellectual freedom, knowing that “it is the aesthetic mode of the psyche which first gives rise to freedom” (Schiller, 1967, p. 191).

It is the artist-teachers, the ones with aesthetic sensibility who, whatever their art, have the ability to conceive and execute tasks with exceptional taste, judgment, and imagination...skill, originality, flair, dexterity, ingenuity, virtuosity...the use of imagination and innovative ways. (Rubin, 1985, p. 15)

Whatever their art! This certainly leaves a place for visualizing teaching as an artistic endeavor. It makes it possible to acknowledge teaching as an art practiced by those who possess an aesthetic sensibility including a critical sensitivity that results in a resistance to society’s continuing demands for standardized expectations and rigid methodologies. Such sensitivities result in resistance to the “constrained existence” about which philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1964) warns us.
To be pedagogically constrained as a teacher is to be molded into someone else’s interpretation of who one should be. We are reminded that, “[te]aching is an art performed by a creative individual...[and] because he is an artist he is not a methodologist” (Bernier & Williams, 1973, p. 396). There is, of course, a significant place for skillfully-applied methods and technical expertise. This is important. But there must be an aesthetically-pleasing, mediating balance. In seeking such a balance there is recognition that: “Teaching is an art, and an art, though it has a variety of practical devices to choose from, cannot be reduced to a science” (Barzun, 1991, p. 4).

It is pedagogical symmetry that the teaching artist—the aesthetically sensitive educator—seeks to bring to the classroom. It isn’t easy. “To nurture inspiring aim and executive means into harmony with each other is at once the difficulty and the reward of the teacher” (Dewey, 1997, p. 221). To bring an artistic-scientific balance into the classroom often requires a creative challenge to the expectations of an educational orthodoxy. It requires “resistance to the manipulative power of ideology” (Freire, 2001, p. 127)—an ideology that tends to negate individual teacher autonomy.

An aesthetic sensibility infuses imagination and colorful thoughtfulness into the classroom’s intellectual atmosphere. It “rearranges the mind so you don’t see things only in black and white” (Smith, 2009). It fertilizes innovative possibility. An aesthetic sensibility does, of course, respond to the need for order, structure, form, artistic standards, and pattern, but it imagines new ways to reconfigure them. It may even stir-up the winds of controversy. Of course, controversy may lead to an educative experience that opens the mind to unsuspected possibilities.

We must keep in mind the fact that “with good teaching as with good art...the point is precisely to provoke...and spur to critical thinking” (Barber, 1992, p. 99). There is no creative classroom learning experience if the provocative elements of artistic sensitivity and aesthetic sensibility are missing. The creative is minimized when “stick to the facts” is the medium and message, and “follow the pattern” is the established rule. We need to remind future teachers: “revolt from established patterns seems to many people impious, but impiety is the normal price we pay for human invention and creativity” (Morris & Young, 1976, p. 226).

Professional impiety in the teaching ranks brings to mind the skeptic, the doubter, the iconoclast, the risk-taker, the one who says: “mystery is OK, and doubts are your friends, welcome them” (Nye, 2006). Future teachers should be encouraged to explore their doubts, and be reminded that “it takes artistry to deal with the mysteries of human existence; it calls for confidence in the magic of human
possibility” (Cousins, 1981, p. 94). Not exactly the image that comes to mind when accrediting agencies seek to define the quality teacher. We do, however, hope for a few impious pedagogues who will serve as barriers to a complete professional obeisance to standardized educational models.

What is starkly missing in discussions about the preparation of teachers is the opportunity to change; the opportunity for future teachers to be exposed to and to grapple with counterintuitive and counter-normative ways of thinking about and engaging with our educational system…. We want (at least some) prospective teachers to “think otherwise,” to “teach against the grain,” “to develop a critical consciousness,” …to question and to decide. (Buttin, 2005, pp. 215, 219)

It is the foundations classroom that is best suited to exposing future teachers to the counter-normative germ. But, even in the foundations classroom, the germ needs an accessible host in order to be activated. This is the student and future teacher who is open-mindedly willing to consider new ways of thinking, doing, and being. It is in the foundations classroom that we have responsibility and opportunity to “make possible a pluralism of visions, a multiplicity of realities. We may enable those we teach to rebel” (Greene, 1978, p. 182).

Not all will accept the invitation to intellectual resistance. It is too easy to conform, too easy to close the mind to alternatives, too easy to subscribe to prescribed directives, too easy to take the road of least resistance. The opportunity to seek creative alternatives may, however, be offered in a foundations classroom that is dialectically open-ended; one with an aesthetically-impregnated intellectual atmosphere.

I believe people learn best when they are nurtured as well as challenged, when they are allowed to explore, experiment, and take risks…the purpose of school is to open doors, open worlds, and open possibilities…. [There is] need to think, explore, imagine, and finally choose a course of action from a dazzling array of possibilities…. [L]earning, if it is to be meaningful, depends on imagination, risk-taking, intention, and invention. (Ayers, 2001, pp. 62–63)

In other words, meaningful education evolves when the teacher and the student creatively cultivate their aesthetic sensibilities. The evolution of intellectual growth involves expanding the capacities to question, imagine, innovate, create, doubt, challenge, perceive with an open mind, and resist attempts to standardize the learning experience. When these aesthetic sensibilities are allowed to germinate, we begin to see the flowering of the artist-teacher who “like the artist in any sphere, attacks his task in the only way he can: he develops his own style, and he expresses himself in his own personal ways” (Axelrod, 1973, p. 9). This
is the educator who is aesthetically existentialist in his or her teaching style; who brings a personal authenticity into the classroom. Here is the one who rebels against those force-fed teaching strategies and outcomes that when implemented, “anesthetizes our souls, severs our connections to our consciousness, and ignores the meaningfulness of students’ lived experiences” (Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, 2000, p. 299).

**Further Exploration of Aesthetic Sensibility**

We may ask: “exactly what is this aesthetic sensibility that encourages a teacher, and/or a student, to be resistant to enforced conformity?” The answer is many-faceted; perhaps it evolves into answers. There have been many attempts to define that which constitutes an aesthetic sensibility. In a personal exploration for an answer—or answers—we become entangled in efforts to distinguish between descriptive terms: aesthetic, artistry, aesthetic intelligence, etc. We reflect on the meaning of awareness, awakeness, perceptiveness, receptivity. Perhaps it is not the answer but the intellectual quest that provides a searching teacher with a fresh perspective on the *what*, *how*—and more importantly—the *why* of teaching.

By searching for an understanding of aesthetic sensibility, the adventurous, questing teacher will grow in resistant, creative possibility. He or she will relate to “the improvisatory nature of pedagogy...that aligns with aesthetic process” (Prendergast et al., 2008, p. 73). The necessity, and the creative adventure, of improvisation are too-often neglected in the education of future teachers. It is in the foundations classroom that an over-reliance on formulaic recipes may be challenged, and opportunities created

…to help the teacher establish herself as an artist, and to grow as an individual, free from misdirected, misinformed, and miseducated people that wish to establish teaching as a mere trade, and produce teachers who are devoid of artistic capabilities, caring, or love. (Doue & Manning, 2006, pp. 105–106)

In aligning with the aesthetic processes the teacher makes a personal connection to the art of teaching, to a way of bringing personal *being* into the teaching-learning equation.

Aesthetic experience is a particular way of *being in the world* which brings enhancement to all that we do. If we take “enhancement of all we do” as a fundamental educative good and can particularize it within aesthetics, then we are justified in seeking ways of bringing about aesthetic experience through our educative endeavors. (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1997, p. 314)

To enhance the teaching/learning experience is to “open up horizons of meaning” (Kestenbaum, 2002, p. 13) and broaden the intellectual vision
of both teacher and student. It is the art of teaching, not the mechanics of teaching, which provides enlarged opportunities for both teacher and student to see beyond the narrow confines of bureaucratically-painted knowledge-horizons. The teacher whose artistic, perceptual view is clarified by aesthetic sensibilities is the one who will “learn to think more subtly, and to live and work with more complexity and fineness of feeling, taste and judgment” (Minnick, 1990, p. 190).

It is by way of a resistant aesthetic sensibility that we are motivated to seek the beautiful in a classroom encounter. The foundations teacher understands that a creative exposure to a philosophical or a political or an historical or a literary idea can have elements of the aesthetic. We know that it is similar to when “we leave a beautiful piece of music with our feeling excited, a beautiful poem with our imagination quickened, a beautiful sculpture or building with our understanding awakened” (Schiller, 1967, p. 153). We might add, when we leave a beautiful educational experience—whatever the academic discipline—with our joy in learning stimulated, our sense of intellectual adventure renewed, our emotions aroused, our search for deeper life-meanings intensified. “Aesthetic experiences…involve us as existing human beings in pursuit of meanings” (Green, 1978, p. 180), and the aesthetic educational experience

...signifies an initiation into new ways of seeing, hearing, feeling, moving. It signifies the nurture of a special kind of reflectiveness and expressiveness, a reaching out for meanings: a learning to learn. (Greene, 2001, p. 70)

This reaching out for meaning, as an aesthetic experience, implies a resistance to forces that would negate significant elements of a learning event. These are elements that if not negated are able to open pathways to the innovative and imaginative, to “originality, flair, dexterity, ingenuity, virtuosity” (Rubin, 1985, p. 156). It is in the foundations classroom that future teachers should have opportunities to challenge the unaesthetic. This challenge is needed because “the unaesthetic could manifest itself as too narrow a focus, or too little opportunity for individual exploration” (Gordon, 1998, p. 4). It is by way of the individual exploration—free of previously-mapped destinations, and fueled by resistant aesthetic sensibilities—that opportunities are created for the teacher to become the teacher-artist instead of the teacher-technician. We should be concerned that, in too many cases, “teachers are technicians who by virtue of the domesticating education they receive in an assembly line of ideas...seldom reach the critical capacity to develop a coherent comprehension of the world” (Macedo, 2000, p. 10). It is by challenging technocratic-domesticating education that “we may make the teaching of the aesthetic experience our pedagogic creed” (Greene, 2000, p. 133).
Education has been identified as “the art of all arts” (Allard, 1982, p. 11), and Elliot Eisner (1985) has challenged the foundations educator with a thought: “the aim of education is the creation of artists—people efficient in the various modes of expression” (p. 27). Here is a recognition that there are modes of pedagogical expression that expand beyond the carefully-orchestrated, and the efficiently-organized. There are modes of expression that are demonstrations of resistant aesthetic sensibilities. Such expressions represent creative challenges to enforced conformity; challenges that flow from those who become “artists of resistance” (Zinn, 2010, p. 6); from those who are resistant to bureaucratically-imposed assumptions about the why, what, and how of education. These expressive ways of teaching—and learning—are “manifestations of aesthetic energy [that flow] from the interaction taking place between the teacher and the students” (Ivie, 2003, p. 308). The foundations of education teacher has a unique classroom responsibility to generate the aesthetic energy that powers intellectual resistance to an “instrumentalist approach to education…(in which) teachers must treat students as empty vessels to be filled with predetermined bodies of knowledge” (Macedo, 2000, pp. 4–5). It is in the foundations classroom that resistant aesthetic sensibilities may be cultivated, and future teachers may be… prepared to confront and not only survive, but resist and flourish within the hostile teaching environments caused by high stakes testing. By flourish, we mean that teachers are able to be authentic in their teaching. (Webb, Briscoe, & Mussman, 2009, p. 16)

We live in an era when it is conformity, not personal authenticity, which is often the fastest, easiest road to professional success. Schools of education are often waystops on such a road. Conformity, of course, is not always negative. Emerson’s (1996) oft-repeated maxim, “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” (p. 265) is significantly circumscribed by the word “foolish.” It is the foolish or thoughtless or talking-parrot-like conformity that raised Emerson’s ire. Our future teachers are being prepared for a system that rewards consistent conformity—conformity that is often necessary but also often foolish.

Educational conformity is certainly not a new phenomenon. Many years ago, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1974), writing with an international understanding, notes “the pattern which we now cultivate and call education, which is conformity to society, is very destructive” (p. 90). Using an aesthetic imagery, Freire (1993) reminds us that: “an absolute consistency would make life an experience without fragrance, color, and taste” (p. 22).

The educational system needs teachers—at least a restless few—who develop and/or intensify a disposition toward a resistant aesthetic
sensibility that is not afraid to challenge foolish consistent-conformity. Such teachers will understand that “the aesthetic tone of the environment has its own effect on students, communicating qualities and awakening capacities that no (conforming) didacticism can” (Miller & Nakagawa, 2002, p. 106). An aesthetic tone establishes a classroom atmosphere in which creativity trumps conformity, the dialectic trumps the didactic, daring trumps documentation, scintillation trumps standardization, questing trumps quizzing, mystery trumps measurement, and self-expression trumps stifled-energy.

It is in an aesthetically-toned foundations classroom that a resistance to enforced, foolishly-consistent conformity may be awakened and channeled into a transformative experience. Here we learn to appreciate “the beauty of confronting one’s emotions with clear vision and a refusal to flinch” (Ebenbach, 2010, p. 65). Here we begin to realize that “aesthetic education…is revolution through beauty” (Greiner, 2003, p. 437). It is a revolt against the tyranny of the unaesthetic. Here we learn to cherish ideas that reveal beauty to us; the beauty that flows from innovation, imagination, resistance, emotion, the unpredictable, intuitive insight, perceptive awareness, questioning critique, multiple perspectives, cognitive transcendence. Here we learn that “we must not be willing to remain passive. We must, instead, seek more shocks of awareness as time goes on…more explorations, more adventures into meaning, more active and uneasy participation in the human community’s unending quest” (Greene, 1995, p. 151). It is in such a classroom that a quest for a philosophical holy grail—the true, good and beautiful in the educational experience—does not get misdirected by the power of bureaucratic certainty.

**Final Thoughts**

I am not part of the traditionally-defined artistic community (although I have—in the past—joined my wife on the stage). I do not sing, dance, paint, play an instrument, compose concertos, write novels, or seriously engage in any of the “traditional” arts. Mostly, I observe, interpret, emotionally interact, and enjoy. I do teach, and I find that the concept of the artist-teacher—the one who weaves beauty into a classroom setting, and in so doing, resists conformist expectations—to be an intriguing notion. I find excitement in the fact that “artist teachers periodically escape the routine by substituting something more novel and ingenious…abandon convention and pursue something off-beat” (Rubin, 1985, pp. 136, 158). I have an awareness that with an aesthetic sensibility, the artist-teacher has the courage to move away from the road most travelled. He or she is able to resist misdirected, bureaucratically-enforced standards and conventions that have “been produced through the formalized and codified system of social-scientized culture” (Harvey, 2010, p. 198).
As previously stated, it is obvious that not all who aspire to the title, “educator,” will bring a resistant aesthetic sensibility to his or her educational experiences. But, it is the foundations teacher who must continually encourage the few who may eventually compose that “lucid vanguard” of which Freire speaks (Gadotti, 1994, p. 59). It is these transformative artist-teachers who will be in the vanguard—small as it may be—of resistance to unaesthetic educational practices. Educators who bring an aesthetic sensibility into the teaching profession are the ones fortified by a creative vision; and by an innovative, provocative, non-conformist disposition. The members of this lucid vanguard are the ones who will bring an aesthetically-empowered challenge to today’s educational orthodoxy. These intellectual rebels understand that self-expression is required: “it is not enough to hold convictions...one must be in a position to defy the world, to be the rebel” (Reitman, 1988, p. 112).

George Counts (1978), an educational rebel with a conviction that became a cause, reminded the nation in 1932 that, “our schools, instead of directing the course of change, are themselves driven by the very forces that are transforming the rest of the social order” (p. 1). Counts challenged teachers to resist these forces and to work toward a “more just and noble and beautiful America” (p. 51). Now, almost eighty years later, his words ring with a prophetic urgency. We need a lucid vanguard of teachers, fortified by a resistant aesthetic sensibility, who go above and beyond corporate-inspired, measurable, competitive mandates and who weave the noble, the just, the good, and the beautiful into their speech and into the classroom atmosphere.

A word of encouragement for the lucid vanguard: “it is important...never [to] give up. Try not to give in to the temptation to wash your hands of conflict, to hide, or to resign. There is a Fellowship for your support” (Boring, 2003, p. 78). The fellowship may be small in number, but it has the power of kalon, the power of aesthetic energy. Carpe Diem.

References


The Bigger Picture: A Critical Look at Art’s Role in Alternative Schools

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Introduction

Alternative schools incorporate a broad range of strategies to address at-risk students’ academic deficiencies and therapeutic needs. Artistic expression is offered as one beneficial strategy for students in alternative schools due to its potential to foster an individual’s self-esteem, assist in developing coping strategies, and increase his or her academic motivation (Boldt & Brooks, 2006). Interestingly, despite the steady relegation of art education programs to the mainstream public schools’ curriculum (and placed “at risk” of being dropped from schools altogether), art remains an important curricular and symbolic component in many alternative schools. For instance, in one Prairie state, policy requires state-funded, alternative schools include art and identifies which art forms (i.e. drawing and painting) are appropriate to teach.

In this article I draw from a larger qualitative study conducted in a Prairie-state alternative school. I describe students’ experiences creating art in a state where alternative school students’ need for art and the state’s policy to create specific art forms collide. Given the socially-constructed nature of the “at-risk” label (Fine, 1999) and policy decisions’ contribution to producing and perpetuating social injustice (Campbell, 2000), the particular strategies educators implement to “help” these students become important ground for social critique. Indeed, a particular set of beliefs about students and their perceived needs (Pillow, 2004) influences the creation and limiting of educational policy options. Pillow argues educators and policy makers should scrutinize which elements are present and absent in educational policy to determine the relation between educational policy and its implementation. Although some state policies fashion art as a tool to emancipate students identified at-risk from their troubled personal and academic backgrounds, I argue such a use of art may reinforce dominant conceptions of at-risk students as broken (Proweller, 2000), playing into the pernicious fallacy that, as poet William Congreve wrote, art “soothes the savage breast” (Congreave, 1697/1967 p. 326). Such a use of the arts threatens merely to function as an opiate to distract, make compliant, or entertain “alternative” students as they move toward degree completion. Moreover, in a policy-driven context, art itself is at risk of becoming...
another standardized component of rules and guidelines organized around a notion of content and competency. If policy shapes the need for art and specific art forms, it potentially detracts from another key element of artistic endeavors—the experience (Dewey, 1934). Adorno (1970/1998) maintains art loses its significance if it tries to create specific political or didactic effects—in other words, art should compel rather than demand change. The potential for art to induce critical reflection that contributes to critical consciousness of one’s social world seems absent in the current, policy-driven context including those standards governing alternative schools.

In the first section of this article, I explain both the study’s methods and theoretical frame of this study. Next, I provide a brief overview of the scholarship on art, alternative schools, and students identified at-risk. Given this body of literature, I raise questions about art’s use in alternative schools, the ways those uses are disconnected from the historical and philosophical intent of art, and the ways it potentially perpetuates the stigma attached to the at-risk label. Third, I describe Second School, the alternative school under study, give narrative snapshots of the participants, and cite data to emphasize the importance of asking critical questions about teaching art in alternative schools. Finally, I conclude with implications for education such as students’ desire for artistic voice and educators’ influence on students’ artistic engagement.

**Overview of the Study**

**Methods**

Combining observations and participant interviews, I conducted this three-month study in an alternative education program for at-risk students. I observed instructional and informal moments during art-based lessons related to participants’ class work in order to gain insight into students’ processes of creating the state-mandated art forms. I noted, for example, participants’ discussions of artwork, choices of media, and engagement during in-class arts activities. I used students’ own art as prompts for interviews. This method provided a means to “find out from people those things we cannot directly observe” (Patton, 2002, p. 339). Participant interviews focused on probing students about their experiences, decisions, and thoughts surrounding ideas on art practices.

The sample population consists of students enrolled for the 2009–2010 academic school year. At the time I began fieldwork, all participants were eighteen years of age or older. Selection criteria included a student’s voluntarily enrollment in the alternative school context under study as well as participation in a class where the teacher used arts education as a teaching strategy or where the arts were a
primary content. Furthermore, I made use of opportunistic or emergent sampling, necessary to identify additional participants. The final sample includes seven volunteers \((n=7)\), three female and four male, four of whom are Caucasian, two of mixed African-American and Caucasian background, and one of southeast Asian heritage. Given the analytic themes emphasized for this article, four of seven participants are represented here.

**Theoretical Framework**

The battery of research examining art’s potential in alternative schools points to factors that fall along a continuum of benefits. This continuum, which ranges from personal to academic issues, highlights what educators construct as students’ needs while framing art as a tool to address those needs. However, a therapeutic or remediative model of art education assumes each student is, in some sense, unwell (Feldman, 1996). Even studies that evoke art’s liberating qualities through student voice tend to fashion art as a tool to achieve a specified end: the rehabilitation or remediation of a troubled or difficult child. Particularly important, given this literature, is to explore, by using critical questions, how students constructed as “unwell” experience art processes within specific policy and curricular contexts such as an art-mandated lesson in an alternative school classroom. Consequently, critical theory provides the framework for this study.

The lens of critical theory is crucial to this project for two distinct reasons. First, one uses critical theory to examine systemic inequities and unequal power relations through the very individuals subjugated to such inequities and relations. Second, by using this frame, I am able to highlight critical characteristics of artistic endeavors, in this case how an individual’s artistic decision-making serves to work against dominant narratives designed to categorize individuals (either to pathologize or to mark as “other”). By utilizing critical theory, I have an opportunity to challenge common, oftentimes stereotypical assumptions (Crotty, 2003) made about at-risk students.

**Art as Liberator, Healer, and Medicine**

Current research supports the vision of art as a beneficial and therapeutic endeavor for students attending alternative schools, and educators have similarly promoted this vision. As a therapeutic endeavor, art improves resiliency and self-esteem (Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2008), and as an academic endeavor, art improves students grades’ and test scores (Boldt & Brooks, 2006; Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2008). As a social justice tool, art gives voice to marginalized population of students (Keiser, 2000; McCormick, 2000; Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2008) while emphasizing the need for alternatives to mainstream education and
expanding perceptions of alternative-school students who are often labeled as at-risk, volatile, and dangerous (Proweller, 2000). Dewey (1934) opines we make art not for the product but for the experience.

A review of the research literature investigating the use of various artistic practices in alternative schools reveals two distinct patterns. While study results generally speak to the positive benefits of artistic practices in alternative schools, researchers differently interpret students’ reasons for using art and results of doing art. For instance, research suggests if exposed to a creative arts curriculum, students show a significant increase in motivation and academic performance (Boldt & Brooks, 2006; Gasman & Anderson-Thompkins, 2003; Gratto, 2003; Stephenson, 2006; Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2008) as well as an increase in self-governing behavior (Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2008).

Boldt and Brooks (2006) contend creativity in the arts helps promote academic achievement through building a sense of community. In their study, students identified as at-risk worked together on painted murals incorporating their personal histories into their artwork. They and others (Montgomery, Otto, & Hull, 2008) find the very process of creation involves self-exploration that can feel both empowering and healing. In another study promoting art as a vehicle for increasing motivation in at-risk youth’s motivation, Gasman and Anderson-Thomkins (2003) discover visual arts classes foster self-discovery, problem-solving skills, and opportunities for positive risk-taking. Specifically, they suggest alternative schools’ art programs can help at-risk youth develop protective factors that foster resiliency (Gasman & Anderson-Thomkins).

If art is beneficial to all, as many educators and educational researchers argue, then a critical question becomes, why preserve it and emphasize it particularly in alternative schools? Pillow (2004) raises useful points for considering this development in educational policy positing the creation, or limits, of educational policy options are influenced by a particular set of beliefs that educators hold about students and their needs. Pillow stresses scholars should address the relationship between policy issues and their subsequent implementation by examining which elements are present and which are absent in educational policy. In the case of arts education in alternative schools, creating art to improve a student’s life imagines a particular population of students who need emotional uplift in ways not-as-essential for mainstream students, further suggesting art fills an emotional need for this population of students.

Curriculum policies, such as those guiding alternative schools, suggest artistic products are beneficial and useful for students identified at-risk, so this belief becomes a default alternative-curriculum model.
Using his "museum conception of art" (Dewey, 1938, p. 33), Dewey argues when art is viewed as something external—on display in a gallery or museum—it detaches the art object from the human experience that helps feed the artistic work's form. Form, in this thinking, is not comprised of style or technique but made up of the raw materials of experience that one draws upon to help inform the internal organization of the work.

In alternative schools, art tends to be assigned a functional and utilitarian value. Educators, researchers, and policymakers have established that students engaged in artistic endeavors create desirable educational outcomes such as positive behavioral and academic improvements. For Adorno (1970/1998), a functional object conjures images of commodity production where art products are churned out on the basis of filling an economic market need. He contends that for art to become truly free or autonomous, artists must reject commodity requirements or, one could extrapolate, in the case of alternative schools a pre-envisioned and prescribed function that dictates art's form, content, and context for which it is created. Indeed, Adorno maintains autonomous art has no social or universal function, but focuses on the particular or subjective individual.

Given the model of art's utility within the alternative school curriculum, Adorno's view on hierarchical conditions in which one creates art raises a critical question: can art be autonomous or fulfill the needs of the individual if created in a hierarchical context that requires and defines it? Such a question raises two distinct interpretations. On one side, one may infer that art's autonomy struggles if such a system as a policy that categorizes and isolates students requires its creation. On the other side, one may infer that art can be categorized autonomous as a response to repressive and constrictive forces, such as students creating specific forms of art as a type of resistance to those forces.

**The Site—Second School**

An alternative school located in a suburban community, Second School's mission statement defines its purpose: "to serve the needs of students [for] whom the traditional school setting is no longer productive and/or appropriate by providing a nurturing learning environment." In particular, Second School serves students who are lacking academic credits to graduate or, as the mission statement indicates, those who need a nurturing learning environment. Potential students either choose to apply to Second School out of choice or the student's mainstream home school refers him or her. In compliance with state policy, students go through an intake process in which their applications are reviewed. Second School faculty members interview each potential student. At any given time, the school serves 60 students ranging that range in age from 13 to 20.
Participants

Lexis—The Writer

Lexis is a 19-year-old female who reports a mixed heritage of Caucasian and African American. She has an eighteen-month-old daughter and is pregnant with her second child. Initially, she indicates she is apprehensive about participating in the study; that all she really has to show are journals written for class. However, when it comes time for our first interview, she presents a stack of file folders to me; they are not journals, but a novel she has been working on. Hesitant at first, she indicates she would rather discuss the novel than her journals.

Aaron—The Musician

Aaron is a soft-spoken, 18-year-old, Caucasian male. With his long brown hair hanging past his neck and an assortment of faded tee shirts advertising such bands as Metallica and Def Leppard, he physically resembles the preeminent rocker. However, he explains that he associates more with grunge rock than anything else as it is more his style. Of writing music, Aaron explains it “has always been a way for me to escape reality.”

Bryce—The Dark One

Bryce is the first individual to volunteer for the study. He is an 18-year-old, Caucasian male. Over the course of the three-month data collection, Bryce’s physical appearance changes. He tattoos his wiry forearms and adorns his face with two piercings below his lips and two metal hooks that protrude from his mouth. He explains his piercings “set off” his personality that others refer to as dark. Although Bryce maintains a few close friends, he cherishes moments away from people so he may draw undisturbed: being away from people provides “…peace, solitude…and no one can bug you.” At home, he can spend up to six hours in solitude working on a particular drawing. He indicates that drawing in solitude provides a “sense of freedom…you can express yourself in any way without people judging you.” In addition, he mentions he writes poetry if a situation calls for it such as feeling stressed.

Brody—The Island Boy

Brody is an 18-year-old male of Timoran heritage. Born in Guam, he was reared there and Hawai’i. Brody’s tough exterior is also reflected in his interview statements. He explains, “…you know, I don’t go out there to cause trouble or look for trouble. If the trouble comes to me then, hey, I’ll be there to stand up for myself, you know.” When confronted with conflict “you stand up for your own and don’t let anyone punk on you.” The gunshot wound battle-scar on his right calf is a visual sign of his toughness, while a tender side emerges through his tough exterior when he respectfully refers to the grandparents who rear him as “Mom” and “Dad.” They mean the world to him.
Appropriate Art and “Making It My Own”

In this section, I offer excerpts from participant interviews that emphasize the importance of critically examining art’s use and role in the alternative school. For the purposes of my argument, I emphasize Brody’s experiences to highlight this section’s analytic theme whereas other participant narratives are provided to frame background knowledge or offer additional context.

The participants’ desire to create unique and meaningful works is one significant theme emerging from this study. However, participants also face various obstacles in creating their works. One potent theme centers on what constitutes “appropriate” art in a school setting and how participants make sense of set norms as they reflect upon their own work. For instance, Lexis explains: “Art in school...they can’t fully express themselves because they have to keep it ‘PG’. Or ‘G’ in some cases…and I know some kids could be in a depressed state and they want to draw maybe a depressed picture…but due to the rules of the school they can’t.” Aaron adds: “…music inside of school is appropriate for what should be heard.” Although Lexis seems to speak broadly about individuals who seek to create for therapeutic reasons, Aaron provides insight into the meaning of the work he creates in school and his ideas and creations being at odds with the school’s guidelines on appropriateness.

In reflecting on his own writing, Aaron explains the difficulties in crafting something he feels offers emotional release for him while still keeping his work appropriately within written school norms that insist on no profanity and the use of appropriate language at all times:

…it’s kind of hard for me to think of different names and stuff...put my feelings in different words...trying to make it appropriate and stuff for other people to...uh, see. Especially a teacher...it goes to the whole appropriate language and behavior in school.

The idea of appropriate art in school clashes with some participants’ emotional ties to their work. Bryce best describes the way in which an individual can learn from his or her own artistic products and experiences: “…you can show how much you’ve evolved over the years if you keep your drawings you’ve had. You can see how much you’ve grown from that. That’s an emotional time.” Art, in this case, can serve as both a catalyst for emotional resolve and a reminder of one’s changing emotional coordinates.

Despite the presence of school norms that confine choice and expression, some participants find ways to make given art assignments their own. For instance, Brody, approaches his history teacher about alternative possibilities to the assigned art project. Although the art project’s topic choice is broad, students’ choice in materials is somewhat
limited. Evidently, the broad nature of the project grants him some leverage with his teacher. The objective of the project is simple: research something about a country and display it through a visual or artistic medium. Brody indicates to his teacher that the available materials—watercolors, tempera paints, and even markers—does not appeal to him, mentioning that while he can work these materials, he will be able to create a far better work if he uses the medium he knows well: spray paint used for graffiti tagging. For Brody, tag art is a source of comfort as he is nostalgic for times when he skittered in the dark and tagged buildings with relatives he hoped to emulate. In addition, Brody decides to re-create the Guam flag, a country he associates with his heritage.

Considering an individual’s race, ethnicity, or behavior may influence an educator’s perception of a student and be used as a means to classify, categorize, and predict which students will be successful and which will fail (Ferguson, 2000; Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2003), Brody is caught within an intriguing dynamic illustrating how race and ethnicity are situated in alternative schools. With African-American boys deemed unsalvageable and criminally-inclined on one end of the spectrum (Ferguson, 2000), and Asians as the model minority (Centrie, 2000) on the other, Brody’s outward physical appearance and ethnic identity might be perceived to be at odds with his inclination towards rap music and graffiti art. In essence, despite the construction of Asians as model-minority, straight-A students, Brody’s complicated heritage and life experiences disrupt this assumption as well as reveal the difficult racisms he faces among youth unfamiliar with such a range of ethnic and racial diversity. For instance, Brody explains:

‘cause a lot of people think I’m Mexican or Chinese. You know, I tell them straight up, nah, there’s a difference between Mexican and Chinese and Island People. And….I’m not Chinese or Mexican…there’s a difference between that and….I’m an island boy. But….people always get mixed up….they ask all kinds of dumb-ass questions….are you…do you eat dog?, this and that…do you eat cat?….nah, nobody eat cat and dog and stuff like that. I eat chicken and duck. I don’t eat no dog or cat.

Using Guam as the content and graffiti-style art as the form (and bias) for this project, Brody accomplishes and produces several things. First, the content, form, and medium open up a learning experience satisfying both the objectives of the assignment and the integrity of his cultural heritage. Second, Brody takes pride in representing his cultural heritage through a technique learned from family members. Brody’s choice of content and materials both reflects his need to address issues of racism, as individuals’ statements go beyond that of incorrectly labeling his ethnicity.
In research examining alternative-school-student narratives, Rymes (2001) finds grammar plays a potent role in crafting the narrative self. In Rymes’ study, the student narratives created for re-examining drop-out stories employ specific grammatical structure, language, and form. Typically, these common grammatical structures minimize the individual’s role in events while maximizing external events. Indeed, with Brody, a specific genre of stories emerges when one considers that an individual’s experience with racism is often ignored as a factor contributing to the “drop-out versus push-out” phenomenon (Fine, 1991) with greater emphasis placed on teachers’ perceptions of behavior related to an individual’s minority status (Lehr, Moreau, Lange, & Lanners, 2003). For Brody, his engagement with racist statements often leads to conflict for which he is reprimanded. Take this excerpt for instance,

I got suspended for...racist...racist stuff cause it...you know...this boy...he wanted to call me a rice-paddy-eatin’ kid this and that. I kept running my mouth. He called me rice paddy, chink, soy sauce, this and that...I went off on him. I wasn’t thinking at the time.

Here, Brody reflects on past experiences that, in part, ultimately led to his expulsion from the mainstream school, and thus, maximizes external events while constructing his reaction as a necessary act (Rymes, 2001), evident in his intolerance towards experiences of overt racism and his frustration with other individuals’ lack of knowledge and incorrect identification of his ethnicity. To maximize his ethnic visibility, Brody indicates he began to graffiti tag his backpacks:

You could always write on your Jansport bag. Yep, I did that. I’d write “island pride” or whatever. I’d tag that on my bag.

Brody used the space on his backpack to display his sense of cultural heritage so that others might “get it right.” Rather than (illegally) appropriating public spaces for art as he did with his relatives, Brody appropriates his own personal belongings to display messages he specifically designs to educate others.

In this alternative school setting, Brody re-appropriates the vague art assignment for his own purpose: to assert his ethnic heritage through a familiar medium that connects to his family and earlier life. Both his content choice (the Guam flag) and the graffiti-style medium hold significant meaning given his nostalgia for past family experiences and frustrating in-school experiences with racism. Brody also indicates that providing a public, visible venue to get one’s message recognized is a motivational reason for an individual to pursue graffiti art. Whether the canvas is a backpack, an empty wall, or a social studies project, Brody appropriates space and, in this case, the content of what he is allowed to work with to demonstrate his self-proclaimed “island boy” identity.
Despite school rules regulating students’ emotional expression (Ferguson, 2000), Brody seeks out spaces and opportunities to render visible the strategic and thoughtful motives behind the words and images he creates (Akom, 2000). In Brody’s case, his experiences are the source of strength upon which his artistic renderings build.

Brody’s experiences prove significant when reflecting on art’s role in alternative schools. In his case, product and message visibility are important. While life experience certainly does inform his work, the actual experience of creating his works seems to take a less-important role within the alternative school context. Also, Brody’s display of his “island boy” identity on personal and public spaces is clearly purposefully created to resolve his emotional and aggressive responses to overt racism from peers. While Brody seeks resolution from external conflict through his messages, another student, Bryce, in contrast, uses his drawings as an indicator of personal growth resulting from internal conflicts. Bryce explains the act of touching pencil to paper and “bending lines” alleviates emotional upheaval. While the final product is significant for both Bryce and Brody, they seem to have very different experiences and motivations in achieving a completed work. In essence, these students award higher value to their work and the processes used to create that work when provided the space and opportunity to personalize assignments outside boundaries imposed by alternative school policy and curriculum.

While art’s universal function as proclaimed academic and therapeutic savior might manifest within an alternative school setting, students engaged with this vision of art at various levels range from merely going through the motions to harboring feelings of resentment. For study participants, art becomes a space in within they struggle, but ultimately find, a meaningful experience; they manage to negotiate the border between art as a functional or utilitarian tool and art as an autonomous, subjective endeavor. Brody articulates his subjective experiences, including racism, within his graffiti art, a form that schools often eschew and society paints with a negative stigma.

**Implications for Education**

Art has become a catch-all for researchers and educators advocating its integration into alternative education because of the academic and therapeutic benefits it is thought to offer. Not only do many champion its benefits for addressing academic and behavioral needs of alternative school students, but emancipatory researchers envision art as a vehicle through which marginalized people claim or reclaim their voices. With an overt emphasis on art’s utilitarian values, alternative schools face the chance of reducing or over-simplifying art’s role, use, and outcomes (Eisner, 2002).
Participants do not dismiss art’s value and utility, instead using it as a venue to articulate multiple and varied experiences. Despite a large portion of literature examining and advocating art, social justice, voice, and alternative schools (Daiute, 2000; Keiser, 2003; Proweller, 2000), students are not provided with direct opportunities to articulate or express their experiences, so are limited in opportunities to claim their voices—including voices speaking resistance, critique, and marginalization. Instead, some seem to find alternate ways to incorporate their experiences, or biases (Brodkey, 2000), within their work while others seemed to disengage completely from given art tasks, viewing them as yet another requirement of another institution. Brodkey suggests life experiences—biases—function as the strength of any expressive or creative endeavor.

As part of a critical approach, I used this study to critique taken-for-granted curricular and pedagogical practices and inspire change in policy-driven conditions that render student voices mute. Storytelling is the most universal means humans have for conveying to others who we are, what we believe, how we feel, what we value, and how we see the world (Rymes, 2001, p. 163). Based on listening to students’ voices on their experiences creating art, I recommend alternative school faculty who integrate or utilize art in the curriculum be open and sensitive to student experience, particularly in their choices of art content and form. It is important for teachers to recognize how sensitive student reactions can be when the student sees his or her art in a particular way and his or her teacher see art as something contrary.

Educators should be aware of and, importantly, critical of the various reasons art might be mandated in alternative schools. While teachers may harbor assumptions about art’s therapeutic and remedial effects, they may not be exposed to the scholarly literature revealing art’s social-justice potential. If an educator’s perspective on art is limited to a therapeutic model which views alternative-school students as “unwell”, that educator’s eyes may purposefully turn away from deeper experiences or wider phenomena arising from students’ artistic engagements. After all, students arrive in alternative schools already burdened with the weight of significant social stigma that informs the way they are understood and treated. Bryce’s concern that his art perpetuates the stigma of being “dark” or a “ticking time-bomb” is a specific example of this phenomenon in my data.

Because art in alternative schools is best viewed as multi-dimensional and not restricted to something palliative, teachers will benefit from considering different factors that motivate and drive students’ decisions on when and how to engage in artistic endeavor. Participants’ engagement and specific interest in a particular art form are connected somehow to life experience and identity. Study participants
either desired or found a way to incorporate an aspect of their life experiences within art-based assignments and saw the value in pursuing personal and emotional endeavors. They recognized the value in an art experience. Attention to identity and experience rather than a specific product can facilitate an engaging, aesthetic experience. In turn, encouragement of a sensitive connection with art (Noddings, 2003), the curriculum, and schooling may achieve one of the most important rationales for the creation of alternative schools: re-engaging the disenfranchised student (Raywid, 1999).

If art is experience as Dewey (1934) contends, and each individual’s experience is unique, then it stands to reason that a single art form or activity in a classroom will neither encompass nor meet the needs of every individual’s choice given their positions within different social hierarchies. Participants indicate art form matters in part because form is linked to family, identity, race, class, and belonging. Considering student experience, alternative-school faculty might consider maintaining as open a stance as possible to diverse art forms while allowing students flexibility to choose a well-suited form as well as the inclusive content.

Currently, within an alternative school context, art is ultimately institutionalized and thus inescapably intertwined with power and hierarchy. Considering students who attend these programs have been particularly affected by various expressions of institutional and educational power, sensitivity to this power dynamic, even through art, proves a powerful tool in developing a humane approach to understanding experiences students bring to schools.

References


The Fitness Problem: Rhetorical Ambiguity and Physical Fitness Post-World War II

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Introduction

With its primary recommendation that “cognizance be taken of the fact that our adult citizens and our youth have little appreciation of the existence of a problem pertaining to the fitness of American Youth,”¹ President Eisenhower’s first Conference on the Fitness of American Youth marked the presence of an institutional discourse that contributed to the formation of a public fitness problem with deeply-material implications.² Owing much to the President’s Council, physical fitness became an increasingly-visible, public problem recognized by an eleven-page cover story in US News and World Report and contributing to increased changes in physical education.³ One central way in which this public problem would become visible was through specific use of the term “fitness” to represent the weak body as an object of public concern. The ambiguous definition of fitness functions as a pivot upon which the distribution of discourses regarding the fitness panic in education and government rest. The vague nature of the term is essential to its mobilization within the President’s Council on Youth Fitness; its ambiguous nature is also allows it to be co-opted by physical educators.

In this paper I begin with an examination of ambiguity’s importance to the construction of the physical fitness problem. After demonstrating that the ambiguity of fitness assists in its attachment to different institutions, I consider the limits of ambiguity in defining fitness and note the relative absence of conversation concerning the value of physical fitness to health. This absence, and the eventual linkage that emerges between physical fitness and physical health, is significant because the discourse of “health” strays from vague notions of fitness towards one requiring quantifiable evidence to demonstrate fitness’ connection to improving health. I argue that the necessity for quantifiable evidence to help define and explain the fitness problem creates the conditions necessary to create the US’ present focus on obesity.

The Ambiguous Value of Fitness

A common theme within federal and educational discourses during the 1950s is the need for managing the unruly, unfit body for the
production of a more-efficient and less-deviant subject. Conceptions of the body of the juvenile delinquent illustrate this idea well. Common fears expressed in both descriptions of communism and juvenile delinquency mandate the need for the management of deviancy:

We want to impress on every parent in America that it is time to face the facts: the delinquent may be any child you know, including your own—regardless of your social position, your economic status or your good intentions. Juvenile delinquency is everybody’s problem.4

The problem described here is not localized to one specific sector of the population; instead, problems of delinquency reside at all levels of American life. The previous quotation bears a striking resemblance to statements made about Communism by FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover:

America is face to face with an ideology—atheistic communism—which denies every ideal we uphold. The forces of this conspiracy have, in a relatively short time, expanded their rule.... And with untiring efforts they continue to unleash their weapons of terrorism, subversion and vicious propaganda in an attempt to ensnare every nation in a giant communist web.5

Hoover and the Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency explicitly state fear of unruly individuals’ deviant practices and their concerns about managing deviance. Both implicitly value creating a more-manageable, ideal population of citizens, a desire by no means unique to the 1950s or the US government. Making better citizens has often been a goal of governing institutions. The use of a physical fitness panic to push an agenda of good citizenship, however, renders this discourse unique.

Concerns that an overabundance of leisure time (made possible by the development of time-saving devices) might contribute to youth delinquency position the proper use of leisure time as a solution to the management of unruly bodies and practices. Specifically, the solution to the leisure problem—to deviant problems that resulted from too much leisure time—becomes to instruct individuals in how to use their leisure time properly: “what we must do is take time and convert it into proper kinds of leisure. Time by itself is not leisure...what we must do is re-evaluate this social structure on how to live life.”6 Thanks to The President’s Council on Youth Fitness, physical education is identified as a means of managing the leisure problem and consequently becomes an approach for producing ideal citizens:

The primary job of the physical education teacher as differentiated from other teachers in the school is to educate for an understanding and acceptance of the body as a symbol of the self, for an understanding of the laws of its expression
and use, and for an appreciation of the values of achieving and maintaining a responsive, well-directed, mature, responsible instrument for living democratically both with oneself and with others.\textsuperscript{7}

The above statement, made in one of physical education’s canonical texts, positions physical education as a means of producing a normal body and thus, merges the practice of learning to be fit with the underlying importance of efficiency. The desire for maximizing the efficient body and the efficient citizen is then continuously expressed through the deployment of the term, “fitness,” in a multitude of ways. The priority on and value of efficiency implied by physical fitness’ emergence as a means of producing a more perfect population are taken up and circulate, in part, because fitness is defined ambiguously.

The move to describe the importance of increased physical fitness as one component in the realization of “total fitness”—an idea used by The President’s Council and physical fitness educators to describe “over-all” well being and its physical, moral, intellectual, social, and emotional components—illustrates a notion of fitness that exceeds its purely physical components.\textsuperscript{8} When defined as exceeding the physical, fitness no longer simply references the engaging in exercise to cultivate a stronger body, but as a means for individuals to produce themselves as whole citizens. Describing the goal of The President’s Council, Council Chair Shane MacCarthy wrote: “Our purpose in being is to get you convinced of the necessity for physical activity, not just for physical fitness, but physical activity for total fitness.”\textsuperscript{9} Additionally, the proceedings of the first President’s Council on Youth Fitness articulate the importance of ensuring that young citizens be “fully fit,” thus stressing that physical fitness is only one element in a larger project that assists in developing better individuals.\textsuperscript{10} Echoing the sentiments of The President’s Council, delegates of the 1956 AAHPER conference conflate “fitness” with the same values embodied by total fitness in their mission statement: “fitness is that state which characterizes the degree to which the person is able to function…. Ability to function depends upon the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual components of fitness.”\textsuperscript{11} In the institutional discourses of education and government, there are references to both strength and the importance of developing the whole individual.

Circulating coextensively with discourses concerned with “total fitness” are those concerned with muscular and health fitness. For example, an eleven-page cover story in \textit{US News and World Report}, “Is American Youth Physically Fit?: The Findings that Shocked Eisenhower,” constructs physical fitness as an alarming issue, a public problem desperately in need of a cure. The author notes “there is deep concern in high places over the fitness of American youth.”\textsuperscript{12} In order
to demonstrate fitness is indeed a problem, the author draws upon evidence that includes the rates of Selective Service rejection. Rejection due to physiological problems was often used as evidence to suggest a lack of fitness during both World War II and the Korean War. Interestingly, not only did a selective service report find that rejections were not due to the physical fitness issues but that “the conditions found indicate a medical need, rather than a lack of physical training.”

Similarly, the results of the Krause-Weber tests were used as evidence that American youth were lacking in muscular fitness as compared to children in Europe. Rates of military rejection and evaluations made by Krause-Weber tests also worked their way into The President’s Council on Physical Fitness: “with more leisure time available to youth, profitable methods must be adopted as a pattern of current life to achieve physical fitness…. The strength of our Nation tomorrow is the fitness of its youth today.” Now exacerbating the strategically-ambiguous nature of fitness are the many occasions when physical fitness and total fitness become conflated.

“Youth Fitness: A Community Project,” a publication of The President’s Council on Youth Fitness distributed to communities as a way of advancing physical fitness goals, illustrates this point. In the pamphlet all members of the community “tell the youth fitness story” because:

Not only does the telling provide ongoing incentives to many persons, it also creates opportunity for recognition—a basic human need—for civic responsibility which will result in the improvement and enhancement of the fitness of the community’s—and America’s—YOUTH.

The pamphlet and this particular passage best illustrate the ambiguous and multifunctional character of fitness. They communicate the importance of educating others that fitness is an important ideal that all children should achieve. Moreover, because telling the tale of fitness is identified as both a form of education and a means of gaining civic value in one’s community, total fitness is implied. Individuals are now fit to be citizens when they can responsibly educate their communities about fitness. This deployment of a fitness panic necessitating total citizenship and an increase in muscular strength marks the fluidity of fitness’ meaning and its flexibility as a rhetorical device.

We might think of fitness as an umbrella term infused with different meanings ultimately working toward the same purpose: the production of an efficient citizenry. The rhetorical value of the term fitness resides in the way in which it was deployed in the ’50s under multiple definitions while still maintaining a cohesive focus on efficiency. This focus inserts physical fitness as a priority into the American cultural consciousness.
and, through the conflation of physical fitness with total fitness and citizenship, reconceptualizes fitness as a means of “fitting in.” Such a cohesive focus was possible because discourses about fitness had primarily emerged from federal and educational institutions having vested interests in producing model citizens. Both institutions position fitness in this way because of a shared belief that citizens with increased physical strength contain the “sufficient coordination, strength and vitality to meet emergencies,” are fit to function and “contribute [one’s] share to the welfare of society.”\textsuperscript{17} From a rhetorical perspective, the way in which this problem was constructed and the dissemination of the ambiguous term, “fitness,” seems like a successful means of disciplining society and, to a certain degree, it was. Ambiguity, however, did not completely assist the cause of those interested in “fixing” the fitness problem.

Ultimately, the newly-defined fitness lacks a quantifiable value and so offered nothing but abstract benefits to the American public. In such cases as “Youth Fitness: A Community Project,” the importance of fitness is mostly assumed while the benefits are only vaguely implied. In general, the panic caused by the Kraus-Weber tests and the subsequent use of those tests as evidence that American children were too weak promoted an agenda focused on the creation of a stronger nation. The association made between a need for fitness and the need for a stronger nation filters its way from The President’s Council into American culture via periodicals. An article in Cosmopolitan, “Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?” stresses the “nation will suffer” due to poor fitness, a point echoed in The New York Times, and US News and World Report.\textsuperscript{18}

As the memories of war moved further away, the imminent threat that had initially galvanized the nation into prioritizing physical and total fitness also dissipated thus requiring additional means by which fitness might still be prioritized as necessary. I argue that health became the logical answer. As a term that signified the need for bodily-readiness for war and willingness to fight, fitness worked quite well. Fitness’ ambiguity, however, did not function with the same measure of success when framed in terms of health because discussions engaging fitness from the perspective of health did not adequately convey the material consequences of being unfit. In the next section, I explain the way in which the ambiguity of fitness conflicts with attempts to maintain its public priority.

**Health in Fitness**

In the 1950s, health had been an important outcome of fitness, but improving health had not been stressed as the primary goal of The President’s Council. As time passed however, the relationship between fitness and health grew more important. At the 1957 Conference for Physicians and Schools, Shane MacCarthy, Director of the President’s
Council for Physical Fitness, asked the assistance of the medical community in documenting the importance that physical fitness played in health:

It is necessary indeed that youth fitness be programmed, not on opinions but on facts, based on data obtained in a scientific manner. Hence the clinical, physiological research on fitness is that which must be conducted by the doctors of our nation. It’s a long-range and indefinite project.\(^{19}\)

A request of this nature is telling because it indicated a need on the part of The Council to substantiate their project with medical/scientific evidence. But why this need for evidence? Quantifiable scientific data on the benefits of fitness to the body would provide legitimacy to the mission of The President’s Council. This move to legitimate the fitness problem through the use of draft rejection statistics, as evidence for the existence of the fitness problem, is an example of the employment of scientific data. Both *US News & World Report* and *Cosmopolitan* claim draft rejections as evidence for the lack of fitness although draft rejections had little to do with muscular strength problems.\(^{20}\) Their use of evidence signaled the need to prove that fitness was important.

Though this example is drawn from a situation that relied heavily on a panic to promote fitness, it represents the vague nature of the term “fitness” and how its vague nature drains it of its meaning. An imperative for a stronger nation and the fear it invoked could only last for so long, and, additionally, representations of the achievement of fitness offered minimal and unclear incentives mostly including claims that individuals would “feel better” and “have more energy.”\(^{21}\)

In wartime, and shortly after, the fear of attack and the need for strong, able-bodied men became a compelling motivation for promoting fitness. The implication of not having fit citizens represented a very real possibility that our nation would be unable to defend itself against attack; this was a powerful tool for promoting fitness. As the threat of attack dwindled, the need for strong soldiers was replaced by the need for healthy bodies. The incentives and implications for being unfit did not, however, provide the same imperative. A *Cosmopolitan* article, for example, noted backache to be one negative consequence of a lack of physical fitness and also promoted physical activity as a way of helping children release unnecessary tension.\(^{22}\) Literature that engaged the fitness problem from a non-military perspective frequently focused on the social and strength-related elements of physical fitness, while paying less attention to the value and importance of overall health.\(^{23}\)

A film produced by the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (AAHPER), *They Grow Up So Fast*, for example, depicts the negative effects of poor physical education as low
motivation, poor self-image, and inability to work with others. With the introduction of a proper physical education program, the film’s dejected star, Jimmy, learns poise, social interaction, and motivation. Jimmy does not, however, learn the importance of physical education and activity to health. In their article in *Research Quarterly* (where the results of the Kraus-Weber tests appeared), Weber and Hirschland attach the importance of physical fitness and education to posture, a specification that does not appear in subsequent work citing the tests as evidence for needed improved fitness. Furthermore:

The Kraus-Weber tests for muscular fitness are not designed to determine optimum levels of muscular fitness, but rather to determine whether or not the individual has sufficient strength and flexibility in the parts of the body upon which demands are made in normal daily living. Furthermore, patients whose physical level fell below these minimum requirements appeared to be “sick people,” individuals who bore all the earmarks of constant strain, and who frequently manifested signs of emotional instability.

Though the Kraus-Weber tests did prove children in the US to be drastically less-physically-fit than those in Europe, they do not demonstrate improved physical fitness is a health imperative. The claim United States’ children are lacking in strength and flexibility, and thus have bodies incapable of meeting the demands of everyday living, implies only vague consequences for a seemingly-serious problem. Similarly, a characterization of patients incapable of meeting the previously-stated minimum requirements as sick offers no medical evidence that a lack of fitness actually causes illness. Finally, in the above quotation and later in their conclusion, Hirschland and Kraus characterize increased exercise (an activity leading to fitness) as a means of staving off nervous tension, a hypothesis they have the impression may be accurate. This absence of certainty undermines the claim that the Kraus-Weber test results prove physical fitness to be a physiological/biological necessity. That is, the tests’ vague justification for the necessity of fitness frames it as an ideal whose material consequences are unclear and unnecessary.

Physical fitness as beneficial to circulation became a more-developed approach to “medicalizing” the importance of health fitness. From a health standpoint, the evidence that fitness improves muscle capacity and increases blood circulation illustrates specific physiologic phenomena improved through exercise. Unfortunately, this approach negates its own persuasive force by defining fitness as increased efficiency and endurance:

Physical activity stimulates the circulation of blood, increases the appetite, and improves the functional capacity of muscles
including the heart…. From the health point of view the physiological effects of exercise are an increase in functional efficiency and organic power. In other words, the body becomes more efficient in performing physical activity and withstanding strain and exertion.\textsuperscript{28}

Although such evidence begins to create an understanding of biological fitness, it also fails to support the hypothesis that physical activity is necessary to good health. Specifically, the indication that physical activity’s value resides in its ability to improve “efficiency” and allow for greater measures of “strain and exertion” implies fitness creates a more-productive body but does not explain the value of possessing such a body.

The \textit{Journal of the American Medical Association} similarly stated that exercise increases the physiological efficiency of the individual.\textsuperscript{29} Neither \textit{JAMA} nor the AAHPER publications address the value of physiological efficiency. For fitness to remain a problem, a lack of fitness must cause consequences that individuals wish to avoid. Those invested in solving the physical fitness problem looked to medical experts to explain physical fitness’ value to overall health recognizing that medical support would provide unambiguous clarification that fitness is valuable to one’s overall health.

\textbf{A Necessary Evil}

Associating fitness with physical setbacks in United States’ teenagers and educational and political agendas is, in part, made possible due to the multiple meanings and values assigned to the ambiguous term “fitness.” Earlier, I specifically discuss how the definition of fitness was used to refer to both muscular strength and one’s “fitness” as a citizen. I then considered how health was an important issue in the fitness panic but was never effectively used to demonstrate the importance of physical fitness. These varied meanings and values give fitness a fluid status that allowed it to be valued for different reasons in different discursive communities. Fitness’ embodiment of different definitions in different types of discourses, however, allowed it to disseminate a cohesive statement that conflated the efficient citizen with the fit body. The ambiguous meaning of fitness showed it to be neither an intelligible threat nor a rewarding bodily state. In order to meet the demands of the federal government and education, medical researchers needed to discover why physical fitness was beneficial to health.\textsuperscript{30} The indentification of physical fitness as capable of preventing obesity allowed it to become imbued with medical value, thus causing medical and political interests in maintaining a fit body to coincide.

During the 1940s and ’50s, weight loss, or reducing as it was called, was seen as a necessary health value, but it had not yet been fully linked
to physical fitness. Perhaps one of the most important ways weight loss became visible as need was not through medical, educational, or federal discourses but through the insurance industry. In 1952 the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) released the results of a thirty-year study finding obese individuals to be at greater risk for heart attack than those of normal weight. This study was meant to expand upon and perfect a previous study conducted between 1909 and 1912 that concluded that “the mortality of overweights was excessive” and “that to some degree overweights had been treated generously insurance-wise.” Though quite subtle in its language, the report alludes to the importance of identifying obese individuals as increased health risks. This identification, in turn, served to raise life insurance premiums and reduce insurance payouts: “our detailed results will be useful in reappraising our practices with regard to rating of overweights.”

The economic interests of insurance companies provided the evidence necessary for obesity to emerge as a public health problem. Despite current preconceptions, obesity is a medical problem; MetLife’s involvement demonstrates how economic interests assisted in making fitness intelligible as a medical problem. After announcing its support of “public health propaganda for weight control,” MetLife circulates the information using Today’s Health, a publication of the American Medical Association specifically used to secure the public’s cooperation in ending public health problems and, to defend the necessity of weight loss to the US public:

Overweight is America’s number one public health problem. It affects more people than any other impairment or disease. No group in the community is immune to it. Overweight handicaps men as well as women; children as well as adults. Altogether, about 25 million people in our country are overweight to some degree and at least five million adults are seriously obese.

Articles in The American Journal of Nursing, JAMA, The American Journal of Public Health, and RN also echoed the dangers associated with obesity. Moreover, weight reduction of the obese had long been a primary objective of the American Heart Association. Despite their concerns, members of The President’s Council of Physical Fitness fail to address obesity or weight loss in their proceedings. The “problem” identified by The Council is scientific: technological advances prevent youth from engaging in physical activity; “with more leisure time available to youth, profitable methods must be adopted as a pattern of current life to achieve physical fitness, which is an integral part of total health.” Similarly, Fitness for Secondary School Youth, a publication of the American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (AAHPER), maintains a focus on developing “total fitness” in students. Though it
does mention the specific importance of cardiovascular and respiratory fitness, two conditions obesity negatively affects, it does not connect increased physical activity with cardiovascular health. Given physicians’ apparent lack of concern about obesity, its lack of priority for both the AAHPER and The Council makes more sense. In short, obesity had not yet been linked to physical fitness.

Equally striking is the minimal discussion of how increased physical activity might end obesity. Though in 1959 exercise is identified in medical publications as a potential means of weight reduction—“exercise on the treadmill also cut down considerably rate of weight gain of mice with a traumatic or hereditary tendency to obesity”—dieting was often touted as the standard practice for those interested in losing weight. In Today’s Health, the AMA’s publication for communicating with the general public, exercise was regarded as a means of weight loss but was subsequently described as impractical: “everybody agrees that physical exercise can cause weight loss, but how much?” Reaching at least 200,000 subscribers, Today’s Health consistently argued the dangers of obesity/overweight while positioning dieting as the most practical cure: “the cause of overweight is not obscure. It is due to overeating and nothing else. Since overeating is a matter of habit, the cure for obesity is not easy, but it is simple. The obese person must adjust his eating habits, eat less.” Similar sentiments are echoed in numerous popular periodicals and advertisements. Dieting becomes the preferred way of losing weight, and, more importantly, exercise is only beginning to be seen as a way of controlling weight. Given this locating of obesity with overeating, and the fledgling research on lack of exercise and obesity, the value of physical fitness for weight management could not yet become a publicly-intelligible value.

Medical and scientific research problematizing obesity circulated at the same time as educational research advocating the importance of physical fitness through exercise, but because of minimal research that attended to both physical fitness and weight, they circulated as different problems with different priorities. The scientific developments and experiments that ultimately demonstrated that increased exercise assists in weight loss and prevents arteriosclerosis laid the groundwork for the articulation between the two public problems. One need only look at current discourses that position obesity as a public problem to recognize this connection. Numerous discourses from a multitude of institutions identify the need for increased physical activity—not dieting alone—as a necessary step in maintaining a healthy body and achieving weight loss.

The way in which increased fitness is currently understood as a method for treating obesity illustrates the current connection between the two conditions. In the 1950s, however, lack of fitness and obesity had coexisted but not been associated with one another. To be clear, I
am not claiming that the current obesity epidemic occurred because of medical developments that identified physical fitness as a way of losing weight. I claim instead that the highly-visible public problem of physical fitness, a that problem educational and federal discourses positioned as a problem, and obesity, a health problem identified through medical and actuarial discourses, had existed in two relatively-separate discursive worlds that were not yet linked through a structure of signification. Based on how obesity is described as a problem and how solutions to obesity are currently characterized, the separation between these discourses no longer exists. Thus, the visibility of physical fitness as a form of weight loss, a development only just beginning in the late 1950s, lays the groundwork for these differing discourses eventually to unite in a common cause: the crusade to end obesity.46

The realization that increased fitness prevents obesity and assists in weight loss provided a quantifiable and concrete demonstration of the value of physical fitness.47 Additionally, because research illustrates physical fitness as a health necessity, the medical community’s need to support good health initiatives coincide with the fitness project’s mission. Though not occurring directly in the 1950s, the priority to increase physical fitness mutates into the obesity epidemic. Current national concerns for obesity do not stem from a need to produce a stronger citizenry, but The President’s Council on Youth Fitness’ identification of fitness as a national priority does render the fit body intelligible as a national value.

At the same time, medical and insurance research has found obesity to be a serious public health issue, and, due to pressure from The President’s Council, has begun to do research on the physiological benefits of increased exercise and fitness. Based on current health literature, one can see that exercise as a means of weight loss and health improvement is now quite common.48 The current connection between medical health and physical fitness illustrates that the two previously separate problems have currently merged.49

The obese individual, unlike the unfit individual, embodies the problem from which he or she suffers, an easily-identifiable visual marker of what obesity looks like. More importantly, obesity’s emergence as a well-recognized problem of epidemic proportions also occurred due to scientific evidence that obese individuals face serious health consequences. Prior to physical fitness’ articulation with obesity, the consequences of a lack of physical fitness were such abstractions as energy loss or non-conscription into the armed forces. The connection between fitness and weight loss illustrates gaining weight as a concrete and dire consequence for not exercising. Because the public now recognizes the serious health consequences that accompany obesity, medical professionals have access to improving the population’s

The Fitness Problem
physiological health, a value that aligns with the federal government and the AAHPER’s citizenship-cultivation and total-fitness priorities. Obesity has now exploded into a public problem that cuts through multiple institutional discourses assuming a discursive presence that exceeds its visibility in medical, federal, educational, and cultural fields.

Endnotes


9 MacCarthy, “Symposium on Youth Fitness.” 82.


Frank, “Physical Fitness and Health Problems of the Adolescent.” 575.


Henderson, “Are We and Our Children Getting Too Soft?” and “Is American Youth Physically Fit?: The Findings That Shocked Eisenhower.”


Ibid.


27 Ibid. 187.


30 Bauer, “Past, Present and Future in Fitness.”

31 MetLife’s involvement in framing obesity illustrates the involvement of political/economic interests in obesity emerging as a public problem. This is an important facet within the fitness/obesity problem not covered because it did not fit within the scope of this project. The MetLife study, however, demonstrates the involvement of other institutions in contributing to current notions of the slim/fit body as an ideal.


34 Dublin & Marks, “Mortality among Insured Overweights in Recent Years.”

35 Ibid. 28.

36 “Plain Facts About Health and Disease,” *Hygeia* 1, no. 1 (1923).


“Highlights of Conference Findings and Recommendations.” 5.


My logic for conceiving of fitness and obesity in these ways is derived from the notion of articulation that considers meaning to be latent not within texts, institutions, and practices, but within their interactions. See Lawrence Grossberg, We Gotta Get out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture (New York: Routledge, 1992); Stuart Hall, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall,” Journal of Communication Inquiry, 10, no. 2 (1986).

Barclay, “Accenting the Physical in Fitness.” 70.


Such concern can be noted at the Council’s website. See President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, (http://www.fitness.gov/resources_factsheet.htm: Department of Health and Human Services, 2006).
James P. Barufaldi: Teacher of Science Teachers

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Introduction
With the spotlight on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) initiatives, the question becomes, “How is it possible to regain the former prominence of the United States in science, technology, engineering and mathematics?” According to one study posted in 2010, American 15-year-olds rank 21st in science and 25th in mathematics compared to 15-year-olds in other countries.¹

- American innovations have transformed our nation again and again creating whole new industries and occupations. Going forward, new innovations will continue to be critical, both in maintaining a solid industrial base and increasing our standard of living.

- In short: innovation leads to new products and processes that sustain our industrial base; innovation depends on a solid knowledge base in math, science and engineering; without this knowledge base, innovation as well as our industrial base will erode.

- Along those lines, all jobs of the future will require a basic understanding of math and science. The most recent ten-year employment projections by the US Labor Department show that of the 20 fastest-growing occupations projected for 2014, 15 of them require significant mathematics or science preparation for one successfully to compete for a job.²

In 2002 US Comptroller General David Walker testified, “Within five years about a quarter of NASA’s scientists and engineers will be eligible for retirement while ‘the pipeline of people with science and engineering skills is shrinking.’”³ For obvious reasons, only US citizens are employed by NASA, and they are scrutinized carefully. With the majority of PhDs in science being granted to persons from other countries, the pool of persons meeting the requirements is small.⁴ In order to reach some solutions concerning “how” to increase the numbers of students necessary to fulfill future needs, we need to explore “why” the US has come to this situation.
When Sputnik came along and shocked the US out of its complacency and feelings of superiority, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act. One of the major features of its funding was to provide regular classroom teachers with all-expense-paid summer workshops and educational opportunities. Generally, these workshops were conducted by professors and government researchers who considered to be what today we would call “master teachers.” Over time the funding for these activities, like the funding for NASA, decreased. As a result, professional development for those who reached the most young people—teachers—became almost obsolete.

At the University of Texas at Austin, James Barufaldi became concerned about the situation and began to consider ways to combat the lack of professional development for teachers in science. In this paper we explore his life and his development as an honored science educator whose excellence has been recognized internationally, far beyond the boundaries of the state of Texas, for his dedication to excellence in science education at all levels.

We first began writing biographies of exceptional persons in science as a way to inspire students and teachers at all levels to become aware that science is a fascinating area which can lead to amazing careers though reading about the lives and varied backgrounds of scientists and science educators, their career achievements, and their primary contributions. The subject of this paper is one such exceptional role model.

Professor James P. “Jim” Barufaldi, was honored in 2008 as the Outstanding Educator of the Year by the Association for the Education of Teachers in Science, in 2002 with the Minnie Stevens Piper Award, and in 2003 with selection to the Academy of Distinguished Teachers at the University of Texas at Austin, as well as many other awards. He is the Ruben E. Hinojosa Regents Professor in Education and Director of the Center for Science and Mathematics. In this paper we explore his contributions to the teaching profession not only through his research, his philosophy, and workshops for teachers in the United States, but his contributions to dozens of professional development workshops for teachers throughout the world.

**Life**

As a boy Barufaldi (1940– ) grew up in the small, blue-collar, Pennsylvania-coal-mining town of Sygan Hill, Pennsylvania, whose population fluctuates between 500 and 800. Most families were from Eastern Europe. His paternal grandfather was Italian, his paternal grandmother was French, and his mother was Slovakian. There was never much money. He thinks his father never made more than about $8,000 a year as a factory worker and later working for a builder, but he remembers never feeling they were poor. An early memory is playing
school at age five with friends and imaginary friends—even giving them grades. He cannot remember a time when he did not want to be a teacher. He recalls, “A sixth-grade teacher, Ms. Nahay, stimulated my curiosity, encouraged me to do my best, and taught me that a vast world exists beyond a coal-mining village in southwestern Pennsylvania. She helped me understand that a young boy from that village could accomplish any goal through hard work, preparation, and perseverance.” When Barufaldi was fifteen, he began the first of many jobs, selling shoes. He says, “We always had food, I knew that I was loved, we had few toys but everyone enjoyed playing outside, so toys were not missed.” He remembers working all year to be able to pay for his high-school ring.

One day in high school, the football coach called him in and said, “You are a smart boy; you should apply to college. I know of a small college, Marietta College, where you could receive free tuition.” No one in his family had ever been to college, and there was little money to pay for room and board, but he was excited at this opportunity. For a small-town boy whose graduating class numbered 52 in 1958, this was a great opportunity. So he hopped in a friend’s car, and they drove the 130 miles to Marietta College in Ohio to enroll, and he saw his college campus for the first time. While in college he worked several jobs including serving food at a fraternity house where the members offered him a free room under the stairs and at an amusement park to pay for his expenses beyond tuition. Later the fraternity made him a member.

Once classes started, he realized that he was not prepared because in his high school there had been no advanced science and mathematics. However, he worked very hard and credits a biology teacher with helping him to succeed. He says,

The biology professor, Mr. Young, my mentor at a small, liberal-arts college in Ohio, served as an important role model and gave me confidence, bolstered my self esteem, encouraged me to think “positively.” He taught me the necessary content and skills that enabled me to excel in the sciences. He provided opportunities to serve as a teaching assistant in his science laboratory. Through this apprenticeship, I learned many things as I carefully observed him modeling humility, understanding, fairness, dedication, commitment, and sensitivity toward student needs and concerns. He perceived learning as an unfinished human enterprise. Teaching [for Mr. Young and for Mrs. Nahay] was an ongoing professional endeavor. They enjoyed interacting with people and sharing their skills and knowledge with others.
Career

After graduating with a major in biological sciences from Marietta College in 1962, Barufaldi began teaching in a challenging, inner-city, junior high school in Cleveland, Ohio. The school had a reputation as being “rough.” His students were predominately African-American from poor homes. Even though he taught there in the 1960s, he still hears from some of those students. A year after he began teaching, he married one of his colleagues who taught mathematics in the same school. Although teachers were not permitted to be married and teach at the same school, the principal made an exception for them. They invited all the seventh-graders to the wedding. After about four years, he enrolled at Kent State University in biology and education. After graduation with a M.Ed. in 1967, he and his wife moved back to Cleveland where he taught and served as department chair at John F. Kennedy High School for five years.

In the summer of 1969 he attended a National Science Foundation (NSF) institute. At this point he decided to work on a Ph.D. In 1972 he graduated from the University of Maryland, College Park, with a Ph.D. in science education. His dream had been to work with Professor Addison Lee at the University of Texas at Austin. Lee was considered to be one of the “Deans” of biology education in the United States. Fortuitously, his first offer of a position was with Lee and so began his long association with the University of Texas at Austin where he would evolve from educating college students to educating Texas teachers, to educating teachers in the United States to educating teachers in over twenty countries from that base.

Accomplishments

Barufaldi’s first years on the University of Texas (UT) faculty consisted of sheer, grinding hard work with a four-course semester with labs while researching and writing for scholarly journals, a requirement in a flagship university where “publish or perish” was and continues as a reality of academic life. However, his delight in the students and his work with Addison Lee made up for the long hours. Lee, a powerful educator on the national and international scene, created the first center for science education. He was one of the few who, according to Barufaldi, began the “discipline of science education.” He created one of the first PhDs in science education in Texas. When he retired in 1980 he paid the ultimate compliment from mentor to mentee by recommending Barufaldi take over the Center for Science and Mathematics Education as director, and the Dean of the College of Education followed his recommendation.

Addison Lee had started the NSF Chautauqua-Type Short Courses for College Science Teachers, and Barufaldi worked with him and
continues this service to teachers today. His experience with these courses and the Center was the beginning of his life-long involvement in professional development for teachers. In these courses professors would take information and improve their courses and then come back at a later time and show what they had done—an “Each One, Teach One” approach. Instructors would be rotated geographically so Barufaldi began to offer these courses in Belize and Costa Rica. Eventually, he would travel the world to provide professional development about collaboration in Portugal, Russia, Japan, Israel, Bermuda, Iran, Barbados, Bahamas, Costa Rica, Mexico, Australia, Belize, Canada, Iceland, Finland, Korea, Panama, Honduras, Taiwan, Guatemala, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and Trinidad. In these countries he found teachers thirsty for help improving education. They wanted to collaborate but did not have a model. Barufaldi taught them how to build a collaborative unit, how to bring people together to build and create. This was an important shift from “inquiry” to the “process” of building collaboration.

One day in a faculty meeting, Lee asked if anyone was interested in curriculum and Barufaldi said that he was and volunteered to take courses with the Biological Curriculum Study (BCS). He was not impressed and wrote to BCS critiquing the materials. This led to BCS offering him a summer job writing curriculum in Boulder, Colorado for many summers.

The story of how Barufaldi became involved with professional development for Texas teachers is an interesting one. In November 1980 a twenty-six-year-old man from Lebanon applied to the Ph.D. program in science education at UT. His name was Kamil Jbeily, and Barufaldi became his mentor and major professor. When Jbeily graduated, he remained in Austin with the Texas Education Agency (TEA); so, he and Barufaldi remained in close contact.

In 1990–91, major science education reform activities were underway in Texas. Changes necessitated that teachers adopt new methods of teaching and teach a wide variety of sciences for which they were not prepared. Jbeily, then at the Texas Education Agency (TEA), initiated a series of regional meetings across the state to explore ways to create ongoing, regional support systems of professional development for Texas science teachers. The meetings included representatives from education service centers, colleges and universities, school districts, and community leadership. The goal was to create partnerships built upon collaboration, cost sharing (using Eisenhower funds as seed money), and synergistic relationships to provide science teachers with relevant, meaningful, sustained, and high-intensity professional development designed to have a positive impact on student achievement. These partnerships gave birth to the Texas Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Science Teaching.
On March 2, 1996, with the reorganization of TEA, and under a TEA-UT partnership agreement, the statewide administrative office of the Texas Regional Collaboratives (TRC) was moved to the Science Education Center (now Center for Science and Mathematics Education) at The University of Texas at Austin. The program now enjoys support from a wide spectrum of local, state, and national partners.

In July 2006, the TRC launched a new initiative funded by TEA to provide high-quality professional development for Texas mathematics teachers. After a competitive process, grants were awarded to 20 partnerships across Texas to establish the Texas Regional Collaboratives for Excellence in Mathematics Teaching [TRC].

Once the transition was made, the TRC became the delivery system for STEM education in Texas. This newly-established relationship began a productive and viable partnership that has had far-reaching effects improving science instruction and science achievement of students. The move combined a professional development component, a research component and a funding/accountability component of the TRC, the UT College of Education faculty, doctoral students in science education, and the involvement of corporations. Doctoral students and faculty found opportunities to conduct scholarly research on the effectiveness of the professional development provided by the TRC and the funding agencies could review the research and see that their dollars were well spent. Kamil Jbeily as Director and James Barufaldi as Principal Investigator for TRC make a dynamic team.

In discussing Barufaldi’s contributions to science education and to teachers, Jbeily says, “I found in him commitment to excellence, to developing capacity in people, to believing in the human capacity to deliver quality work if supported. He builds the capacity for diversity that characterizes the global village through his professional development of teachers from many countries.” He reminds us Barufaldi was the person who brought the 5-E model (Engage. Explore. Explain. Elaborate. Evaluate) to Texas and implemented it for teachers all over the state. Jbeily describes Barufaldi as a “visionary who continuously pushes the envelope.”

In his many writings about professional development, Barufaldi describes what is important in defining it. He says, “Collaboration is a learned process, one that must be practiced, nurtured, and supported.” He identifies four components: “shared vision, interconnectivity among the organizational units of the system, recognition of a multi-tiered process, and support within the system.” With collaboration everyone has ownership, everyone wins. Barufaldi’s dedication to the art of teaching is evident when he says,

My philosophy of teaching embraces the notion of positive role models. It is my goal to convey to my students the love
of teaching, the joy of learning, and the excitement of observing and discovering new things in one’s environment. I am teaching because Ms. Nahay and Mr. Young were exemplary role models for me. I am confident I am making a difference in the lives of students, a difference that will enable them to realize their goals and enhance their quality of life. The teacher is the key, one who provides the opportunity to open many doors in the lives of their students. I know this because two teachers, early in my career, devoted the time, patience, and commitment that truly made a difference in my life.21

James P. Barufaldi embodies all of the qualities we admire in a “born teacher”: humility, openness, kindness, knowledge, and the ability to communicate all of those traits in such a way that his students—the teachers—learn how to model these traits with their students just as Ms. Nahay and Mr. Young modeled them for him. Barufaldi says, “If I leave any legacy, I believe that it would be the professional development model.”22 His work with teachers in Texas, the United States, and in other countries has brought his message of the synergistic value of collaboration to literally thousands of teachers and their students and assures the long life of that legacy.

Endnotes

5 Ibid.
6 James Barufaldi, philosophy of education, email message to authors, August 1, 2010.
7 James Barufaldi, telephone interview by authors, August 4, 2010.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 James Barufaldi, philosophy of education, email message to authors, August 1, 2010.
11 Barufaldi interview.
13 James Barufaldi interview.
14 Kamil Jbeily, interview with authors, October 12, 2010.
16 James Barufaldi, interview.
17 Kamil Jbeily, interview.
18 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 91.
21 Barufaldi, philosophy.
22 Barufaldi, interview.
Dark Night of the Soul: Analyzing Roberts’ My Heart and My Flesh as Philosophy of Education

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Oh God, I believe, and there’s nothing left to believe.

Introduction

Philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin (1985) advises seeking such new “bona fide sources of data” (179) as letters, diaries, poetry, and fiction to illustrate how materials from beyond disciplinary boundaries contribute to philosophy of education. Taking this recommendation requires rethinking “not only of what counts as a bona fide topic of study, but also what counts as a bona fide source of data” (179). In this paper, I introduce sixteenth-century, Spanish, Carmelite priest John of the Cross’ (1542–1591) poem “Dark Night” (c. 1579), his commentary, Dark Night of the Soul (c. 1582–1584), and U.S. Kentuckian poet, novelist, and short story writer Elizabeth Madox Roberts’ (1881–1941) second novel, My Heart and My Flesh (1927), as bona fide data sources for philosophers of education. I propose using John of the Cross’ concept, “dark night of the soul,” as a lens for analyzing My Heart and My Flesh. Such analysis unveils Roberts’ novel as educational philosophy and Roberts as a novelist who has constructed a theory of female education (Martin 1985, 180). After contextualizing, defining, and explaining John’s concept, dark night of the soul, within his life, poem, and commentary, I use this concept as a lens for analyzing Roberts’ novel, My Heart and My Flesh. I thereby illuminate Roberts’ contribution to historically ignored and marginalized writers who have searched for the meaning and value of being and becoming an educated person. Finally, I demonstrate how Roberts portrays the traditional ideal of the educated person as a misguided ideal offering the transformation process of John’s dark night of the soul as a viable alternative.

From Personal Dark Night of the Soul to Philosophical Concept

Sixteenth-century, Spanish, Carmelite priest John of the Cross (1541–1591) is helping St. Teresa of Avila with the reform of the Carmelite monastic order in Spain in 1579 when members of John’s order kidnap, imprison, and torture him for nine months, a torture leaving him permanently crippled. John of the Cross writes his poem, “Dark Night,” shortly after his escape. Upon the request of the nuns of

Oba fide sources of data
his order, he writes a four-part commentary, *Ascent to Mt. Carmel*, three or four years later explaining the imagery in “Dark Night” (Dodd 2000). Following its initial publication, the commentary’s fourth part often appears separately as *Dark Night of the Soul*. From John’s kidnapping, imprisonment, poem, and commentary emerge his philosophical concept, dark night of the soul, the lens through which I analyze Roberts’ novel.

**John of the Cross’ “Dark Night of the Soul”**

Initially John calls the dark night the “road…along which the soul ordinarily passes,” called “with full propriety ‘dark night’” (DNS 35). Later John expands this initial conception to encompass an educational process:

> This dark night is an inflowing of God into the soul, which purges it from its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural, and spiritual…herein God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it…. (DNS, 100, emphases added)

For John, the dark night is far more than a commonplace metaphor for the darkened mind, depression, or inadequacy of thought. The soul is setting out on a difficult road, undertaking a journey of recovery from being separated from the purpose of existence. The dark night is the path and environment for the soul’s learning process, as well as the means of attaining the soul’s purpose to achieve union with God “in the perfection of love” (DNS, 100). Therefore there is a distinct difference between John’s concept of the dark night and the aforementioned commonplace. Without John’s understanding, the dark night as road, environment, and educational process is indeed a depressing thought.¹

Although the dark night has two stages, the first of which John calls active and the second passive, both consist of the night of sense and the night of the spirit. Although these elements are central, I focus instead on the intertwining features of the passive night of the spirit: the soul’s paradoxical passive-active role; suffering; learning through tests and trials; and the bringing of the soul into the union in wisdom. These features are intimately, complexly connected, and these are the features that mark the soul’s attainment of the educational experience and objective of the dark night.

John expresses the learning the soul undertakes when entering the second stage of dark night as “passive.” Much more than mere suspension of independent or individual action, John’s passive night extends the ordinary idea of non-action or inaction. Based on the soul’s attitude toward the work of learning, John’s concept of “passive” is simultaneously non-action and a profound action in which the soul engages—to consent to and welcome God’s work in one’s soul. For John, to unite one’s soul with God occurs only when the soul gives up
trying to control what happens, for God leads the soul through the passive night only when it is profoundly involved and cooperative. One needs to undergo the educational process of the dark night because the soul holds onto a vice, especially the vice of pride, or the soul clings to desires or attachments that prevent the trust, love, and necessary for union with God. When the soul willingly consents to and welcomes God’s work in one’s soul, this work is pure gift given without the soul having tried to win or merit it. The soul’s developing this complete, intense response of quiet patience and trust signifies the soul’s attitude:

If those souls to whom this comes to pass knew how to be quiet at this time, and troubled not about performing any kind of action, whether inward or outward, neither had any anxiety about doing anything, then they would delicately experience this inward refreshment in that ease and freedom from care. (DNS, 66)

Here and throughout his commentary, John shows that engaging in the passive night is difficult, even at times excruciatingly painful work, and that one learns but gradually, never suddenly. Insight emerges only after one has accomplished this work. Because the passive quality is a full cooperation with God, the soul is completely involved thus creating the paradox: the profoundly-active work of learning occurs within the passive night (stage).

Related to John’s passive night is suffering. In the active stage, the soul’s weaknesses—“imperfections” and “errors”—can cause the soul’s suffering, incite its developing habits that help control or eliminate these weaknesses, and thereby prepare the soul for deeper work in the passive night. Suffering results from desires that obstruct union with God: pride, the primary obstacle, desires and/or attachments. During the soul’s passage through the dark night, even undeserved suffering stemming from experiences and events outside a person’s control, may reflect one’s attachment to desires that block the soul’s progress. John points out that pride is related to desire for or attachment to even good things made by God, but which are not God; “the perfection and worth of things consist not in multitude and pleasantness…but in being able to deny oneself in them” (DNS, 58).

Another aspect of the education of the soul undergoing the dark night, like every educational endeavor, is the aspect of testing, and the link of the tests with the objective of “union with Wisdom” (DNS, 89). While in the passive stage, John explains that God may allow three spirits to test the soul: one is the spirit of fornication, another is called the spiritus vertiginosus, which I translate as the spirit of despair, and another is called the spirit of blasphemy (DNS, 88–9). Calling these spirits “goads and horrors” and asserting that they are never meant as
“punishments,” John consoles readers by noting that God never allows the soul to be tested beyond its capacity. However, a test might overcome an individual who turns from God. The tests are intended as experiences that will teach the soul to rely on God alone, rather than on its own limited strength. Here John emphasizes the importance of the spiritual director who should teach the soul either how to avoid these tests, and/or help the soul through them whenever they occur. The soul thus guided learns to let God provide the power, overcomes the three spirits, and attains union with wisdom.

For John, pride is the primary obstacle to learning wisdom and realizing a loving union with God during one’s journey through the dark night. This obstacle appears in the first pages of Roberts’ (1927) *My Heart and My Flesh* as the novel’s protagonist Theodosia’s hurdle to overcome what becomes her journey through the dark night of the soul.

**Dark Night of the Soul as Lens for Analyzing Roberts’ *My Heart and My Flesh***

In *My Heart and My Flesh*, Roberts examines “the human being with all the advantages of education and culture” who at the same time lacks the sense of knowing where to find “morality,” “order,” and “significance” (Rovit 1960, 47). Theodosia embodies Roberts’ vision of the inadequacy and even tragedy of the traditional ideal of education noted by Martin (1985) and Laird (1988, 1991). In her notes on *My Heart and My Flesh*, Roberts expresses her view of Theodosia as “a wondering spirit, a lost thing” with only “partial consciousness” possessing ironically a “rich insufficiency” of life. Roberts sees Theodosia’s assets as precipitating a condition that needs to be taken down to the “bare breath” of life, and afterward built back up, which transforms the novel from “an agony of naturalistic despair” into a novel that “leads us from death into life” (Campbell and Foster, 167).

From the beginning, the oncoming night is introduced in the homely image of a young girl, Luce, hurrying to buy oil as the town lamplighter “was lifting a burning swab of waste to the street-lamp” (MHMF, 1). Luce later observes the novel’s protagonist, Theodosia, who even as a young girl is inordinately proud and therefore unaware of needing anything, who instead “spreads a trail of herself...as she went proudly first, the other girls walking on her steps, setting feet down where she guided, she leaving a comet-train of herself behind to be entered, walked into” (MHMF, 12). It is Theodosia’s soul that undergoes the dark night in the novel.

By the time she reaches the threshold of adulthood, we see that Theodosia lacks a sense of what the soul is. Foreshadowed by Luce, Theodosia’s mother, Charlotte, appears to have no soul: when Luce looks within her, there is “nothing found” (MHMF, 7). This search takes
place during church, during a catechism lesson that begins innocuously:

[Question (Q):] How can I glorify God?
[Congregational Response (R):] By loving Him and doing His holy will.
Q: Can you see God?
R: No, but He can see me. (MHMF, 10)

The rote format can only dimly accommodate the larger context: the community knows that Charlotte’s husband, Theodosia’s father, Horace, “sits in Tennie Burden’s doorway” (MHMF, 10).

Q: Does Charlotte Bell know about Tennie Burden?
R: She knows.
Q: Does she care?
R: Ask somebody else. (MHMF, 10)

Charlotte’s knowing of her husband’s unfaithfulness interweaves with catechism questions seemingly twisting her knowledge and violated religious principles that become Charlotte’s burden reflected in her “darkly averted, sad face” (MHMF 10). At the close of the catechism lesson the questions turn to the issue of what the soul is that become a starting point for Theodosia’s passage into her dark night.

Q: How do you know that you have a soul?
R: Because I can think about God and the world to come.
Q: I can’t think about the world to come.
R: Try. (MHMF, 11)

Although still a young girl, Theodosia’s pride is set against her ignorance of her mother Charlotte’s “burden” and father Horace’s not-so-secret secret. Charlotte, having no discernible sign of “something” within herself (perhaps a soul), denying the truth of her husband’s actions, will die giving Theodosia no guidance or understanding. Charlotte’s emptiness foreshadows Theodosia’s sense of what the soul is.

And therefore, as Theodosia reaches the threshold of adulthood, her sense of pride and sufficiency begins to fray. Appropriately, she seeks to smooth this fraying or being on edge through music, her first step towards finding, identifying, and perhaps understanding her own soul: through music, “she would search inwardly for some token or glimpse of this [soul, as a] shadowy substance, this delicate eidolon. The question arose again and again. The soul, where and what was it?” (MHMF, 87–8). She wonders whether music comes out of her, from “some inner unit,” another dim reference, or whether in her playing she merely imitates the teacher (MHMF, 88). While she does not know, she wonders. Her wonder, however shallow and self-serving, marks her beginning journey into the dark night. Although confused, Theodosia asks questions, searches for answers in music, romance stories, and
other limited resources, and begins to realize that “all souls [are] of equal value” (MHMF, 88). However, this realization is muddled in her mind, as she is still prideful. She makes incessant demands to fulfill her desires, and retains her worldly attachments. These mixtures of positive and negatives signs mark her struggle and strife throughout her journey as a dark night of the soul.

Her first awkward step is further impeded, as was her early educational experience in church and from her mother, by her music teacher. The music teacher has “changing moods” but cannot “crush her student’s zeal” when Theodosia demands to learn the “successive octaves” and “artificial harmonics” which, according to the teacher, are beyond her abilities because her “hand wasn’t made for that” (MHMF 94). Instead of helping Theodosia understand or trying to explain why she cannot achieve the level of excellence her doting grandfather has led her to expect, the teacher tells Theodosia she lacks the necessary “hand” to master the music. Theodosia compounds her teacher’s inadequate teaching by refusing to listen, petulantly insisting: “I want it. I want that passage under my skin. It’ll liberate my soul. I must have a showy, idle, ornamental soul, full of ruffles and grill-work” (MHMF, 94). Although this episode might harden the reader against Theodosia, since she seems the most arrogant and spoiled little rich girl, examining this episode through the lens of John’s dark night as teaching-learning process reveals her teacher’s failure to turn Theodosia’s learning struggle into a teaching moment and student-learning success. Theodosia’s teacher seems to represent the traditional ideals of education that values the genius and technical proficiency of a few over the value of helping the many. As Theodosia finds her musical instruction no longer provides her with satisfaction, she moves along into John’s dark night, the paradox within the passive night, beginning to learn the truth about herself and her own abilities. Difficulties she is not taught to overcome, cannot learn or figure out, and a teacher who does not offer a solution, link miseducative processes to traditional educational ideals.

Although Theodosia’s conception of her own soul is grossly inadequate and immature, it is consistent with the condition of a privileged girl who represents the advantages of education and culture but lacks a sense of purpose beyond herself for these advantages. Theodosia’s understanding of her own soul is significantly advanced when she cares for her dying grandfather. Earlier proclaiming she could not stand being around the sick and dying, she now assumes sole responsibility for his care, accepts suffering, and sets in motion her growth into a caring person and teacher. As she progresses she is better able to perceive the nature of the soul, not through the understanding of her own soul, but by seeing her own reflection within her grandfather’s
soul and through that reflection altering her previous perceptions of the soul, ultimately re-conceptualizing it as deathless.

There should be a soul somewhere, she thought, and she searched into the withered leavings of the crippled body and quavering voice. When she had found this entity in her grandfather she would, she thought, be able to identify it within herself. ... What, she questioned, did his spirit have to do with his knowledge, with his person, his courage, his putrefying flesh, his taste, his temper, his determination, his belief in herself? ... She tried to eliminate from herself all but that which they held in common and, the cancellations made, to identify something which one could describe as deathless.  

(MHMF, 103–4)

Theodosia’s understanding of the soul’s deathless nature becomes an advancement that shows she is ready for the passage into the testing of the first of the three spirits John depicts, of fornication. John’s spirit of fornication is one of the first of the three horrors, which test, try, or tempt the soul of someone who has gone far enough into the passive stage of the dark night to bear the testing. For John, this particular spirit “may buffet [the] senses with abominable and violent temptations, and trouble their spirits with vile considerations and representations which are most visible to the imagination, which things are a greater affliction to them than death” (DNS, 88).

Theodosia initially meets the test of the spirit of fornication and repels its temptation to hatred associated by her father’s depravity with great success. Having learned of her father’s additional transgressions with other women (two in addition to Tennie Burden), she firmly and steadily rejects him, seeing herself “freed; somewhere there was a soul within her, she had identified it in a swift moment of concentrated loathing, cut it free with hate. Now there would be to describe it, to outline it, to study it, to see it” (MHMF, 105). Her learning, while “hard” in the sense of strong, is also “with determination and cool with the end of emotion” (MHMF, 105). Her use of the word “hate” is crucial, for hate here is the positive assertion of truth opposed to her father’s wrongs, which have been revealed to her over time and leading up to her grandfather’s death.

John’s imaginative nature of the spirit of fornication is vividly rendered when, at her grandfather’s bedside, Theodosia finds her father’s voice gradually becoming “delayed,” his words slowed down and “pushed apart” to “let clearer pictures stand between” (MHMF 177) them. In her vision, she sees a procession of women down the center of a “wide promenade” walking in the midst of another crowd of women lined up along the sides of the road. This parade of women follows a self-propelled float carrying a grotesque male figure of “heroic
proportions” displaying himself in a “lewd pose” (178). This vision reveals how Theodosia’s discerning process, or wisdom, is developing as she moves through the dark night. She pictures the meaning of what her father has done and what he has become, in what she had learned of his three adulterous affairs and four abandoned children, outside his marriage and home. She simultaneously awakens to what he has done to her and her mother, who was never able to do anything to stop or counteract the horror.

Theodosia now becomes cognizant of a third element in her vision: she sees her “self” standing beside her.

Her own self stood at her elbow. She turned quickly about, toward her self, and she knew a deep wish, an ardent prayer that her self had not seen this last. Her self had not seen, was watching the women as they were going far down the street… the float had passed by. Her self had not seen it. She was glad with a great thankful prayer. She found then, suddenly, that she had waked from a sleep. (MHMF, 179)

Read through the lens of John’s concept of the passive within his larger concept of the dark night, Theodosia’s proper care for her grandfather has deepened dramatically and quickly to show her becoming capable of caring for her own “self.” Her conception of her own soul here merges with her conception of herself. This effect of her learning, this shifting from external to internal dimension reflects Martin’s (2007) concept of educational metamorphosis, where change beyond the acquisition of disciplinary or subject knowledge often marks unforeseen or unanticipated, but truly educative experiences. Her learning also reflects the passive nature of the dark night. In her vision-trial by John’s spirit of fornication, Theodosia succeeds in protecting her “self,” her soul, with care, as her mother has been unable to do.

After the vision passes, Theodosia feels “as if she were something living that was being expelled from the dark, dead mass… pushed outward into a quivering point of pain”; another mark of John’s concept of suffering in the passive stage of the dark night. But even in her pain, in a gesture reflecting her care of her self in the vision, “she gathered herself together in the act of folding her arms” (MHMF 181). She feels “diminished to a point of denial, concentrated to negation,” but she is able to “walk toward the inner door… feeling a summons,” as she turns away from her father forever (MHMF, 182). Through John’s passage through the dark night’s horrors one can read this inner door and summons as God’s calling her soul. Although she feels diminished, denied, and negated, these feelings are reflective of her journey toward fuller liberation from the past miseducative experience. Her hatred of her father allows her to cut away from him and move forward.
As a catalyst, hatred is a two-edged sword, though. Hatred is part of the test, and this test leads to another temptation by the spirit of fornication. As John reiterates throughout his commentary, the need for a spiritual director, or teacher, is great. Earlier in the novel, Theodosia attempts to connect with her two half-sisters, Lethe and Americy, and half-brother Stiggins. Here possibly is the proof of that need, for Theodosia lacks such a teacher. Anger toward her father, however justified, spills over and makes her vulnerable to a deeper test of the spirit of fornication, which “goads” her into projecting her hatred and anger toward her father onto Lethe’s cheating husband. When Lethe murders him, Theodosia falls gradually deeper and deeper under the spell of John’s spirit of despair, which “darken[s]” the sense and mind so that one sees no way out of one’s difficulty; decision becomes impossible; confusion reigns; “neither can they find any help for their judgments in counsel or thought” (DNS, 89). The constellation and convergence of this darkening of the mind’s power to think and reason, the onset of overwhelming confusion, and the sense of helplessness make this, in John’s view, the “severest [of the three] goads and horrors of this [dark] night…” (DNS, 89).

Filled with guilt for her part in the murder, Theodosia becomes physically ill, deliriously repeating over and over that she killed Ross. After she shows brief signs of recovery, the town doctor sends her to live at her aunt’s decaying, country plantation mansion. There her aunt denies her food, allows rain leaks into her room by failing to repair the roof, and finally refuses to converse with her. The deprivation and inhumanity of Theodosia’s aunt replicates John’s treatment by his fellow monks during his nine-month imprisonment. Theodosia’s escape follows the pattern of John’s escape from his imprisonment. John’s spirit of despair mirrors Theodosia’s situation, as a legion of spirits form a cacophony of voices tormenting her and bringing her to the brink of suicide, at which point she cries out: “Oh God, I believe, and there’s nothing to believe” (MHMF, 247). This is her cry to which the title of the novel alludes from Psalm 84: “My heart and my flesh crieth out to the living God.” It is the paradoxical turning point of complete surrender, the transition through the test of the spirit of despair beyond ordinary knowing; it marks the end of her descent into hell—the dark night.

The world becomes “more and more dim” and “…the dark crept nearer…”; shadows are all that are left to indicate any object outside herself; her progress continues as another “darkened mass” is

…among the shadows…holding a remote kindness for some being far apart from herself, identical with some abstract goodness that would never be stated…gathered to a dim
shadow that concentrated to a dull point and receded through elastic space to infinite depths of remoteness. (MHMF, 254–5)

Although it may seem that she regresses here, rather than progresses, a vague philosophical principle of the dark night is represented in the note of “remote kindness” and “abstract goodness,” as yet only partially-realized ideals. Within the temptation of suicide and all her disorientation and despair comes the power of the passive in John’s dark night when she calls out in despair to God, as another vision of herself suddenly jars Theodosia’s being. Engulfed by the dark night, Theodosia can no longer even physically see, but, like St. Paul and the blinded OEdipus, she sees in another way.

She stared at the wall to the left of the fireplace, her vision having no function. Only one fact held truth in the singleness of prophecy. She saw herself leap from the chair suddenly, and rush out at the door; a sudden start and she would be gone. She stared at the wall; the picture of her going, a felt picture, spread downward through her limbs that lay relaxed not, ready for the sudden spasm of movement. (MHMF 255)

“Seeing” that she can leave the room brings Theodosia immediate serenity. This vision is given to her as she cries out to believe even though there is nothing to believe, when she finds the “reality beyond fact” (Spivey 1965, 247), the significance of all of her searching for the soul.

Roberts evokes John’s passive concept of the dark night in Theodosia’s transition from despair to hope by means of an “unsaid” and “loaned” word, followed by another word which is, apparently, said, and in this context, she reclaims her own existence:

“I’m still alive,” she sang under her breath, “I’m alive, I’m alive.” She leaned tensely near the hearth and spoke, or she smiled without speaking. Her eyes were dim with the new birth and the bloom of renascence slightly blurred her consciousness as yet. The loaned word grew more vivid, “Tomorrow,” substituted now for the unsaid word that receded, its mission accomplished. (MHMF, 256)

“Tomorrow” is a “homely, habitual fact” (MHMF, 256). The “unsaid word” recedes into the darkness—even the reader never learns what the word is. This is a unique use of the literary device of the self-defining word that encodes its own meaning, in contrast to the almost mystical contrast of the word that is spoken in one’s soul. Moreover, by definition, “tomorrow” contradicts and counteracts despair. Theodosia sees that “tomorrow” has a “shape” and power in and of itself (MHMF, 255). Sudden and inexplicable as the vision was, this word is “vivid, like
a new flower in a sunny place”; although powerless to speak it aloud, Theodosia “knew it with a rush of thanksgiving that out-ran all her recognition” (MHMF 255). Echoing John’s appreciation for simple habits, disciplines, and images, which Theodosia has previously learned, and sees these things reinforced during her successful journey through the passive stage of the dark night.

Though more mundane, Theodosia’s escape follows John’s escape pattern: John attempts to escape the compound; facing an insurmountable surrounding wall, about to turn back to give himself up in defeat, he suddenly finds himself standing in the outside street (Brenan 1973, 32). In his commentary, John writes that after passing through the dark night, the soul receives protection, safety, and healing. Carmelite nuns hide and take care of John until he can travel. A local peddler helps Theodosia who, like the nuns who delight in helping John, is delighted to help her. Taken to Spring Run Valley, a rural hill community, a doctor and his wife continue to care for Theodosia until she is well enough to begin teaching in the local one-room schoolhouse. Teaching in a rural school becomes the setting for Theodosia’s third test, in accordance with John’s spirit of blasphemy, through which her educational metamorphosis manifests itself.

Theodosia becomes a teacher who, in sharp contrast to her former music teacher, uses her musically ability to help her students learn. Theodosia exemplifies the new ideal of teacher that shows care for, concern about, and connection with her students, using her own education as gift (Martin 1985, 2006; Laird 1988):

If they were dull, Theodosia in her distress at this, played for them on the fiddle. The day little Johnnie Turner could not learn to spell “hitching” she played a Romance and an Adagio, a pensive wailing, until all the children were happy and they leaned forward on their desks, a-tiptoe to hear. (MHMF, 268)

She is certainly a person transformed. Following this episode, Theodosia meets her third test from the spirit of blasphemy. Entering the schoolroom one morning, she finds the blackboard covered with profanity:

She erased the words, seeing them, unafraid of them. They named the excretions of the body and the acts of excretion, she observed. If one is to name the discharges of the body he should name them all, she thought, looking at the last of the words as she erased. Name them all, slighting none. Among these words should be written the omitted word, a true juice of the human frame, tear. Spelled with four letters, as were the other words, she ruminated, belonging with the others entirely. Let the boy, whoever he was, who wrote for the whole people
of the community, let him write the last word; he would write it in time, this supreme juice from the body.... (MHMF, 278)

In this trial, Theodosia, serene, calm, and wise passes this test with little effort. She embraces the test as an opportunity for her to meditate and reflect, to learn, to add something new and transformational to four-letter words. In so doing, she demonstrates her advancement through the dark night of the soul to realize John’s union with wisdom (DNS, 89).

**Conclusion**

The use of novels as sources of data for educational research allows access to thought of writers who have been excluded from consideration as educational theorists in the history of educational thought (Martin 1985, 178–9). Reading Roberts’ novel through the lens of John of the Cross’ concept of the dark night of the soul reveals meaning in both writers’ work that has something to say about the traditional ideal of an educated person, and reveals terrible deficiencies in the traditional ideal. Roberts portrays the recovery of a soul from the traditional ideal, and encompasses recovery in a new ideal of a teacher who discovers how to meet the needs of her students, provide them with meaningful learning experiences, and attain wisdom.

As lens through which to read Roberts’ novel, John’s the dark night of the soul elucidates ideas and concepts “beneath” and “beyond” imagery and language in novels (Otto 2007; Worley, Otto, and Bailey 2010). John’s explanation of the passive night, of suffering, of testing and temptation, and of union with God as the soul travels its path through the dark night illuminates Theodosia’s moving from being a miseducated woman to recreating herself as an educated person and new ideal. Theodosia journeys through John of the Cross’ dark night, learns what it has to teach her, and educationally metamorphoses as Martin (2006) theorizes one may. Her metamorphosis illustrates how one’s learning journey through the dark night can lead to self-transformation and pedagogical reconceptualization. For those who would help others on their educational journeys and journeys towards union with God, John of the Cross and Roberts’ Theodosia are excellent models and guides. Each transforms his/her confusion, destruction, despair from mis-educative to educative during their respective journeys through the dark nights of their own souls.

**References**


### Endnotes

1 I am indebted to both Virginia Hensen and Virginia Worley for pointing this out to me in two separate contexts.

2 Campbell and Foster (1956) 158–59; 167. References from Roberts’ notes are from her papers held in the Library of Congress, catalogued
as Elizabeth Madox Roberts Papers. Roberts’ notes will be cited hereafter parenthetically by the author of the published source and page number.
Juxtaposing Progressive Education and Organized Religion: Flora White’s Story

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Introduction

In Alan R. Sadovnik and Susan F. Semel’s (2002) book, Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders During the Progressive Era, the authors identify the religious backgrounds of several noteworthy, progressive educators who represent a variety of denominations. Charlotte Hawkins Brown was a Baptist; Marietta Johnson was raised in the Christian Church; Margaret Naumburg grew up in the German-Jewish tradition; Margaret Haley was Roman Catholic; Laura Bragg was the daughter of a Methodist minister; and Carmelita Chase Hinton was the child of a devout Episcopalian. Although assigned religious and denominational labels, these women’s religious lives have not been explored, and the relation between their pedagogical and religious practices remains fertile ground for research.

This lack of research is underscored by scholarship that exists on male progressive educators. Richard Hofstadter (1955), for example, claims that the lost status of the Protestant clergy was an important contributor to Progressive reform efforts. Clarence J. Karier (1983) describes psychologist G. Stanley Hall, leader of the child study movement that fueled progressive education, as a “priestly prophet” who “had passed beyond the faith of his fathers toward a new heretical faith” (pp. 35–36). George Counts likewise writes the “liberal-minded upper middle class” parents who sent their children to progressive schools had abandoned their forebears’ faith and had “an agnostic attitude toward all important questions” (1932, p. 2). Jared Stallones (2006) contends religious attitudes were a driving force behind the work of many progressive educators. He notes that while such educational theorists and practitioners as Jerry Voorhis and Frederick L. Redefer melded their religious beliefs into their educational theory and practice, while such men as Paul Hanna and William Heard Kilpatrick divorced their religious lives from their educational efforts. Still others, notably John Dewey, came to terms with their religious feelings by reinterpreting them into humanistic forms. What resulted, according to Stallones, was Dewey’s idea of the social and moral aspects of education.

In this paper I examine the connection between the religious beliefs and pedagogy of one female progressive educator not included in
Sadovnik and Semel’s book: Flora White (1860–1948). White was involved in important ways in new educational initiatives that helped to transform US schools. She participated in the revolt against regimentation in the Massachusetts public schools where she taught. An enthusiastic participant in G. Stanley Hall’s child study movement, White founded and operated Miss White’s Home School in Concord, Massachusetts between 1897 and 1914, an “experimental” school for girls (and some of their young male siblings) where White promoted physical activity in young women. White’s career was enhanced by teaching, study, and travel to Cape Colony (in southern Africa) and Europe. After retirement she led a full life becoming an active member of an intellectual community that included theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and other prominent clerics. Although she was an Episcopalian, White grew up in the Congregational Church, wrote extensively for a Unitarian magazine edited by John Haynes Holmes, minister of Riverside Church in New York and founder of the NAACP and ACLU, and authored religious dramas and poetry with spiritual themes.

**Methodology and Thesis**

I studied primary and secondary sources associated with Flora White’s life between 1876 and 1914 to compare her pedagogical and religious views during her teaching career. Primary sources include White’s professional speeches and published articles, as well as her personal correspondence. Secondary sources include newspaper articles, school bulletins, and advertisements for Miss White’s Home School.

I chose a methodology focusing on comparisons of White’s pedagogical and religious attitudes, specifically tolerance of routine activity, acceptance of individual interpretation/discovery, comfort with emotional/physical expressions, use of everyday examples to enhance understanding, and view of the professional in charge (teacher/clergy). These criteria reflect major themes in White’s educational practice. They also correspond to five of the Seven Principles established by the Progressive Education Association in 1919 (Interest, the Motive of All Work; Freedom to Develop Naturally; Greater Attention to the Child’s Physical Development; Co-operation Between School and Home to Meet the Needs of Child-life; and The Teacher a Guide, not a Taskmaster) (Cremin 1969, 243–245). The juxtaposition reveals White’s pedagogical and religious views as often contradictory. This lack of alignment may be explained in part by prevailing attitudes on evolution and social class that influenced White’s thinking.

**The Evidence**

With respect to the first comparison (tolerance of routine activity), White’s distaste for classroom regimentation and routine is reflected in her criticism of schools in her day:
We...drive the children into rooms by fifties and sixties...and there compel them to sit for five long hours each day over verbal tasks, permitting them for motor activities only wigglings of the fingers with pen and pencil, wigglings of the tongue in using words, and a few rigid movements of the arms taken under peremptory commands. (White 1899, 8)

In contrast, White readily accepts the routines of religious practice set forth in the Book of Common Prayer which contains the structured services of worship for churches in the Anglican Communion to which the Episcopal Church belonged.

White proves a strong promoter of individual discovery and interpretation in the classroom. For example, she writes:

The self directing of certain activities belongs to the nature of youth, and it is a mistake to thwart it by assuming the sole direction of such activities ourselves.

Education must let youth live in the world of nature, the artist world...the world in which it may create, the world in which the sole guide is some impelling force within, the world in which it never aims at the attainment of any established standard. (White, Child Training and Evolution, Part I, 11)

White advocates that teachers allow their students to “test and do and dare” (White, Child Training and Evolution, Part II, 10). However, she takes exception when a British Particular Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, subjects the scriptures to his interpretation. Spurgeon, the most popular preacher in London, never attended theology school. When White heard him preach at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London in 1885, she reported he “perverted the text...in every conceivable way to suit his idea & illustrations.” (Flora White to Harriet M. White, August 2, 1885)

White believes in individual expression and movement at school, as evidenced by her advocacy of giving each child

...a space that would insure it against repression,—a space wherein it can laugh and sing, and kick and jump, and swim and dive, and frolic,—yes, and plant and pull, and pound and build, and always have room for it all. (White 1899, 7–8)

Toward this end, she suggests school success might be measured by such factors as “percentages of joy and exuberance of spirits,” rapid pulses, and strong longings (White 1899, 6). Yet she was very uncomfortable with the expressions of emotion she witnessed when Spurgeon encouraged members of his congregation to “break down” thereby bringing them to tears. White reports the experience left her cold: “I might as well have gone into the woodshed for all the religious emotions it awakened” (Flora White to Harriet M. White, August 2,
1885). Reflecting upon a two-year teaching assignment in southern Africa, White also discusses her discomfort with zealous evangelical Christians trying to convert her. She writes approvingly of one clergyman who was “not a fanatic,” but a “staid, orthodox minister” (Flora White to Harriet M. White and Mary A. White, October 4, 1885). On the other hand, White says staidness can be overdone. She writes of a Dutch Reformed Church she attended in Cape Colony, “The service was wooden and the seats excruciatingly so (Flora White to Mary A. White, February 28, 1887).

White spent a summer studying at the Seminarium for Teachers in Sweden where she learned to promote individualized education and cognitive development through the construction of traditional Swedish handcrafts. She became an enthusiastic supporter of sloyd (educational handcrafts) in which students work at their own pace to create new learning through folk processes initially developed by working-class Swedes. In her religious life, however, White eschews the commonplace. For example, she is dismayed when Spurgeon

…hung over the railing while he spoke & talked in the easiest most off hand way & in the language of the common people, often a vulgar language…for ex. When he spoke of Abraham’s offering with Isaac he referred to it as “that painful business.” Common workaday phrases are what he abounds in. (White, August 2, 1885)

White repeatedly says a teacher should be a facilitator of learning, surrounding the child with appropriate materials while waiting and watching for growth to unfold. She advises teachers to “learn of the child the road of its desires, and travel along that road—hand in hand with it—beside it, not in front of it…[or] above it” (White 1899, 9). To foster this role, she recommends classes not exceed 15 students. In White’s religious life, however, she enjoys large assemblages of people and worships in a cathedral. As a young teacher, she enjoys listening to the sermons of the Reverend John Cotton Brooks, Rector of Christ Church in Springfield, Massachusetts. She feels Brooks “speaks to humanity at its highest” while Spurgeon “speaks to humanity at its lowest” (Flora White to Harriet M. White, August 2, 1885). Both descriptions show the minister’s delivering information in a top-down, lecture format. White acknowledges Brooks’ pronouncements were moving to her, but notes that “others [hear the complex ideas in the sermon and] say what does he mean[?]” (Flora White to Harriet M. White, August 2, 1885).

**Deconstructing the Disparity**

To understand the disparity between Flora White’s pedagogical and religious views, one might note her classroom practice is designed for
children while her religious beliefs and practices are geared to adults. Since progressive education is, first and foremost, “focused squarely on the child” (Counts 1932), it is helpful to consider how children were viewed during White’s teaching career to determine the implications of this distinction.

According to John Cleverley and D. C. Phillips (1986), Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) had a profound effect on Americans’ visions of childhood during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. During this period scholarly and popular discourses were strongly influenced by a hybrid of embryology and evolutionary biology known as the theory of recapitulation: the embryonic development of human beings passed through stages similar to those in the evolution of their ancestors. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) promoted the idea that the individual grew and the species evolved along parallel paths that led from homogeneity to heterogeneity. G. Stanley Hall, who endorsed Miss White’s Home School, thought that infancy, childhood, and youth are “keys to unlock the past history of the race,” and describes the new field of psychology as the study of “embryology of the soul” (as quoted in Cleverley & Phillips 1986, 50).

White’s writings and speeches reflect her exposure to Darwin and the theory of recapitulation. For example, she writes:

There is a “natural evolution” possible to all growing things. In recognizing this, we recognize a force unknown, and perhaps as Spencer says unknowable, making itself manifest in every young life. (White, *Child Training and Evolution*, 8)

In professional speeches and articles, she describes the school’s role in “producing a stronger, nobler race” (White 1899, 6) adding:

I hold in my hand a living germ…. I close my hand, and that mysterious thing we call life is gone, no man knows whither…. How might the life power of this germ have been cherished? How might its growth have been forwarded? Manifestly, by having left more space about it, where that tiny, new-born force could reign supreme, absolutely free in its motions from the encroaching motions of the external world.

As with the single cell, so with the aggregation of cells which form the child is life to be cherished and growth to be forwarded. (White 1899, 8–9)

In other words, White argues children have special requirements because they are evolving into something greater. The human race is evolving as well—at varying rates—which, in White’s mind, accounts for the differences in the humanity represented by Brooks’ and Spurgeon’s audiences.
Influence of Social Class

Closely related to White’s exposure to Darwin’s theory and the theory of recapitulation are her views on social class. During her teaching career, White wrote letters sprinkled with class references. For example, in 1885 when she visited London en route to Cape Colony, she describes:

…one of the worst streets in London—A thieves’ resort—where murders and common & dark & dirty & literally heaped with babies—real pretty babies some of them if they had been washed up & oh—such looking women. (White to Harriet M. and Mary White, August 6, 1885)

Six years later, when White travels to Sweden on a German ship, she notes that the women passengers are “common.” White’s description reveals that sometimes her class distinctions are tied to her view of race:

The boat is a funny old German craft, not beautiful but thoroughly comfortable. She has waddled along at very good speed and does everything quite well in fact, like the rest of her race, but does not appeal to your sentiments—the poetry left out & the polish left off. Poor Heine [a German lyrical poet who became an expatriate in Paris] how could he help leaving them!

I asked myself as they streamed on board at N. Y.—Can it be possible these bipeds belong to the same species that I do—and I was conscious that if they had been cows I should have patted them and hugged them and taken a real delight in their presence—but it was useless. They were not cows and where you looked for something suggestive of more than creature you found only that which can readily be evolved out of bread and butter and more especially beer—I summoned all of my humanitarian principles to rush to my rescue—alas, they were utterly unavailing. I could feel no kinship. (White to Mary A. White, May 20, 1891)

White’s views of social class were shaped in part by a childhood in which her family had lost status. Her father, a state legislator and small farmer in Heath, Massachusetts, died when she was an infant leaving her mother with five children. Local histories note Mrs. White and her children were poor during Flora’s childhood. The four daughters remained with their mother; the one son was “bound out” to a farm family with a male head of household in a neighboring town (Moyer 1974, 493). The experience was painful, as Flora White recalls in an undated letter to her mother around 1885 or 1886:
“I’ve tried to raise my family to my own level” as a certain sister of mine remarked years & years ago when I was a little thing and “took in” what I heard. The aforementioned sister I am afraid is in the uncomfortable position of finding the family a little above her level. At any rate if there is further lifting to be done I think she is the one in most need of hoisting.

The letter likely refers to Flora White’s eldest sister, Emma (the only White daughter who married), who moved with her husband William Hillman to Lincoln, Nebraska where he worked as a bill agent with the Rock Island freight depot. Emma and William Hillman were the parents of ten children. The remaining White sisters were teachers and thus considered middle class, despite their low pay. Their mother was a well-educated woman for her day having studied Latin and Greek with the Congregational minister to prepare for Emma Willard’s Female Seminary in Troy, New York.

Around the age of twelve, Flora White had an opportunity to gain exposure to a refined clientele and a fuller educational experience when she moved with her mother and sisters to Amherst, Massachusetts to board in the home of Reverend Isaac Esty, a Congregational minister who previously served as an interim pastor at Heath. His son, William Cole Esty, was a Professor of mathematics at the all-male Amherst College. White later recalls she received a classical education while living at Amherst. Although she later graduated from a teacher-training program at Westfield Normal School that largely catered to daughters of small farmers and craftspeople in western Massachusetts, White appeared confident in her knowledge of educational programs at more elite schools. In 1886 she wrote a letter to her mother and sister describing one of her Cape Colony pupils, Eugene Marais, who later became a famous poet and naturalist. White reports, “He is a very fair scholar,—he would be about in the sophomore class at Amherst or any ordinary college—and he is about 15 now, I think” (White to Harriet M. and Mary White, May 23, 1886).

Social class may have shaped Flora White’s discomfort with strong emotional expression in religious settings. Daniel T. Rodgers (1980) writes that after 1830—when Flora White was growing up—child shapers focused in a highly-systematic way on developing self control in Northern, middle-class children through habit inculcation. By the last third of the nineteenth century—during White’s teaching career—many child shapers took a different approach. Nervous about the pervasive changes that industrial capitalism brought to their society, they began to idolize “pre-machinery childhoods” when children’s spirits had not been broken by classroom drills or premature labor (361). The child-shapers tried to create oases of imagination where children could be spontaneous. Rodgers notes the change occurred slowly and unevenly in
US schools, and children received mixed messages on the merits of order and spontaneity for the remainder of the century.

Despite her respect for the clergy, White was not hesitant to report Spurgeon’s “vulgarisms.” Her description may reflect Spurgeon’s lack of theological education as well as the social hierarchy of Protestant denominations in the United States:

He is short with rather bushy whiskers & hair, decidedly common looking, a plain unpretentious man…. From his speech you would not have known him from a Yankee Methodist. And yet—he was so earnest, so eloquent—so simple & simply sincere & reverent—that you can’t help but admire him…. His whole life is so infused with the desire of instilling some religion, feeling & emotion into the masses of the indifferent & low that he does not get beyond it. (White, August 2, 1985)

This statement contrasts with White’s inclusive statements and writings for professional audiences indicating that educators should be striving for a fuller life for all children.

After returning from Cape Colony in 1887, White decided to temper the religious influence in the small, independent home school that she and her sister Mary hoped to establish in Springfield, Massachusetts to experiment with fine- and gross-motor activities as a means of education. White decided not to include her sister Hattie in the enterprise in part because of Hattie’s strong views as an evangelical Christian and out of concern that Hattie would try to exercise her prerogatives as older sister when school decisions were made. The Springfield School was in operation through 1892 when Flora White took a position at Westfield Normal School.

When White, with her sister Mary, opened Miss White’s Home School at Concord, the school bulletin included three clergy among its endorsers—Reverend John Cotton Brooks; Reverend E. Winchester Donald, Rector of Trinity Church in Boston, and Reverend Wallace MacMullen, pastor of the Park Avenue Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. White considered the Concord School the pinnacle of her career.

In their retirement years the White sisters were short of funds again. Following Mary’s death in 1938, Flora’s Episcopal clergy friends assisted her in maintaining a middle-class lifestyle and helped to ease her loneliness. Howard Chandler Robbins, former Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, arranged through Bishop Thomas Casady of Oklahoma for White to travel each year to Oklahoma City to spend the winter with her brother. Angus Dun, Dean of the Episcopal
Theological School and later Bishop of Washington, DC, prepared White's state and federal tax returns as an act of friendship.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Flora White does not fall into any of Stallones’ categories. Although her pedagogical and religious practices do not coincide, White does not divorce religion from her progressive school. She does, however, seek to temper its influence. Over the course of her lifetime, Flora White becomes increasingly tolerant of other religions and ethnicities. She establishes a friendship with Felix Frankfurter, a Jewish agnostic who had a distinguished career on the US Supreme Court. She becomes vitally interested in the work of Mohandas Gandhi. In a novel published in 1941, White criticizes cultural narrowness and attention to status; she also writes sympathetically about a young Lithuanian woman who came to the United States as a steerage passenger. Through it all, White remains a practicing Episcopalian who celebrated her New England heritage and attended each summer the Congregational Church in Heath that she knew as a girl. In that sense, she does not abandon the faith of her forebears. It is more accurate to say that her religious practice evolves—a fitting term for someone whose pedagogical views were shaped by Darwinian and recapitulation theories.

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The Death of Religion and the Rebirth of the Spirit: The Implications of the Works of Joseph Chilton Pearce for Transforming Modern Education

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Introduction
The works of Joseph Chilton Pearce in many ways challenge us to examine not only the institutions we have created in society and the roles they play but challenge us to look in the mirror and examine ourselves as human beings. These challenges are particularly-poignant if the institutions we have built are extensions of who we are. At a minimum Pearce’s work raises such questions as: what kind of jobs are our hospitals doing in connection with providing optimum environments in delivery rooms; what role does religion play in connection with the promotion of human agency; what role does education play in connection with helping students to develop and utilize their full intellectual and spiritual potentials, and why is not self-actualization (as defined by Abraham Maslow) a goal of the educational curriculum? In this paper I summarize and explain Pearce’s work and identify implications for today’s society.

Joseph Chilton Pearce burst into popular American culture in 1971 with the publication of his first book, The Crack in the Cosmic Egg. This book was followed by subsequent books. An itinerant educator and prolific writer who lectures all over the world, Pearce exposes the flaws in Western society driven by a culture of materialism which has created institutions that sabotage human growth and development. He examines humans’ spiritual and intellectual potential, how culture sabotages that potential, and how this sabotage results in an anxiety-ridden, fear-based society locked into a vicious cycle of self-sabotage, self-loathing, and self-destruction. In such a society, love becomes the passé default choice, selected only in a last desperate effort to salvage what can be saved of the human spirit. Neighbors are strangers, and parents fear their own children. Teachers are threatened with bodily harm, and schools become armed camps. One child’s poignant question to her mother says it all: “Mommy will I live long enough to go to college?”

Pearce’s primary preoccupation in his books is human potential. In many ways his works are a clarion call to action lest a rapidly-decaying
society go the way of the Roman Empire—itself a society once considered the superpower of its day and now is on the junk heap of defunct civilizations. Historian Edward Gibbons (2005), examining the causes of Rome’s collapse, identifies three primary reasons: 1) the decline of civic virtue; 2) the influence of barbarians; and 3) the rise of Christianity as a state religion. Pearce, however, points to the rise of pathological culture as the primary cause of our contemporary problems. Tracing this pathology to a disconnect between humans and their built-in, biological, spiritual potential, Pearce connects the alienation, fear and anxiety which are embedded within modern society to a failure to embrace our 4.5-billion-year genetic heritage as human beings. This heritage, an embodiment of nature’s plan for us, essentially is a genetic blueprint that should, if allowed to, guide us in the full use of our genetic capacity—a capacity for genius-level intelligence as well as a capacity for complete spiritual development. This genetic plan should unfold in a natural and orderly way if given the right environment and models for emulation. The human body is made up of seventy-eight trillion cells all coordinated and functioning harmoniously unless something goes wrong. The human brain is composed of between 50 to 100 billion cells, again all coordinated and functioning in harmony unless something derails them. From a single egg cell in utero, we develop into this complex entity called a human being, nevertheless, many things can go wrong before or after the sperm and egg meet. The potential for something to go wrong is particularly great if the in utero environment is not prepared to nourish that fertilized egg to maturity or if the mother is not emotionally-ready for pregnancy. When either of these things occur, nature’s plan begins to be interrupted, according to Pearce, and we end up with individuals who are not capable of maximizing their potential. What is supposed to unfold in a normal and natural way to complete perfection unfolds in a limited and distorted way that aborts various brain capacities for full functioning. For Pearce, although fathers are important, the mother is the key to making society work because she is what Pearce calls first matrix, the one upon which the whole, healthy human beings’ development depends.

**Multiple Matrices and Bonding**

The etymology of the word, “matrix,” goes back to the Latin and Greek words meaning mother or womb. The in utero environment (which Pearce refers to as a matrix) is the mother’s womb, designed to provide a stable, safe, and secure environment for growth. If the egg-matrix in utero is ideal, the fetus develops normally and naturally and has unlimited potential for intellectual and spiritual growth. Once born, the external mother matrix is supposed to take over the nourishment process: nursing the infant for at least eighteen months (recommendations here can very) and generally continuing to provide a safe and secure environment for the infant to grow. This is the second
part of a three-step process according to Pearce. The third step is bonding with the earth which Pearce sees as another matrix:

After an infant is born from the womb, the mother becomes the source of energy, the possibility, and the safe place on which to stand…. Later in development, the earth itself should become the matrix, and we have always referred to [it as] mother earth. Nature [itself] was always considered the general spirit of the earth’s life and was called mother nature or matrix. (Pearce, 1977, 18)

Pearce says the development of human intelligence is based on a series of formations and shifts within successive matrices. Human beings are designed to grow in intelligence by learning about and gaining the ability to interact with one source of energy, possibility, and security after another. The sequence moves from concrete matrices to more and more abstract matrices, “from the matrix of our given life substance to the matrix of pure creative thought” (19).

Citing research by Marcelle Geber with 300, home-delivered infants in Uganda, Pearce describes children who are alert from birth and who show exemplary developmental skills at an early age. Geber used the famous Gesell tests, developed at Yale University, to developmentally assess infants, to measure for early intelligence. These tests reveal:

The pictures of the forty-eight-hour old child—supported only by the forearms, bolt upright, perfect head balance and eye focus, and a marvelous intelligence shining in the face—are no more astonishing than those of the six-week-old child. At six or seven weeks, all 300 of these children crawled skillfully, could sit up by themselves, and would sit spellbound before a mirror looking at their own images for long periods. This particular ability was not to be expected in the American-European child before twenty-four weeks (six months) according to the Gesell tests (68–69).

Pearce goes on to describe additional, remarkable developmental abilities that are examples of what should happen given the right matrix and providing bonding has occurred. Bonding for Pearce is critical for the infant’s development. He defines bonding as “a psychological-biological state, a vital physical link that coordinates and unifies the entire biological system…[it] seals a primary knowing that is the basis for rational thought” (72). He argues “the unbonded person (and bonding to [material] objects is to be very much unbonded in a functional sense) will spend his life in search for what bonding was designed to give: the matrix” (72). Intelligence in the unbonded person can never unfold completely because it cannot get beyond its primal need to be bonded. All intellectual activity will be used in a search of that matrix which will take on such guises as finding and leading an
authentic life, making it in the world, or getting somewhere. Pearce contends that our assumptions about human intelligence grossly underestimate our intellectual potential. According to Pearce, what we attempt to measure on intelligence tests and achievement tests is essentially a very small part of that potential. Achievement tests and intelligence tests attempt to measure knowledge and cognitive ability in connection with what has been learned from the social environment, but the measuring of creativity, intuition, high levels of concrete, operational thinking, formal-operational thinking, and reversibility thinking as well as emotional and spiritual intelligence get lost in the shuffle. Much of this debacle begins in the hospital delivery room, according to Pearce.

**The Delivery Room Debacle**

Pearce argues modern hospitals essentially sabotage the infant delivery process that should be normal, natural and nearly stress-free. He refers to what happens in the modern hospital delivery room as a time bomb. Mothers are put in a supine position on their backs and are forced to push against gravity in a prolonged labor process that often goes on for hours. The stress that this creates both for mother and child is enormous. Cortical steroids and other stress-related hormones are produced in the mother’s body; and what is happening in the mother’s body is also happening to the child. He says that the supine position that the mother is put in for delivery throws every muscle and bone out of line for natural delivery from the womb and makes delivery extremely difficult. When this is coupled with the widespread use of episiotomies (i.e. cutting the vagina to make room for the baby’s head), premedication drugs, and anesthetics, as well as the usual practice of cutting the umbilical cord as soon as the baby’s body is out of the mother, a situation has been created in which bonding becomes almost impossible.

In ancient indigenous societies around the world, mothers, when about to deliver, simply went to a location that was quiet and peaceful, squatted down, and delivered the baby with a minimum amount of effort. This is not to say that no problems ever occurred, but, clearly, on a whole the process was safe, simple and uncomplicated. Pearce calls what is happening in modern delivery rooms today a time bomb because too often infants delivered in hospitals end up with either some form of brain damage or experience an incomplete bonding process. Much of the psychopathic and sociopathic behavior often witnessed in Western society today as well as the increasing proliferation of bipolar and autistic children, Pearce argues, can be traced back in part or in whole to what happens in the delivery room and during the first days of life after a child is born. Mothers observed delivering their babies in the natural squatting manner or through the use of a birthing stool in ancient societies, says Pearce, were back at work or at their normal activities within twenty minutes after delivery. Holland, he says, “where most
childbirth takes place in the home with only a midwife in attendance (although ample backup emergency service is ready), has the lowest infant mortality rate in the world (among technological nations which keep tab on this sort of thing) until Sweden recently took top honors” in the 1970s (47). Current (2010) figures from the United Nations Populations Statistics data ranks the United States 33rd in infant mortality rate behind Iceland, Singapore, Japan, Sweden, Norway, and Hong Kong who lead the way with the lowest. Spiritual development and the development of intelligence are intricately linked, argues Pearce, and to the extent that our institutions sabotage our intellectual growth, they also sabotage our spiritual potential. By spiritual potential or development Pearce is referring to a process that:

...has as its goal an absolute self-sufficiency beyond all such dependency. To achieve this, our spirits must first unite our awareness with that from which we had to separate in order to achieve our state of unique awareness in the first place. That ego which was set apart from everything must be united with everything to realize its union with the Self. ... This separation is only an internal play of the brain/mind, an illusion, but the illusion acts to construct for us a completely separate ego. Spiritual development unfolds the illusion as our own play, shows the unity of all things, yet retains the integrity of the ego. (Pearce, 1985, p. 135)

I believe what Pearce is saying here is what Plato said many years ago in the Allegory of the Cave, that reality as we know it is a culturally conditioned reality that blinds most people to true reality: true reality lying beyond cultural conditioning. Edward Hall understands this. He ends his book Beyond Culture by saying, “Man must now embark on the difficult journey beyond culture, because the greatest separation feat of all is when one manages to gradually free oneself from the grip of unconscious culture (Hall, 1976, p. 211). This sabotaging of potential is particularly true of religious and educational institutions because they tend to reinforce ego driven reality that is dependent on an illusion of individualism and the isolated human self. Hall, following Pearce, says that, “Western man has created chaos by denying that part of his self that integrates while enshrining the parts that fragment experience (Hall, 1976, p. 7). Religious institutions play a major role in this process.

**Religion and the Institutionalization of Spirit**

Religious institutions in society are supposed to perform salutary roles of instilling positive values in the populace. These values are supposed to influence positive behavior in the general population. Studies show people who attend church on a regular basis benefit in a variety of ways including increased longevity and better health, particularly among Seventh Day Adventists (Brewer, 2002). A December
2009 study, however, entitled “How Religious is your state?” by the Pew Research Center found some data that shows a different and disturbing trend insofar as the impact of religious institutions on US society is concerned. This study, which surveyed 35,000 people, identified and compared the 10 most religious states in the US with the 10 least religious states. The researchers found that the least-religious states outperformed the most-religious states on such social health index indicators as average life expectancy, teenage birth rates, pregnancies among unwed women, divorce rates, violent crime rates, and murder rates among a variety of other social health indicators. The most religious states include Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, South Carolina, Tennessee, Louisiana, Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Oklahoma while the 10 least religious states are New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Maine, Massachusetts, Alaska, California, Nevada, and Colorado, according to the study (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009).

The researchers found life expectancy for the 10 most-religious states to be 74.9 years compared with 77.8 for the least-religious states. Among the most-religious states the rate of teen pregnancy is 16.6% compared to 10.3% in least-religious states. They found that in the most-religious states the rate of pregnancy among single, unwed women to be 39% of all pregnancies compared to 33.8% in least-religious states. Divorce rates in most-religious states are 3.95% per 1,000 compared to 3.91% per 1,000 in least-religious states. Violent crime rates in most-religious states averaged 520.7 per 100,000 compared to 370.3 per 100,000 in least-religious states. And, finally, murder rates in most-religious states are 7 per 100,000 compared to 2.49 per 100,000 in least-religious states. In the Pew study, four factors were used to measure depth of religious belief: “importance of religion,” “worship attendance,” “frequency of prayer,” and “certainty in the existence of a god.” These statistics clearly are not the last word or the Holy Grail on the performance of religious institutions in America, but they should raise some serious concerns. The current problems of sexual abuse, confusion about gay rights, confusion over abstinence, the use of contraception and abortion, and the confusion over women’s roles within some religious institutions may just be the tip of the iceberg. Pearce sees religious institutions as a disempowering mechanism in society. For him, in spite of the salutary effects, the institutionalization of dogma by religious institutions undermines the freedom of the human spirit and creates dependence on institutions for salvation. Members of the flock are discouraged from exploring other belief systems lest they be condemned to hell for eternity. These institutions also, through the creation of dependent personalities, sabotage human will, human initiative, and spiritual potential. They do this, Pearce argues, by
institutionalizing various forms of guilt and shame particularly in connection with the role of sex in society and how the human body is viewed. He posits that much of this guilt and shame can be blamed on Freud. For example, he quotes Freud as saying:

[The principal task of civilization, its raison d'être, is to defend us against nature...[whose] elements...seem to mock at all human control; the earth which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in a turmoil; storms, which blow everything before it; diseases...only recently recognized as attacks by other organisms; and finally there is the painful riddle of death...nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable....

Pearce continues:

Against the dreaded external world one can only defend oneself by some kind of turning away from it, if one is to solve the task by oneself.... [But] a better path...guided by science [is] going over to the attack against nature and subjecting her to the human will. Then one is working with all for the good of all. (Pearce 2007, 169)

Pearce argues that much of what we see around us today, at least in part, is the powerful influence of Freud’s idea of working one’s will against nature (the destruction of the rain forests, the redirecting of river beds, the creation of genetically engineered food, the creation of test-tube infants etc.) which is also a continuation of the devolution that starts in utero in the delivery room. Education, and particularly institutionalized education, reinforces institutionalized religion for Pearce, and is complicit and a major culprit in this destructive, devolutionary process.

**Education vs. Mis-Education in Society**

Although education in society starts in the home, schools play a major role in shaping the child’s mind. Pearce’s work raises questions about the function and role of education in society particularly in relation to achieving one’s potential. If we look at what is happening in even the best schools in society, we see many bright and eager upper and middle class young people who do extremely well on standardized achievement and intelligence tests, who appear to be psychologically and emotionally well-adjusted and yet suffer from the same fears, guilt and shame that is pervasive throughout society. A fierce need to protect class interests and to develop war machines appears to indicators of a psychological complex that results in fear, guilt, shame and greed. Pearce argues that generation after generation of Americans are driven by materialistic values which manifest themselves in consumerism and the need to have “things” in order to have status in society, a reflection of
bonding gone awry in which people end up bonding to material things and not to mother/matrix, earth/matrix, or spirit. Our status and security in the world should come from within and through a connection with the intelligence of the heart, Pearce would say, and not through bonding with material objects. Kasser (2007) says:

Studies show, for instance, that when citizens are focused on goals for making a lot of money, having many possessions, and attaining high status, nations pursue highly competitive forms of capitalism with little governmental regulation. Thus, materialistic values are part of the ideological and institutional package that encouraged politicians and other power-brokers to promote the economic policies that contributed to the current crisis.

For Pearce, educational institutions went off-track when they lost connection with the importance of play and were developed primarily to serve the economic interests of society. Today we see more and more schools eliminating recess as a cost-cutting measure of first choice because most of the budget of the US is going to support two wars and a defense department that increases its budget by billions each year. The current military budget request for 2011 is $1.2 trillion dollars.

Research coming out of the Heart/Math Institute (Childre and Martin 1999) points to the fact that the human heart is much more than a pump. Pearce (2002) says:

The heart’s intelligence is not verbal or linear or digital, as is the intellect in our head, but rather is a holistic capability that responds in the interest of well-being and continuity, sending to the brain’s emotional system an intuitive prompt for appropriate behavior. (66–67)

He refers to this function of the heart as the wisdom or intelligence of the heart. A California school, Playmountain Place (http://www.playmountain.org/philo.htm), provides an excellent example of what can be done to educate a child’s emotions as well as intellect. The school’s philosophy is to nurture the whole child. Pre-service teachers have come from as far away as Japan to observe at Playmountain because in addition to educating the whole child, the staff promotes non-violence in the curriculum as a part of their philosophy. Play is also an integral part of the curriculum because the staff believes that play is the socialization process by which children learn to live with each other. Pearce says that play in adult life is also essential just as it is throughout nature. What adults call leisure time or the use of leisure is actually essential for health and a well-balanced life. Finally, Pearce argues we must end the mis-education that passes for education in society if we are to save ourselves from going the way of ancient Rome.
References


Endnotes

1 Where not explicitly stated, when I use the word society in this paper I am referring to modern Western society. Although, since US society drives Western culture, it is the society I am primarily referring to.


A journalist overheard a black child in Chicago who attends an inner-city elementary school ask her mother this question. The question seemed to reflect a state of mind that should not be a part of any child’s concerns. I don’t recall the source.
Torpification in the Academy: The Land of OZ Revisited

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Introduction

Gathered for the reading of a paper to be presented at a national conference, doctoral students and professors, both young and old, listen carefully. This reading is followed by intense discussions, and suggestions for improvement follow. Because doctoral students are to present conference papers, research, write, and publish, these sessions are venues for peer mentoring and professional guidance. At this particular gathering, one professor declares one’s first position, “will likely be at a teaching college—not a research institution.” What this professor means is a four-year college—urban or regional—places a premium on teaching, therefore making time to write or conduct research difficult. What this professor does not mean to say, but says nonetheless, is, “community colleges do not count as colleges.” Having served nearly half my life in community colleges, I shake in cognitive dissonance as the contexts of my doctoral program and community college service butt against one another.

In her 1998 address to the Philosophy of Education Society, Ann Diller (1998) introduces me to Plato’s storytelling technique used to engage his students in the topic to be analyzed. She also introduces me to an unusual creature in Meno (Plato, 2005, p. 112), the torpedo fish.
More commonly known as the electric ray, the torpedo fish discharges varying amounts of electrical current, depending upon whether it wants to stun its prey or protect itself. (Escobar-Sánchez, Galván-Magaña, & Moreno-Sánchez, 2010, p. 933). Paradoxically used to illuminate, contact with this fish brings on physical and/or mental torpor. Torpified, one is shaken because what one thinks is firm, fixed, or true is now dissolved like mist or turned to tales. The implicit (or explicit) divisions between community college women and women of the academy torpify me. In this paper, I meld L. Frank Baum’s (1900) story of The Wonderful Wizard of OZ, its protagonist, Dorothy, her torpification in OZ, and the land of OZ itself into a lens for examining the division between women in and outside the academy. I argue first that by electing to work in community colleges, professional women become separated from the academy and associated with nurturing, educational support rather than scholarship; second, that working in isolation limits one’s potential for feminist dialogue; and finally, that understanding the differences between these two academic kingdoms can lead to feminist collaboration used to enact greater equity within the academy.

**Torpified in the Land of OZ**

In L. Frank Baum’s classic story, Dorothy follows the yellow brick road to seek the aid of the Wizard of OZ. After she has performed all he asks, the Wizard reveals that not everything is green in the Emerald City. Each time Dorothy and her friends visit the Emerald City, they unquestioningly, dutifully don spectacles they are told to wear. They never question why. The Wizard at last tells Dorothy, “…when you wear green spectacles, why of course everything you see looks green to you…my people have worn green glasses on their eyes so long that most of them think it really is an Emerald City, [abounding in] every good thing that is needed to make one happy” (p. 15). Discovering the city is not emerald incites one of Dorothy’s moments of torpification; the people of OZ draw their happiness from an illusion of power and prosperity the Wizard fabricates.

I grew up wanting ruby/silver slippers and the power to click my heels and transport myself to other lands, so what intrigues me about Dorothy is that she wants to go home. At the book’s beginning, some unknown familial shift has occurred, and nurturing, family, and the home connection for Dorothy are transported to Aunt Em, Uncle Henry, and Kansas. Baum leaches the color from Kansas so that Aunt Em and Uncle Henry appear gray and mirthless. When Dorothy comes to live in their home, her vivacity offers a colorful and painful contrast to their pallor. Almost as soon as Dorothy settles into this colorless world, Baum flings her house and everything in it into a world alive and ablaze with color. Although her eyes are filled with wonder in the Land
of OZ, her heart wants to go home to Kansas. So, what makes Dorothy turn from such beauty and magic to colorless Kansas?

The answer is simple: for all OZ’s beauty, OZ is neither real nor are its residents people who live in the real world. Life in the real world may be harsh, but the real world is where one’s life happens. Since the Wizard reveals his power is but an illusion, as is the emerald color of the city itself, OZ loses its magic, becoming a world vested with real frailties. Dorothy finds there is still no place like her Kansas home.

**Working at Cross Purposes**

In OZ’s multiple kingdoms clear boundaries exist. Inhabitants of one OZ kingdom, the Quadlings (Baum, 1900, p. 22), for example, are creatures with thick necks, flat heads and no arms. These people look harmless but in fact are very effective at keeping outsiders from gaining access to their kingdom. In the Academy, there are similar sentries, manifest less in physical characteristics than through roles defined by function or purpose and boundaries created by discipline, power, and even gender. A largely-divided kingdom, university faculty members engage in scholarly research and teach while administrators run college or university business. These various parts of the collective kingdom often work in isolation. Further isolated are community colleges from four-year college and university life. The preponderance of developmental coursework taught by professional women in community colleges invites the perception community college faculty play supporting roles for four-year institutions’ faculty’s academic work, their research and their students. The academic skills remediation, life skills, and other nurturing educational services that are foci of the community college’s professional women frequently are trivialized by university faculty who “…[cast] off the attitudes and values, the patterns of thought and action associated with home, women, and domesticity” (Martin, 2000, p. 49). The word support comes from the Latin (to transport) and from *sub-* and *portare* (to carry), meaning “to endure bravely or quietly” (Merriam-Webster, 2011). Carry and endure.

Community college women and women of universities and colleges are unlikely ever to have a communal moment of torpification, because the metaphoric Qualdings divide their lands. If professional women in both lands do not work together, moreover, do not see their work as overlapping, how will they talk about anything, let alone feminist education? Beyond isolation, the vernacular of the different educational kingdoms also presents barriers.

**Torpified by the Kansas Vernacular**

Dorothy’s character is generous, patient, and willing to help all kinds of people. She travels from kingdom to kingdom within the land of OZ, simply accepting people as they come into her life. She offers her
help, and they help her in return. She expects both differences and similarities in the people she meets.

Avoiding generalizations about group identities results in a practice of isolation of professional women into smaller groups divided by class, race, and other distinctions. As Martin states, women’s feminist research avoids generalizations: “If women are different in some respects, they are different in all” (Martin, 2000, p. 18). Those characteristics women share become lost and forgotten when cast into isolation, consequently professional women in colleges and universities are geographically divided by virtue of inhabiting different kingdoms, and even by the tenets of feminism itself. bell hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (2000, p. 1). She wants to define feminism as a movement that would ask and need everyone to participate, to pull down the barriers between professional women committed to the same educational ideals and make it possible to begin conversations between now-isolated groups, necessary because for hooks, “feminists are made, not born” (p. 7).

Given the divided physical and metaphorical kingdoms of academe, not only are women isolated from each other as feminists, but divides force them to breach walls and struggle to find acceptance in the kingdom of the academy, enduring hostility or even dismissal. Divided from community college women faculty, women’s studies and feminist scholarship gradually become the purview of the faculty of colleges and universities, and as a result, “Feminist theory [begins] to be housed in an academic ghetto with little connection to the world outside” (hooks, p. 22). hooks is not suggesting the scholarship inside lacks value, but rather that the language being used is not feminism’s vernacular, so the message feminist theory carries cannot be carried beyond academic walls. Might the feminist scholar’s silenced voice torpify her as she gazes through the ivy of her academic kingdom to the faraway lands of Kansas? How does Dorothy find her voice, find her answers?

**Dorothy’s Unintended, Nurturing Agenda**

As Dorothy travels to OZ in hopes of going home, she assists the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Lion. Each character Dorothy meets feels he, in some important way, is lacking. Dorothy first helps the Scarecrow escape from a miserable life of hanging in a field, his head full of straw, and brainless. After Dorothy and the Scarecrow become acquainted and begin to express concern for each other, the Scarecrow wonders aloud what Dorothy’s life in a human body might be like: “It must be inconvenient to be made of flesh,” says the Scarecrow thoughtfully, “for you must sleep, and eat and drink. However, you have brains, and it is worth a lot of bother to be able to think properly” (Baum, 1900, p. 25). Similarly, Dorothy helps the Tin Woodman who
believes he lacks a heart, yet is loving—in fact crying when he steps on a bug—and she helps the Lion who is certain he lacks courage, yet roars and scares everyone—except Toto. Dorothy takes care with each of her new friends as she helps them to realize their strengths and achieve their goals. Martin’s (2000) concept of domesticity and the home that decries “love, nurturance, and the three Cs of care, concern and connections—[are] all qualities associated with the private home and with women…” (p. 49) seems to mirror Dorothy’s model of caring and action. As does Dorothy, college students leave home to attend school, an institution that Martin argues has of its “main tasks the casting off” (p. 49) of all things domestic.

Community Colleges: A Nurturing Agenda

Created nearly a hundred years ago, community colleges flourish in the US with more than a thousand open for students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2000). Providing educational access to all, regardless of academic preparedness, community colleges provide educational opportunities for a broad population. Perceptions of the purpose of community colleges vary, but a common viewpoint is that the purpose of a community college is to allow colleges and universities to be selective about whom they admit (Dougherty, 1988; Douthat, 2005; Klein, 2005). Community colleges’ unvarnished truth is that they typically serve historically-underrepresented students: students underprepared for a college education and without the cultural capital successfully to navigate the kingdom of academe without assistance (MDC Foundation, 2007; Oklahoma City Community College, 2010).

What is this kingdom like for professional women? A hundred twenty five or more students will travel in and out of female professors’ classrooms each and every semester. Students’ success often becomes a measure of faculty’s teaching effectiveness. Nurturing a student to academic readiness for transfer to a four-year college or university is a collaborative effort requiring many people and service areas, and community college faculty have one primary responsibility: to teach. Each semester a faculty member’s teaching load is at least five classes, with additional expectations of tutoring in a content area, some committee work, and student advising (Cataldi, 2005). One’s professional development primarily focuses upon teaching strategies and content-area updates.

Professional women working in a community college must be creative, flexible, and offer ways to meet the needs of students and the people living and working in the college’s surrounding area, for generating feelings of positive student engagement and a sense of community for students is complicated in urban settings. Many campuses do not have resident populations, and often more part-time
than full-time students attend. Community colleges vary from state-to-state and community-to-community; one feature they share in common is their open-admission policy (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.), and another is the cadre of dedicated, skilled, professional women (and men) they employ.

The range of student preparedness is broad. Students are met academically at their level and helped with plans they have made (Wellman, 2008). Some degrees offered by community colleges are meant to facilitate transfer and others are meant to feed directly into the job market (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). The challenge for the professional woman is to see each student as an individual. The ebb and flow of students in the grips of family struggles, amidst academic challenges and poverty, those enduring and/or surviving abuse, those struggling with the absence of familial support for academic endeavors, and those with no personal or academic capital completely transform an instructor's landscape of faces from semester to semester. Contrary to the lore of the academy, community college women are not in the academic ghetto but among the people of their community. Among these professional women unrecognized strength, dedication, and courage abounds, but like Dorothy, many community college women do not recognize their inner power.

**Ruby/Silver Slippers and the Power Within All**

Dorothy experiences yet another moment of torpification when she discovers the power to return home resides within her. Along her journey Dorothy nurtures, encourages, and aides those she meets so they might realize their dreams. At the story’s end, Glinda, the good witch, asks each of Dorothy’s friends what they desire and then grants their wishes. Thus, it seems Dorothy lends her power to the story’s males only to return home, but in truth she is only relinquishing her leadership. Dorothy’s friends are ready to rule their respective kingdoms. With the exception of Glinda, none of the inhabitants of OZ understand why Dorothy wants to go home, and it is their failure to understand that mirrors the same misunderstanding professional women of four-year colleges and universities have of community colleges. Community college professional women are committed to a nurturing agenda designed to assist a student’s success in whatever kingdom wishes to enter.

In the final section of *Coming of Age in Academe*, Martin (2000) suggests the metaphor of a recipe—*Add Women and Transform*. But, a recipe for what? Martin provides the reader with examples of women transformed by an education sponsored by male benefactors. But during this metamorphosis women lose their native language and world, causing further alienation. As their pursuit of the life of the mind is honed, the rest of the body and the world become isolated. Martin states, “The
liberally educated person will be an ivory tower person—who can reason but has no desire to solve real problems in the real world” (p. 130). Women of community colleges are educated, dwell outside ivory towers, and work with open-door admissions. Core curricula for most degrees focus on liberal arts, and moreover, community colleges consistently respond to student needs by providing such services as daycare and ESL classes. Martin argues for complete reform of the education-gender system without including those who educate half the students in the US (American Association of Community Colleges, 2009).

In conclusion, I issue an invitation from the professional women of community colleges to the professional women of academe. Imagine the significant impact of the collaborative efforts of professional women of community colleges and universities in fashionable, green glasses working in concert. Or as hooks (2000) asks, “imagine a mass-based feminist movement where folks go door to door passing out literature, taking the time (as do religious groups) to explain to people what feminism is all about” (p. 23). Ultimately, students will be the beneficiaries when we initiate conversations, ideally resulting in honoring the work of each kingdom.

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Navigating the Contradictions: Relationships between Male and Female Peers in Nursing

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Background

As the first decade of this new millennium draws to a conclusion, healthcare remains one of the most intensely-debated topics in our nation. Current efforts to craft a healthcare plan that will benefit all segments of the population are fodder for angry discussion, controversy, and confusion. Yet the reality is there are not enough healthcare workers to meet the current demand for quality medical care (Devi, 2008; Rajapaksa & Rothstein, 2009; Stretton & Bolon, 2009). Specifically, the nursing profession is experiencing a period of crisis as some studies have increasingly forewarned the rapid decline of qualified nurses and predicts a catastrophic scarcity by the year 2020 (Aiken, Cheung, & Olds, 2009). One major factor to the shortage of nurses may be the “unwillingness of males to pursue the profession in great numbers” (Allison, Beggan, & Clements, 2004, p. 162). Since men compose approximately half of the American population, dismissing the reasons for their shortage in the nursing field is grossly overlooking a potential cadre of employees.

The Institute of Medicine’s (IOM) Initiative on the Future of Nursing (2010) reports that, while many professions within healthcare are becoming more “gender balanced” (p. 202), the nursing population has remained predominantly-female. The IOM lists specific barriers that may keep men from choosing a career in nursing which include: stereotypes, academic acceptance, and role support. The IOM calls for these obstacles to be overcome in order to recruit and retain more men to the profession. While the gendered character of nursing has been studied for decades, putting the research into practice and making the profession more gender-equal has proven difficult. In order “to provide culturally relevant care to all populations” (p. 30), the IOM proposes the current nursing workforce needs to increase diversity. Aiken and Cheung (2008) recognize the United States currently has the potential workforce to ameliorate the nursing shortage if resources are made available to nursing education and through “greater representation in nursing by blacks, Hispanics, and men…” (p. 34).
Problem Statement

Men working in nursing represent a small percentage of the profession consisting of about 7% of the overall numbers (Anonymous, 2007; Brady & Sherrod, 2003; Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2010). In the face of an escalating nursing shortage and a decreasing quality of patient care, attracting more men to nursing could help alleviate this critical healthcare problem. The problem for some men who enter nursing is that issues of working in a female-dominated occupation are neither adequately addressed neither in nurse-training schools nor on the job. LaRocco (2007) discovers when men do enter nursing; they may face overwhelming frustration and lack of support. Some men find a difficult process of negotiating relationships with female nurses and with both male and female doctors. A concerning struggle for some men is they often sense they do not receive sufficient support in the nursing profession—from their families, from the profession itself, or from society. Too many unspoken biases and stereotypes lead to frustration and burnout for men in nursing (Burtt, 1998; Meyers, 2003; O’Lynn, 2004). Research also indicates men are leaving the nursing profession at significantly-higher rates than women (Rajapaksa & Rothstein, 2009). In order to recruit and retain more men into nursing, it is imperative to understand the experiences of men in nursing school and across all levels of employment.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to develop an understanding of communication and peer relationships between the sexes both while in nursing school and through workplace interactions. Interviews were conducted with 10 men currently working, or having worked, in nursing. As the men tell their myriad stories of difficulties while in nursing school, a compelling trend soon emerges. Although their stories are different, one theme is similar: the tremendous support they receive from their female peers while in school. Fast-forward a few years when the men are working as nurses and the story shifts. Suddenly, their female peers are no longer the source of support they depended on in school. The men describe how their sympathetic training-school peers turn into workplace adversaries. A question emerges while attempting to navigate this contradiction as to why female peers were such a robust source of solidarity in school, but the relationship becomes hostile in the workplace. Through this study I set out to find a pathway through this paradox.

Research Methods

I chose a qualitative research design because it was the most-appropriate avenue for a female, feminist researcher to use to capture the rich, in-depth experiences of men in a female-dominated profession.
A qualitative design provides a detailed understanding of the lived experiences of the participants through their own voice (LaRocco, 2007). Qualitative interviewing allows respondents to clarify and elaborate their replies to questions asked. As Williams and Heikes (1993) explain, “Qualitative interviews...allow people to negotiate their responses” (p. 286). Sex-role-specific occupations contain layers of multidimensional issues, so understanding the experience of these men in the profession was best realized through face-to-face interaction and one-on-one interviews.

**Theoretical Framework**

I utilize a critical feminist foundation as my theoretical framework because critiquing gendered patterns and sex-role-specific occupations are the focal point of the study. Through a critical feminist perspective, ideological assumptions of gender can be unraveled in order to understand in greater depth the experiences of men in a female-dominated field. There is a need for more feminist studies of men and the various aspects of masculinities. As Kimmel and Messner (2004) contend, it is a necessity to study masculinity given that for generations men have considered themselves as being without gender. Forbes (2002) emphasizes the “categories of men and masculinity are frequently central to feminist analyses, but remain taken for granted, hidden, and unexamined” (p. 269). Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2003) argue that “for most of the history of social science, men were considered the standard, normal, unmarked category of human beings, and so it would have seemed odd, not that long ago, to write about interviewing men” (p. 55). By scrutinizing masculinity through a feminist framework, it may be possible to gain a more complete picture of social constructs and how they affect both sexes (Gardiner, 2002).

Potentially, through a study of dominant and non-dominant forms of masculinity and various constructs throughout society, we may begin to diminish the power of patriarchy. As Robinson (2002) posits, patriarchy may harm men just as much as women: “Oddly, feminism and patriarchy can be seen to work hand in hand, both limiting the possibilities available to men who are forced to adhere to oppressive gender scripts” (p. 153). It is essential that feminist theory include a rich understanding of masculinity as part of the critical fiber of gender studies, give the goal of feminist theory is “not only to explain the status quo of gender relations but [also to] gain knowledge on how to change them” (Nentwich, 2006, p. 500).

Another research strategy that underlies this study is symbolic interactionism. This research orientation focuses on human interactions, relationships, and how the individual constructs themselves in certain social contexts. Using this frame, researchers seek to understand meanings people attach toward things, for as Blumer (1969) articulates,
“To ignore the meaning of the things toward which people act is seen as falsifying the behavior under study” (p. 3). Historically, a nurse is a pervasive representation of femininity (O’Lynn, 2004). The nursing profession is laden with symbolism for both men and women working in the occupation and images that nursing evokes may deter many men from entering the occupation (Barkley & Kohler, 1992; Summers & Summers, 2009). Therefore, how a man perceives being a “nurse,” how he interacts with other nurses, physicians, patients, and his own circle of social relationships is fundamental to an understanding of the ramifications of being male in a female-dominated career. A symbolic interactionist framework allows me to capture these meanings.

Findings

Responses from this study expose a vast disconnect between the school where nurses receive their training and the real world of the nurses’ workplace. A majority of study participants named their female peers as a strong source of support while in nursing school and many stated their classmates were their primary resource in handling the stress of nursing school. One participant began nursing school while unemployed, was called back to his factory job during his first semester, and found it quite difficult to juggle his work schedule, schoolwork, and required clinical hours. He initially dropped out of the program but re-entered the following year. As he was considering leaving again, it was his female peers who interceded on his behalf, “They were very, very helpful. In fact it was a couple of them who revealed to the instructor what I was doing and I think that was very good of them because that is what led me to stay.” Through peer mediation, his instructor was able to modify his clinical hours to accommodate his work schedule and allow him to complete nursing school.

A majority of the men formed a strong cohort with their female peers to encourage and support one another throughout the entire program. As one participant states:

I truly wanted everyone to succeed and we all wanted each other to succeed. There was a core of about eight of us that would study together and try to do our clinical rotations in the same spot and we always tried to make sure we all had each other’s backs and supported each other.

One participant, the only male in his nursing school class, states, “Let’s say that in some ways, I was sorry I was married at the time (laughs)…. I seemed to be somewhat of a celebrity among the girls.” When asked if he was included in study groups, he responds, “I really felt like a part of the other students and nobody ever made me feel left out.” All of the men in this study discuss the close camaraderie with their female peers while in nursing school. However, once in the workplace, that supportive relationship shifts.
The nursing profession is comprised of a tightly-structured hierarchy. At the top of this traditional patriarchal system is the physician. Nurses are expected to be competent, invisible, submissive, and follow the physician’s orders without question. New nurses, of both genders, are indoctrinated into their role as submissive and passive helpers (Gordon, 2005). However, nursing is an autonomous profession, and nurses, in most healthcare systems, are not accountable to physicians. However, many doctors do not truly understand the duties of the nurse, do not they appreciate their level of expertise, or include the nurse as a collaborative partner (Summers & Summers, 2009). Although nursing positions have changed over time, the ranks of nurses are tightly ordered. One man contrasted his current position as a director of nursing to the beginning of his career when he worked as an orderly: “I noticed that in the healthcare world we have this hierarchy, if you are low on the totem pole, you are the nursing assistant. Everybody dumped on you! You know all the hard work….”

The men in this study realize hegemony is a passive/aggressive play acted out on the hospital floor daily, and their roles are assigned and passed on from the older nurses to their rookies. New nurses are treated harshly and given the more difficult or dirty jobs to perform as an interviewee reveals; “…now that I have been here a while, the new people came on, I’m able to give bowel elimination to them. [laughs] …and that’s just that the new person kind of gets what everybody wants to give up.” Nursing theorist Suzanne Gordon (2005) argued that nurses indoctrinate one another into their submissive role within the healthcare system, a domain nurses rule through innuendo, power, fear, and manipulation. The phrase “eating their young” portends a threatening aura of initiation into the healthcare field. This troubling phrase is repeated by many participants as they convey their own experiences entering the workforce. A review of literature indicates that both male and female nurses use this term to describe the disrespectful, abusive, and cruel treatment they received as novice nurses from those established in the profession. “Eating their young” signifies a powerful idea that shapes the profession for both men and women. It points to a structure of fear and intimidation to which new nurses are indoctrinated.

The foundation of this construct emerges in nursing schools as veteran nurse instructors reinforce the hegemonic ideal of the feminized nursing profession. A participant reveals, “The strengths were…my teachers. They were extremely supportive. Weaknesses, there again were the teachers. One teacher was rumored that just didn’t like men in general but did not like men in her nursing program.” This disturbing image is echoed by another man in the study as he describes the phenomenon as part of a “natural order” in nursing school:
It really bothers me, but you see nursing is sadly very much known for…nurses eat their young, and I don’t understand why. It’s like, nursing school was always such a horrible, terrible thing in the past and it seems like nurses feel they have to repay that to the people as they come in.

Another participant sees the difference in treatment from the established floor nurses and new students as a harsh introduction to the social constructs of nursing:

I had a lot of pushback from the regular nurses. Rather than embracing the students and helping them to be comfortable…there was some tacit and open hostility. There were times when I didn’t feel comfortable going on the floor more because of the reception that I had from the seasoned nurses. There is a saying, I don’t know if you heard it, that nurses eat their young alive and it’s still there.

Perceived communication differences also assist in erecting walls between male and female peers. Some of the participants indicate the differences in conversation topics were the reason for opting out of social gatherings as one man sums up, “The baby showers, the lunch parties, potluck lunches; they go out and eat sushi together…guys don’t seem to get into those little group-hug things that go on. They do their job and go home.” Only one participant actively enjoys workplace socialization with his female peers. The appearance of men in a predominantly-female atmosphere may have had a profound effect on the participants and also on their peers. Stories retold of differences in communication may be an attempt to make meaning from the actions of the women (Blumer, 1969). Gender seems to shape behavior and the communication dynamics men experience.

The issue of advancement for men within the nursing profession also works to create a wall that strains the relationship between men and women in the field. A review of research indicates opposing conclusions about career advancement for men in nursing. Some studies suggest when men enter a female-dominated occupation they quickly acquire positions of authority over their female peers (Williams, 1995). In contrast, Porter-O’Grady (2007) discovers men experience reverse discrimination in the “good old girl’s club” (p. 145), noticing a glaring enigma facing men who work in nursing as men may be expected to rise to a position of authority, they are also ridiculed if they choose to remain a floor nurse; “The expectation is reaffirmed by the notion that there is something wrong or suspicious about a man who appreciates and resonates with rendering good patient care and aspires to no other ambition” (p. 145). The men in my study also tell opposing stories about their ability to advance and how that ability hinders their relationships with female peers. One man articulates that it was difficult for him to
advance into management. At one point he angrily expressed to me, “because I found out that for a guy to get ahead in nursing, [he has] to impress [his] female superiors.” It is interesting he feels subliminal pressure to be twice as good at his job as his female peers. He also mentions he feels like an outsider in relation to his female peers:

I don't fit in with them. She's [the Director of Nursing] going down the hall talking girlie-girl stuff with...the other ladies and it's like she can't get to me on that level as she can with them. So I'm already at a disadvantage because there is kind of a standoffish thing that I don't feel approachable or that she can talk to me or whatever.

He also speaks of the frustration he feels at being unable to compete with his female peers due to differences in socialization outside of work: “But then there’s a lady that’s vying for the same position [as I am] and they’re going out talking, having margaritas with the girls after work, and I can’t compete with that. She got the job.” Ironically, this echoes what women have expressed in male-dominated professions for decades. It is compelling that this same man describes earlier in the interview how his marriage dissolved while he was in nursing school due to the close bond he formed with his female cohort group and the amount of time spent with them.

**Analysis and Implications for Education**

Embedded within the symbolic interactionist framework is the supposition that individuals define reality within the context of their social interactions (Blumer, 1969). People act in specific ways in relation to the actions of others and these interactions “influence one another as they act back and forth” (Charon, 2004, p. 28). When a man first enters the real world of nursing, it is often a shocking experience. Participants in my study note that often the experienced instructors treat them in a disrespectful or rude manner. Using the lens of critical feminist theory, issues of power and patterns of subordination are unveiled, and I identify areas of concern as participants report experiencing discrimination from their female instructors at school. Relationships with nursing instructors and with their peers combine in the development of how these men began to situate their masculinity within a female-dominated profession. It is in nursing school that these men struggle to situate their masculinity and learn how to navigate gendered aspects of their profession.

When the men in this study graduated from nursing school and entered the workplace, they often felt overwhelmed and alienated. Suddenly, the strong bond of support they had with their female classmates evaporated, and rarely were my participants able to form as close a tie with anyone in the workplace as they had in school. All of the participants in my study recollect incidents of stereotyping and express
frustration at gendered work assignments, feelings of exploitation by their peers, dysfunctional working relationships with doctors, and sometimes a dangerous work environment. For decades, nurses have been trained to be compliant and subservient to physicians, and indeed, my participants report incidents in which some physicians humiliate them or treat them with disrespect. Gordon (2005) shows some doctors continually devalue the work done by nurses and in turn, the nurses promote an environment where doctors’ orders are never questioned. This is true for both female and male nurses, as “many nurses tend to embrace the stereotypes of angels, saints, and martyrs that are used to legitimate poor treatment” (p. 134). Gordon elaborates that this oppression also perpetuates a cycle of dysfunction taught from one generation of nurses to the next and could be the reason why “nurses eat their young.” Ironically, some nurses enable doctors to maintain their superior status in the healthcare system. Nurses often acquiesce to physician’s mistreatment and dismissal of their expertise and silently allow verbal and sometimes physical abuse. It is when nurses remain silent that these gendered power issues became more embedded in the healthcare system. This situation may represent what Freire (2000) describes as members of marginalized groups treating their own in the same manner that their oppressors treated them or horizontal violence. In the hospital setting, the doctor is the oppressor who wields power over the nurses, and they in turn oppress those whom they deem lower in status.

The workplace is a strong arena where people “do” gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and nursing is a highly-sex-role-specific field in which the men are often denied access to such particular specializations as obstetrics/gynecology and pediatrics. There are also subtle reminders that such medical procedures as catheterization of female patients are off-limits to them. Daily they are bombarded with such images that dominate representations of nursing as the mother, the angel of mercy, and the servant in white. They also experience a strong hegemonic occupational hierarchy in their contact with their families, peers, and physicians.

One key response of a critical feminist study is a call to action. Feminist research provides for change as Brisolara and Seigart (2007) contend: “action and agency are morally and ethically appropriate responses of an engaged feminist evaluator” (p. 280). The imperative is an invitation to “work toward changing as well as understanding the world” (Lather, 1994, p. 103), and the results of my study may guide educators and nursing programs directors to formulate a support system that will encourage recruitment of more men into the profession, strengthen retention rates for men who are in nursing, and bridge the bond formed between male and female peers from the school to the workplace.
This research began with a contradiction: why female peers are such a strong source of fellowship in nursing school for men, but that relationship turns adversarial in the workplace. Administrators and faculty of nursing schools need to recognize the unique needs of men in their programs. They also need to be aware of factors that contribute to “eating their young.” The participants of this study argue nursing schools need to initiate discussions of gender differences within the profession. It is imperative to have open dialogues about gender with all students and possibly role-play various scenarios that may occur in relation to sex-role stereotyping with peers, doctors, and patients. Nursing schools are already equipped with a clinical system that transitions the students into the real world of nursing, and this would be an ideal opportunity for them to demonstrate and discuss situations where gender could be a barrier. One participant states he would have appreciated talking with a man in nursing about gender issues while in nursing school, “There wasn’t even any significant…informal conversation.” He would have welcomed hearing of the experiences of other men in nursing.

The nursing profession may continue to experience severe shortages as long as it remains firmly-entrenched as a female-only occupation. Barriers that keep the profession feminized and construct male nurses as outsiders must be abolished. Understanding the experiences of men in nursing and exploring areas of needed change while breaking through gendered constructs which are detrimental to both men and women will create a significantly stronger healthcare system. As a society, we must engage and work together with all partners to create a nursing profession that welcomes and values qualified, competent people of any gender, sex, or sexual identity. As a society, we need to recognize that there is no common definition of masculinity, and occupations that focus on caring and compassion are appropriate for all individuals.

References


The Care and Feeding of Assistant Principals: Leadership Development or Squandered Potential?

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Background

While much has been written about the training and mentoring of principals, there has been a paucity of research regarding the professional development of assistant principals. Even as such states as Alabama, Illinois, Iowa, and Oregon have begun to revise their principal preparation programs, attention has been primarily devoted to the individual holding the title of principal. Even while principal preparation program efforts are leading to major reductions in the numbers of candidates being certified in such states as Iowa (Hackmann & Wanat, 2007), it is still presumed that the initial training of principals and assistant principals should be identical. This concept is clearly being perpetuated in Illinois’ proposed new principal preparation standards in which the positions of “principal” and “assistant principal” would fall under the same administrative endorsement with identical preparation programs. While it may make sense to prepare future principals and assistant principals in a similar fashion, many individuals only enter the principalship after serving several years as assistant principals. Although it may be impractical for principal preparation programs specifically to prepare individuals for the role of assistant principal, it should be possible to provide professional development activities and mentoring to assistant principals to prepare them to successfully transition into the role of building principal.

Although national efforts to provide professional development for assistant principals are examined in a cursory manner in this paper, my primary focus is upon the state of affairs in Illinois. Illinois is a large, populous, multi-ethnic state with 869 school districts (nearly a tenth of the total school districts in the nation), so consequently has a large number of assistant principals. In this paper I examine the staff-development opportunities, barriers to professional growth, and mentoring of assistant principals in the southwestern region of Illinois, just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri.

Professional Development Opportunities

Many states provide extensive staff development programs for principals. In Illinois, this provision is primarily made through the
Illinois Principals Association (IPA) which not only offers face-to-face workshops and conferences but provides a range of webinars, podcasts, and online courses to its membership. One staff-development activity available to first through third year principals, assistant principals, deans, and aspiring administrators is the New Administrator’s Workshop, hosted annually, by the IPA (2010). Depending upon an assistant principal’s role, many of the topics covered in the New Administrator’s Workshop could have relevance to an assistant principal. Certainly, learning how to deal with difficult people, managing time, and increasing knowledge regarding legal issues would be quite relevant to most assistant principals.

**Principal Mentoring**

In 2007, Illinois instituted the Illinois New Principal Mentoring Program (2007). Beginning in the 2007–2008 school year, all principals new to the profession in K–12 Illinois public schools were required to participate in this program, along with those from out-of-state, new to Illinois schools. Most individuals entering the principalship in Illinois, including the majority of those moving up from the assistant principal position, have participated in this program since 2007. Mentors selected for this program must have served as building-level principals for at least three years and participated in a targeted training process to prepare them to serve as mentors. Mentors are assigned by geographic region and by past experience at particular grade levels to the extent possible.

This mentoring program is supported financially by the Illinois State Board of Education and is conducted in partnership with the IPA. Mentors are compensated $2000 per mentee for their services. In FY 2009, the Illinois State Board of Education allocated $3,100,000 to the new principal mentoring program. In FY 2010, this allocation dropped by 33% to $2,077,000 (ISBE, 2010, p.3). According to a spokesperson for the IPA, the funding level for FY 2011, if any, is yet unknown, due to the fiscal crisis in Illinois (B. Schwartz, personal communication, June 11, 2011). Due to the manner in which the new principal mentoring act is written, if the legislature does not provide funding, then mentoring is not required. With the precarious fiscal situation in which Illinois currently finds itself, there is little chance this mentoring program will be extended to assistant principals.

**National Efforts**

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) is now devoting attention to the assistant principalship at the national level. It has created the National Task Force on the Assistant Principalship at the Middle Level and High Schools. This group is comprised of eight current assistant or associate principals; one retired assistant principal; five principals; one central office administrator; and
two NASSP staff liaison members. The responsibilities of this task force are to focus upon the professional needs of assistant principals who are aspiring to become principals as well as those who choose to spend their careers in the assistant role. The task force is to assist NASSP in identifying ways to improve professional development for assistant principals, deliver programs and resources to inform their day-to-day work as they manage school business, and connect day-to-day tasks to instructionally-focused, whole-school, collaborative leadership (D. Jones, personal communication, March 22, 2010). One of the major achievements of the task force is the 2009 publication, *The Best of Principal Leadership for Assistant Principals*. Task-force members reviewed over 500 *Principal Leadership* articles from the previous five years looking for articles supportive of assistant principals in their current roles and helping them develop professional skills leading to the principalship.

The other major national professional organization specifically for principals, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), does not have a specific section on its website devoted to assistant principals. While many elementary schools do not have assistant principals, NAESP claims to serve both elementary school and middle-level principals (NAESP, Member Benefits, p. 1).

**State, Regional, and Local Opportunities**

While assistant principals may receive professional development from other national organizations, such training is likely to be curricular and content-area-specific. However, another likely source for professional development of assistant principals is from intermediate, state educational units and from a plethora of organizations dedicated to the maintenance and renewal of certification. In Illinois, for example, there are 56 Regional Offices of Education (ISBE, Directory of Regional Offices, 2011, pp.4-9) serving 102 counties. Some serve single counties while others serve multiple counties depending upon population. Regional offices often provide or broker staff-development activities for teachers and administrators. Illinois, like many other states, requires professional development for the maintenance and renewal of administrative certification. While this requirement can be met by enrollment in graduate-level, education courses, it can also be met by attending various workshops that grant Administrators’ Academy credit. Among those offering credit are the IPA, the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA), and the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). Finally, assistant principals can improve their knowledge and preparation through individual reading, through discussions with peers, and via discussions and mentoring opportunities provided by their respective building principals.
Individual Efforts

While opportunities available to assistant principals through coursework or standard, administrative, staff-development opportunities are not typically geared toward pursuing the principalship, there are other avenues for assistant principals. They can seek or be assigned a mentor, or they can aggressively pursue opportunities and engage in activities that will increase their viability as principal candidates. Although Illinois does not provide a formal mentoring program for assistant principals, this service can be provided formally or informally, ideally by the assistant principal's immediate supervisor. The engagement in self-development and promotion activities is somewhat dependent upon the assistant principal's specific assignment and job responsibilities.

Mentoring by Principals

What should principals do in order effectively to mentor assistant principals? According to Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007, pp. 24–25), principals can take a number of actions to facilitate the career paths of their assistant principals. Initially, principals should inquire about career goals when hiring assistants and should only employ assistants already strong in instruction. Then, the principal and the assistant should get on the same page quickly, because it is important to show a unified front to the employees being supervised. Perhaps one of the most important things a principal can do is involve the principal in all aspects of running the school. This is the only way in which the assistant principal will gain the skills necessary to eventually become the administrator in charge. Once the assistant principal is somewhat established in the role, the principal should get out of the way and when the principal is out of the building, the assistant principal should actually be in charge of the school. The principal should serve as the best loving critic of the assistant principal. This means that principals and assistant principals need to have frank conversations regarding the issues, problems, challenges and opportunities involved in running a school. Finally, the principal must cheer for the assistant principal and support the assistant principal’s advancement to the principalship.

Assistant principals need to work to develop a positive and collegial relationship with their principals. The best outcome in this regard is when the principal agrees to become the assistant’s mentor and advocate. An assistant will ideally let his or her principal know he or she is interested in advancement and would like new challenges and opportunities. Those interested in advancement might volunteer to serve on district committees and task forces, when such opportunities arise, increasing both the individual’s expertise and visibility. An aspiring assistant should also take every opportunity to work with teachers on curricular issues and initiatives. Active participation in regional, state,
and national professional organizations also help assistant principals remain current and advance their careers.

**Regional Survey of Assistant Principals**

In order to help define the condition of the assistant principalship in terms of professional advancement, I conducted a study of the attitudes and desires of a limited group of assistant principals in southwestern Illinois. Twenty-seven assistant principals, representing a wide variety of K–12 schools differing in size, their students’ family incomes, and their students’ ethnicities were asked to respond to an online survey in the late spring of 2010. Seventeen assistant principals completed the anonymous online survey, constituting a response rate of 62.9%. On this survey the pilot respondents were to answer a series of questions addressing perceptions of the scope of their current position, their intensity of desire ultimately to become a principal, the extent to which their current and/or former principal(s) serve(s) as a mentor and as an advocate, and various questions regarding availability and barriers to professional development activities.

The survey contained Likert-type items as well as drop-down boxes for participants’ additional comments. While the data collected contained both scaled and open-ended items, in this paper I present respondents’ written responses. The following results offer help in understanding the issues of assistant principals hoping to advance to the principalship.

Before being asked to respond regarding specific professional-development needs, practices and opportunities, survey participants submitted demographic information regarding their work settings, time in position, job responsibilities, etc. The socioeconomic level of schools’ student bodies served clustered around the statewide average of 42.9% free-and-reduced-lunch eligibility. The responding assistant principals were an experienced group with nine of the 17 respondents reporting five or more years’ service in the assistant principal role.

**Job Duties**

Regarding their job duties and responsibilities, 11 indicate they play a general role in terms of job responsibilities and six describe their roles as more targeted. Not surprisingly, all 17 indicate they are involved in the supervision of events. Sixteen are involved in teacher evaluation and 15 in student discipline. Beyond these categories, their duties are more diverse with 13 involved in support staff evaluation, 10 responsible for special education, and eight involved in curriculum, building the master schedule, and supervision of non-athletic activities.

When queried about the areas in which the respondents felt least comfortable, it is not surprising that building budgeting represents their
area of greatest perceived limitation, for only one respondent reports experience in that area. Indeed, many principals do not consider themselves to be experts in the area of building budgeting. According to Sorenson and Goldsmith, “School budgeting is a daunting process for many school leaders because most are not bookkeepers, accountants, or financial planners. Many have received minimal training in the budgeting process” (2006, p. xi).

It is clear that many assistant principals do not have specific responsibilities in such areas as curriculum, scheduling, special education, athletics, and working with the booster club. This finding is partially-supported by respondents’ written comments on perceived areas of relative weakness. Representative comments include, “I haven’t had much experience in these duties since they aren’t my responsibilities. You learn the most about most aspects by actually doing the job”; “I feel the least prepared in curriculum as it is hard to get a handle on all grade levels and all materials”; and “These are areas the principal of my current building really enjoys, so I spend little time with these areas.” Continuing in the same vein, “My school does not have a PTO or Booster Club”; “I haven’t been given the opportunity to deal with such issues”; “As far as curriculum, I don’t know that anyone can ever know everything about curriculum for all areas”; and “I do not have an athletics background and I feel uncomfortable overseeing coaches and schedules. In addition, I am not current on the state regulations regarding extra curricular activities.”

Several responses focus upon perceived level of expertise in building budgeting: “I have limited access to the building budget. I only deal with the budget that is specific to me”; “I have not had the opportunity to be part of building the budget or master schedule”; “I have not been involved with the school budget”; and “I have had little direct involvement in budget development outside of prioritizing departmental requests when I worked in a high school.” Finally, one respondent says, “I have not had experiences with budgeting, and I currently do not have great responsibilities in the area of athletics.”

**Future Aspirations**

Most of the assistant principals surveyed aspire eventually to assume principalships. Only two of 17 indicate they do not plan to seek a principalship. Two members of the group indicate they are already looking for a principalship. Four relate they would be ready to begin looking within one or two years, and six think they will wait three to four years. Three more say it will be five or more years before they are ready to move into the next level of administration.

Generally speaking, most respondents perceive that sufficient professional development opportunities are available for assistant principals in the southwestern Illinois region. All 17 report engagement
in professional development activities beyond professional reading in a typical calendar year, ranging from one to more than six.

**Barriers to Professional Development**

Perceived barriers to professional development do not typically include availability of opportunities. However, professional development addressing the process of pursuing a principalship was limited. A majority of respondents list their current job responsibilities as a barrier to professional development. Antithetically, respondents’ outside personal obligations do not seem to constitute much of a barrier. Only three individuals rate outside obligations as a major hindrance. A majority of respondents indicate their district or building budget limitations begin to impinge upon professional development opportunities. One respondent writes, “Barriers include money and difficulties with getting the time to go professionally.” Another assistant principal states, “Money. Time. My district used to pay for professional development. This has been cut.” Finally, “The current district budget does not provide specific funding for assistant principals to attend workshops, trainings, etc. Also, they do not fund our memberships in professional organizations like they do for principals and upper level administrators.” A strong majority of respondents indicate both their principal and their superintendent are supportive of their professional development.

**Mentoring Opportunities**

When questioned about mentoring, 11 of 17 respondents state their building principal served as their primary mentor. Of the remaining six respondents, three indicate they did not have a mentor. The three individuals stating they had a mentor other than their building principal list other principals as mentors in two cases and a central office administrator in the third case. Most assistant principals characterize their mentoring situation as informal. The perceived effectiveness of the mentoring arrangements does not seem to be either especially weak or strong. While some respondents’ comments are negative, most are positive.

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

In conclusion, the survey conducted in the southwestern region of Illinois proves instructive regarding the professional growth needs, practices, and opportunities pertaining to assistant principals. While there appear to be professional development opportunities available, these are primarily targeted toward becoming a more-effective building principal. In one regard, this can be excellent training for principals-in-waiting. Such activities are likely to improve the general, administrative
practice in buildings served by participants in such activities. At the same time, there are very few professional growth opportunities addressing the process of seeking and transitioning into the principalship.

Barriers to participation in available professional growth activities tend to be the heavy workload of the assistant principals which restricts their time for such activities, and the low level of school and district funding for such professional growth. Perhaps surprisingly, very few assistant principals mention the pressure of outside personal responsibilities as a major barrier to participation in professional development.

Responses regarding mentoring opportunities for assistant principals highlight an area in need of study and improvement. While Illinois has a formal mentoring program for new building principals, no such program exists for assistant principals. Several groups should take responsibility for the development of assistant principals. The IPA may be the most important entity. Illinois institutions of higher education involved in the preparation of principals should begin placing more emphasis upon the role of the assistant principal in their programs. Local boards of education also can have an important impact upon the professional growth of assistant principals. Supporting the professional growth of assistant principals can become a part of the succession planning for the principalship in school districts. Districts should be encouraged to support the growth of assistant principals by treating them as equal partners in the administrative team. The district should pay for the state and national professional memberships for their assistant principals and should encourage them in their growth activities.

In this study I only examine one region of Illinois. The next step is to survey a wider range of assistant principals, and if the data remain consistent, then recommendations for professional growth activities can be made on an expanded basis with more assurance.

References


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Private Belief and Public Life
John F. Covaleskie, University of Oklahoma

Private Belief in Public Spaces

What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy.

The School and Society, John Dewey

For most of the history of the republic (which is technically our form of government, but I will mostly use the more colloquial “democracy”), we have understood that education was mostly about moral formation. For most of human history all over the world, societies have understood education to be moral formation though the specifics of that moral formation have varied from time to time and place to place. Education has mostly been neither a technical exercise devoted to economic development nor a function of schools alone. Rather, it always has been and still is the process by which children become formed—morally formed—to membership in their society.¹ In contemporary societies, schools are the common ground of that process. The function of US schools, in fact, the reason for the creation of our public schools, is the fostering of “republican virtue.”

Thomas Jefferson² sought to establish a system of universal public education because he believed that only an educated people could govern themselves. Horace Mann³ worked to establish the system of public education because he thought there was a need for children who would grow into citizens to develop “common elements” of democratic citizenship, which would allow individuals to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens. John Dewey devoted a good portion of his life to considering the educational requirements of democratic life.

Note that if democracy is just about the individual pursuit of individual advantage and maximizing personal liberty, individual economic advantage, and/or national economic development, there is no need to educate for citizenship, something we increasingly do not even pretend to do. Rather, education for citizenship would just be training for mindless docility in the political and civil realms while focusing one’s attention on the pursuit of wealth and security in the economic realm. Who could imagine wanting that state of affairs? Education for citizenship is an education in virtue because it is an education for responsibility, and it is only in the very recent past that it seems odd to put things this way.
Now it is certainly true that the project of moral development is dangerous: we can educate for a set of “virtues” that are deeply vicious. For most of our history, there is much that we got wrong, and got wrong well—that is, we were effective in teaching a vicious set of moral norms. Partly in consequence, we today seem shy about teaching moral standards at all. Attempts at neutrality and development of pedagogical and classroom management skills without attention to ends have replaced thoughtful moral formation; yet, we still teach a morality—that cannot be avoided—we are just not very thoughtful about the content of that morality. We are teaching children it is good to compete, to win, and not to care for the well-being of others. These teachings too are morally normative, but ones that undermine democracy. Democracy requires cooperation and widespread concern for the common good.

Note the message of the Dewey quotation on our responsibility to others that opens this essay, and reflect on its importance. This claim is not empirical; it is moral. It expresses Dewey’s preference for a moral order he calls “democracy.” For Dewey, “democracy is not just a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” The thesis of this paper is that the public spaces of a democratic society are moral spaces, and properly so. When we operate as citizens, we must do so with some vision of what a decent society would and should look like and what virtues are required of individuals so that they can be decent citizens (who are both the cause and effect of decent societies, or the circle can be either virtuous or vicious). If it is correct that democratic citizenship requires virtue and if it is correct that education is supposed to prepare one for citizenship, then it follows that public school education means fostering the requisite virtues in the young. US public schools are currently not doing this fostering.

That is not to say that we are not developing virtue and morality in the young. My claim is that the virtues and morality we are developing do not support democratic life. We are preparing students to be workers or unemployed or masters of the universe, but not citizens. More than schools alone, though, society’s other instruments of public education—some religions, entertainment, news, and politics, to name the most obvious—are actively working against the development of democratic life. Further, we do not attend to what we are doing; we fail as citizens when we do not discuss seriously the sort of moral formation we want for our children or closely consider the moral formation in which we are actually engaging.

Who “we” is in the above claim needs clarification: there are many moral communities that think seriously about the moral norms by which they want to live and rear their children. What we fail to do seriously—arguably what we fail to do at all—is to engage in a conversation across
these normative communities so that we can reach some sort of accord on the questions that govern how we live together and what we can agree upon to teach all our children about being good people. Without that agreement, education becomes mere training—a technical exercise, unconnected to human thriving. So “we” here is meant to speak to a communal failing, while recognizing that individuals in their normative communities and “mediating institutions” do this work as best they can in isolation.

The problem is that, done in isolation, the job is unlikely to be done well. This is not to say that we cannot or should not or do not do such moral formation in small normative communities like churches, families, political parties, interest groups, and neighborhoods, as well as the variety of civic organization and youth groups that make up Putnam’s mediating institutions and which are so vital to civic life. It is not that no moral formation takes place in these groups—it certainly does; it is that we are reaching the point where there is little serious communication from one group to another. It was a major news event when Republicans and Democrats recently summoned the courage to sit next to each other at the State of the Union Address. The national discourse is driven by people who are determined not to find common ground with adversaries because they perceive such common ground as compromise on fundamental principles.

This generalization, as with all generalizations, is only partly true, but it is partly true. On issues from the morally profound (abortion, for example) to the utterly trivial (the Fox-News-contrived “War on Christmas”), we have constructed a political discourse premised on the idea that the political other is evil. The rhetoric of “fascist” and “Nazi” has been the standard critique of both Presidents Bush and Obama by their political enemies though only Obama has simultaneously been labeled a socialist. When he famously appeared on CNN’s Crossfire (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFQFB5YpDZE), Jon Stewart devastatingly deconstructed this corrosive form of political discourse. A foundational premise of democracy, at least as it was envisioned by Dewey, is that those who disagree with us are not our enemies but are fellow citizens to whose good we are committed and with whom we must seek common solutions while respectfully acknowledging their views of our common problems. If Dewey’s ideal of democracy is to be realized, then what education must do is prepare children to become the sort of people who can engage in a civic conversation to identify and work for common solutions to common problems. Our children’s having this sort of civic conversation would indicate that they had grown into citizens able to constitute a public.

As citizens we have failed to live up to the responsibilities of the office of citizenship. This state of affairs may well represent the victory
of a rhetoric that tells us that there is some inevitable enmity between
the people and their government. Although there are certainly forms of

government where enmity with the people exists, the foundational
premise of democratic government is the opposite: government is “we
the people”; government is “of the people, by the people, for the
people.” To accept the shibboleth that democratic government is the
enemy of freedom, or the enemy of the people, is simply to give up on
the democratic experiment. In a democratic polity, government elected
by the people is chosen and empowered to enact the will of the people
within the terms and limitations set by the Constitution.

I mentioned the important claim that we fail to live up to the
responsibilities of the office of citizen: “citizen” is not just a condition,
and it does not just mean that we are guaranteed certain civil rights,
though both statements are true enough. In addition, we must accept
and acknowledge that citizenship is an office with responsibilities as well as
rights. Among those responsibilities is to take the general welfare as
seriously as one’s own. This responsibility neither obliges us to put the
general welfare ahead of our own nor even fully on par with our own. It
does mean that we must put the common good in the scales of our
decision-making and consider its claims as seriously as we do our own.

Dewey’s call with which I opened this paper imagines a very
different democratic ideal than the one we now live in which the pursuit
of individual thriving seemingly trumps all else, at least in the broad
social discourse. I doubt this condition prevails in what remains of real
neighborhoods or within religious communities and civic
organizations—all such mediating institutions—but these, too, are
largely gone, either to urban rot or suburban sprawl. Civic life is
weakened, and the social glue that once made serious politics possible
has disintegrated.

Such mediating institutions as neighborhoods, religious
communities, and civic organizations may be vital to democracy as
Dewey imagined: it is not incidental to his notion of democracy that
Dewey was thinking of ways to translate the face-to-face democratic life
of small-town Vermont to the democracy of the nation. His question
was how one could “scale up” a democratic life from small-town to
nation; his desire was that we could teach people to feel a sense of
responsibility for each other and that this sense of responsibility would
substitute for the real concern his neighbors in Vermont actually had for
their neighbors. Teaching this responsibility as part of the process of
citizen formation would be accomplished through moral education.

Democratic societies are, by definition, moral public spaces. That is,
democracy, at least from a certain point of view, is as much a moral
system as a social or political one. Dewey saw that democracy is not
primarily a procedural means to protect our freedom and liberty, but that democratic life constructs us as citizens with specific obligations and responsibilities. In part, Dewey calls us to remember that citizens do not exercise some of even the legitimate rights we hold. We may have the right to neglect other people’s children, or children in general, but no decent person would do so, and we must be decent people, or we cannot be democratic citizens.

“Must” here needs some explaining. It is not the “must” that someone enforces on us; it is rather a “must” that we impose and enforce on ourselves. The only punishment for failing here is the punishment we will visit on ourselves, which is why private conscience is so central to citizenship: the private conscience shapes the choices of the public citizen. A badly-formed conscience leads to badly-made policy decisions, which leads to a society that fails to pass the decency test. The decency test is the root of democratic life: for democratic life to work, to be feasible, requires that we be decent as individuals in order that we might be decent as a community. We must, in short, have properly-formed, individual consciences before we can be democratic citizens. More accurately, if we do not have properly-formed consciences, the society may have all the forms and procedures of a democracy, but it will not be democratic. Democracy has to do with outcomes and ways of life, not with procedures. Democracy requires we have as citizens an affirmative obligation to pursue the common good as well as our own.

As Barber7 reminds us, pursuing both the common good and our own does not come easy to us: “we may be natural consumers and born narcissists, but citizens have to be made…. Public schools are how a public—a citizenry—is forged and how young, selfish individuals turn into conscientious, community-minded individuals” (p. 220).

Benjamin Franklin was supposedly asked, upon the ratification of the Constitution, what sort of government he and his colleagues had created: “A republic, madam, if you can keep it.” Indeed, a republican form of government—what we call a democracy—is an accomplishment that must be renewed in every generation. It is necessary to foster in children and to maintain in citizens the virtues proper to democratic life: every generation must be made into citizens.

The making of citizens is the process of education for democratic life, and it is essential to democratic life. It is not coextensive with schooling and does not end when schooling does. The institutions of public education are many and varied: entertainment media, religious institutions, news media, and politics, to name the most obvious. The entire range of mediating institutions includes unions, civic groups, business organizations, political parties, book clubs, and so on almost ad infinitum. Groups with less-positive associations also should be on the list: gangs, racist groups, and other terrorist organizations form the
moral sensibilities of their members. Not all public education is
democratic, but that is a topic for another paper.

Here I want to consider the positive implications of the fact that
democratic life places certain moral demands on us and requires certain
moral responses. To put it bluntly, there is much required of us that
cannot be enforced on us; democracy can only work if we are willing
voluntarily to do that which the society needs us to do. Generally
speaking, the demands on us are that we do the work of shaping and
forming the structures and activities of government as well as the general
policies to be pursued. It is likely beyond the competence of average
citizens to determine, for example, precisely what the tax rate should be
to fund government activities. However, it must be within their
competence to decide whether and to what degree tax policies should be
progressive. Should we have a flat tax? A gradually progressive structure
like the one we currently have? Or steeply progressive such as we had in
the ’50s and ’60s? Should we return to a head-tax such as we had in the
19th century? And what are the legitimate purposes for which the people
should be taxed? These are moral questions that only citizens can answer
in a democracy. If anyone else has the power to answer them, that state
is not a democracy.

Further, it must also be within citizens’ competence to decide what
government activities include. For example, should the government fund
social security, public schools, health care? Should it protect a worker’s
right to organize? Should it recognize the unions of people who are
lesbian and gay? Again, these are questions that must be in the purview
of a democratic citizenry. Similarly, while the planning and strategy of
war is properly left to the military, the goals of war, and whether we
should be at war at all, are matters for citizens. More complex yet, the
answers we give to these questions matter: giving the wrong answers is
another way to end the democratic experiment. The relevant virtues in
this regard are of two kinds: citizens must have both the inclination to
inform themselves on matters of public importance and the intellectual
discipline to make sense of the information we have (citizens, to clarify
this point, are not in doubt about President Obama’s citizenship or his
religion; the first is not a matter of doubt, and the second is a matter of
neither doubt nor relevance). Citizens must also have the moral insight
and the will to do the right thing, to make majority decisions that sustain
not only the forms of democracy but the substance of democratic life.

Citizenship requires, in short, what the Greeks called phronesis,
usually translated as “practical wisdom.” The Greeks understood that
being good is not enough: one must also be wise. More precisely: being
wise is a part of being good in the lived world.

Now, these requisite virtues need not be universal, but they need to
be broadly distributed so that those who lack them are not numerous
enough to prevent democratic decision-making. It is for this reason that education must foster them generally. Citizens must be sufficiently informed to make these decisions, inclined to do so, and actually do so with their fellow citizens. They must, in short, constitute a public—not merely a gathering, an audience, or a collection of individuals. Citizens are members of democratic polities, and without a public, they cannot do their work.

Dewey\(^8\) points us to the importance of a public as a conscious entity of democratic existence: a public acts in its collective interest, diagnosing its collective problems and seeking collective solutions to them. This process, says Dewey (and I think he is right), is the heart of democracy, and it is also the reason that democracy is threatened at its core by a politics that construes government and its people as enemies, or even as antagonists. There are certainly political systems in which this is true, but, as previously argued, it cannot be true for democracy. Systemically to undermine people’s confidence in their government is to turn them away from being citizens. That this effort has advanced as far as it has is an indication of how fragile our democracy has become—how fragile democracy is, as Franklin intimates—and how close we are to being turned from being a public into an audience, and from citizens into subjects.

Recall Barber’s admonition that we must be mindful in forming democratic citizens, that it is up to us, not to the children, to see to it that their education prepares them for the responsibilities of citizenship. This education means not just an intellectual shaping and forming, but a moral one as well. The means for doing this educating are at hand, and there are several models of teachers doing just this.

Conversely, many educators (and others) conclude that in a diverse and often contentious, litigious, and combative society, it is best to say nothing about what Kunzman\(^9\) refers to as “things that matter.” He points out first that there is nothing in the notion of state neutrality on issues of religion that require silence on matters of morality even though it is also true that these two domains often overlap. Second, there is nothing neutral about the silence that surrounds issues of morality. When school personnel treat children as though they are incapable of moral judgment and decision-making, the real danger is that they will become so and will consequently wind up subject to manipulation by and submission to the will of others. Thus, programs that merely control behavior rather than form good people into democratic citizens are real dangers to democratic life\(^10\) and fail the mission implied in the title “public schools.” When the notion of moral formation is not taken seriously, schools fail in their central tasks: to construct, to serve, and to preserve a public.
The alternative to manipulating children through rewards and punishments is seen in this story told by Deborah Meier:

I recently had a conversation that gave me a good deal to think about. Two students had gotten into one of those stupid quarrels. The origins were silly. But what became clear was that one of the kids was a “victim”—over and over he was the subject of teasing and other minor cruelties on the part of his classmates. Everyone knows about it, including we adults. We worry, feel bad, get angry and end up doing very little good.

I asked the student about it and he agreed that the other student was indeed the target of a lot of peer cruelty, and also that the reasons were silly, petty, and unkind. “Which side are you on?” I asked. “His side or his tormentors?”

We were both startled by my question. He said he wasn’t really on any side.

I didn’t stop, because I was busy thinking about it myself. So I pushed. If someone is being cruel to someone else, if someone is the victim and someone the victimizer, rapist and [raped], abused and abuser—can you really be neutral?”

He paused. “No,” he said, “I’m never with the abusers.”

What we realized was that there were two questions here and they were getting mixed up together. (1) Whose side am I on? And (2) what am I prepared to do about it?

No doubt Central Park East, like virtually all other schools, had a rule against bullying and violence, but Meier’s story tells us that the rule was not the point. Meier takes it that her job is to help form good citizens, and that good citizens must be good people first. This job is in some sense the goal in all forms of society; people who are not first interested in being good are unlikely to be so.

Here, “good” is a term of situated, not universal, judgment. That is, even if there is such a thing as universal and/or objective “truth” about matters of moral judgment and moral goodness, the bounded reality and limited knowledge of human beings means that judgment can never be removed from the moral community into which we are born and in which we live. That only good people can be good citizens is especially true in any polity that would be democratic because in any other form of government, compliance with the rules and customs of the society can be gained by surveillance and coercion, if not without cost, at least without contradiction. Democratic citizens must be self-governing individually before they can be self-governing collectively. That is, taken as a whole, democratic citizens must be willing to do the right thing—they must be willing to act for the common good, not just their own
benefit. Here is another way in which a failure of democratic education can leave us with the forms, but not the substance, of democratic life.

Given the diversity of moral and religious beliefs in the US, it is imperative that citizens be able to talk to each other across their differences, and teaching this skill is one of the most important ways that public schools can help construct and preserve the sort of public that allows democracy to work. Putting the common good in the forefront of our concerns is possible for us, but it does not come naturally. Hence Barber’s reminder that citizens must be made, and Franklin’s caveat that our form of government must continually be recreated. In her conversation with the young man, Meier was making a citizen toward recreating democracy in and for the up-coming generation: she was teaching him what it means to be a member of a community, a certain kind of person—how to put himself into the place of the other. More precisely: how not to make the other “the other,” but to see himself and the other as constituting the “we” of “we the people.”

Similarly, consider the example of Vivian Paley as she works with her kindergarten class figuring out the meaning of her new classroom rule: “you can’t say, you can’t play.” Having made the rule, she could have simply enforced it with a regime of rewards and punishments thereby defeating her purpose. Instead, she dedicated the year to working out the meaning of the rule for each student in the classroom community. The rule was the catalyst for many classroom conversations, but, as with Meier’s example, the rule was not the point; the classroom conversations were. The goal, once again, was to help young children grow into the sorts of citizens who could make democratic life more morally-significant than the imposition of majority will. She sought to create citizens capable of pursuing the common good understanding Barber’s position—citizens must be made—whether she had read his work or not.

Many practitioners fear to explore what Kunzman calls “things that matter” and what Katherine Simon names “moral questions.” This failure is what Purpel and McLaurin call the “moral and spiritual crisis” in education. Without discussion of such matters, education becomes dull and lifeless. More to the point, without such discussions, education loses its democratic purpose and nature. Many, particularly those who are progressives or liberals, seem in public conversation to express neutrality in matters of religion and silence in matters of morality. Such scholars as Paley, Meier, Simon, and Kunzman emphasize that this interpretation is incorrect, each showing, from a slightly different perspective and with different student populations, that public school teachers and administrators can indeed discuss things that matter while also respecting students’ and their parents’ “liberty of conscience.”
The relationship between the private and the public is twofold: on the one hand, we are all formed morally by the community in which we live, and by whose moral norms we learn to make moral judgments. Equally true, we come into the public square partly-formed by family and immediate community. We do not choose our original memberships, but we make choices later about staying in, leaving, and joining moral communities. Of course, we do this choosing partly on the basis of the moral formation that has gone before. That is, we find one group to be morally desirable and another to be not so, partly because of the shape of good and evil, right and wrong, by which we were previously formed. And so schools must perform two related roles in the process of moral/citizen formation. First, they must teach the young that such things matter, and then they must fill in the nature of right and wrong, at least in broad strokes. Second, given the diversity existing in such a large and complex polity as the US and relatively-similar societies, schools must help students learn how to discuss these issues with others finding common ground where possible and managing respectful disagreement when common ground cannot be found.

What schools must do is provide both a model for and practice in the sort of public speech that a democratic polity requires and our current political discourse eschews. When public discourse encourages its members to believe—or act as if they believe—those who disagree are evil and seek to destroy the country (rhetoric that is the daily stuff of such right-wing media “hosts” as Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, and Sean Hannity), democracy cannot survive. Simply put, democratic life requires both commitment to principle and compromise for the common good. Democratic life requires that we see our fellow citizens, even those with whom we seriously disagree, as fellow citizens. The current culture makes the job of schools unnecessarily difficult, but no less necessary. Schools must help do the work of shaping the private conscience in such a way that the child can grow into a fully-realized member of a democratic public.

**Endnotes**

1. Though the term “cultural reproduction” is of recent coinage, any schoolteacher would have been able to explain the concept.


Pestalozzi and His Significance in Democratic Education

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Introduction

Many have researched Swiss educational reformer Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s (1746–1827) philosophy of education. Historical research demonstrates that upon its introduction, Pestalozzi’s theory and practice effects a turning point in school curriculum, teaching methods, and democratic education. In fact, Pestalozzi’s philosophy influenced progressive-thinking men and women who contributed to developing democracy and democratic education. Pestalozzi asserts that democratic education is important to one’s educational process. While historians both downplay the role Pestalozzi assigns to civic transformation and claim Pestalozzi’s philosophy to be ahead of its time, they also provide little or no evidence for its current relevance to public education, democracy, and democratic education (Downs 1975, Gutek 1968, Heafford 1967, Silber 1973, Walch 1952). In this paper, I illustrate Pestalozzian theory’s relevance to democratic education today by investigating Pestalozzian democratic education as it pertains to learners as future citizens and women as teachers and leaders.

From Rousseau’s Sophie to Pestalozzi’s Gertrude

Although Pestalozzi had high regard for the educational philosophy and political views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), he takes a big step beyond Rousseau in formulating his own ideas on education, particularly on women’s roles in education and society (Pestalozzi 1945). Pestalozzi was especially fond of Rousseau’s *Emile* and *The Social Contract*, writings published in 1762 that served as instigators for Pestalozzi’s revolutionary views on natural education and the regeneration of society. While Pestalozzi apparently begins with Rousseau’s theories, he conceptualizes natural education and the regeneration of society differently.

Unlike Rousseau, who maintains students should be educated away from the corrupt influences of their environment, Pestalozzi maintains that local education makes society’s regeneration possible. Biographical accounts of Pestalozzi’s life show his familiarity with the conditions of the poor stem from his living among the common folk and experiencing their hardships (Gutek 1968, Monroe 1969, Silber 1973, Walch 1952). He decides early on that one’s “natural” education has to start at home
with mothers’ guidance and continue in home-like school environments with skilled instructors’ leadership. Pestalozzi envisions mothers as teachers best-suited to the needs of children (Pestalozzi 1944). One sees the difference between Rousseau and Pestalozzi’s philosophies in their female characters, Sophie and Gertrude. In his *Émile*, Rousseau relegates Sophie to the home, characterizes her as incapable of intellectual pursuits, and therefore assigns her no role in assisting her male children in their intellectual development giving her authority over her daughter’s training for marriage and motherhood. He omits her name from the title of educational treatise. In contrast, in his novel, *Lienhard und Gertrud* (1781), Pestalozzi creates his character Gertrude who can critically assess her children’s potential, instruct them according to their developmental level, and set her husband on the right path to becoming a responsible and engaged parent. She moves freely inside home and in the community at large identifying injustices and acting to uproot evils in her community. Gertrude teaches and provides a good example of moral conduct and civic responsibility to her children. Pestalozzi writes Gertrude as a collective image of women-mothers-teachers whose love and care are the most vital aspects of children’s early education.

**Pestalozzi and Equitable Education**

As an engaged, critical citizen, Pestalozzi (1945) sees that injustices political and social structures stem from the lack of accessible education. Although the early death of his father results in financial hardships for Johann and his siblings, Johann, unlike common people of his time, earns a degree from the University of Zurich. While in school, he becomes actively involved in the Helvetic Society (*Helvetische Gesellschaft*) and along with its members harshly opposes and criticizes the doings of the ruling classes. Unlike most intellectuals of his time, he is aware of people’s sufferings and seeks to alleviate them. He bases his philosophy of education largely on his idea that every child is capable of learning as long as a skilled teacher guides him or her (Downs 1975; Gutek 1968; Walch 1952). Moreover, Pestalozzi posits that education and the emotionally-secure, positive environment of one’s homelife bears responsibility for cultivating the intellectual and professional skills one needs to become an autonomous, financially-independent being. Neither Pestalozzi’s intellectual nor ruling-class peers—especially those wanting to preserve the autocracy’s political and social structure—commonly share his position.

Pestalozzi’s bases his methods on the interests and needs of the child (child-centered approach), the learner’s active participation, the use of the senses in educating students to observe and judge, and gradual steps from simple to complex (Barnard 1959; Pestalozzi 1945). More importantly, he trusts his model for better education to passionate instructors trained to teach with love. Although Pestalozzi establishes
several educational institutions where he practices these methods, none survive financial hardships (Silber 1973).

Pestalozzi’s controversial methods in classroom instruction become widely known at the beginning of the 19th century. Many historians attribute his methods’ popularity to the intellectual environment of the Enlightenment era (Becker-Cantarino 2005; Silber 1973). Although most of Pestalozzi’s methods are not new, they are nevertheless welcomed as if they are newly-discovered phenomena. Intellectuals of the Enlightenment era recognize rote memorization, drill, and physical punishment to be ineffective and detrimental to students’ mental and physical development. In this environment, Pestalozzi’s theory quickly spreads through his writings, multiple disciples trained at his institutes, and countless students.

Pestalozzi’s efforts to provide every child with an opportunity successfully to learn a variety of subjects (including arts) in combination with manual work yield tremendous results, especially considering the scarce financial base for his educational establishments. The Swiss educator believes in cultivating the abilities of the whole person—a philosophy later known in the US as the education of “the heart, head, and hands” (Soëtard 1994, 6). Pestalozzi insists on shifting the focus from teacher to student. Of no less importance for the student’s sense perception is establishing an emotionally-secure, home-like school environment. His schools are open to all—rich, poor, homeless, and abandoned children—who behind the schools’ closed doors find a home with a loving father in the face of Pestalozzi.

In 1774, Pestalozzi establishes his first experimental school at the farm, Neuhof (DeGuimps 1892; Silber 1973). Although the Neuhof school curriculum is heavy with manual training, Pestalozzi does not ignore such other subjects as reading, writing, language learning, and arts. At the end of the fifth year of its existence, Neuhof shows an enrollment of about forty students, each of whose inclinations and talents Pestalozzi describes in his letter to potential school sponsors (DeGuimp 1892, 63–64). Although understanding the reality of the industrial revolution and the impending societal changes, Pestalozzi admits:

...however much I [feel] that my institution [requires] this, I [am] no less convinced that every vocational training which [does] not provide the individual with a commensurate cultivation of the head and the heart would not only be inadequate but would be unworthy and would degrade him to the status of one slavishly trained merely for making a living. (Gutek 1968, 147)

With this in mind, the Swiss reformer seizes every opportunity his fortune allows to destroy the existing myth of the poor’s natural
dullness. He endeavors to convince the ruling class to give the poor opportunities to learn skills to provide for themselves financially and become autonomous beings capable of further intellectual development. After closing or quitting every school he has opened since Neuhof, Pestalozzi is still eager to fight for his educational ideals. Pestalozzi’s biographers commonly describe an incident that takes place in 1814 when Pestalozzi’s school in Yverdon is under the threat of losing its dwelling to a military hospital (DeGuimps 1892, 307; Silber 1973, 222–223). After expressing his protest to the order to give up the school building, Pestalozzi

…no sooner [finds] himself in the presence of the Emperor of Russia and his officers, than, thinking it a good opportunity to preach educational reform and the liberation of the serfs, he [becomes] so enthusiastic and so ardent that he completely [forgets] his position, and [approaches] so near the emperor, that the latter [is] obliged to retreat. It [is] not till he [forces] him nearly to the wall, and [is] in the act of taking him by the button of his coat, that Pestalozzi suddenly [becomes] aware of his indiscretion. Muttering an apology, he then [seeks] to kiss the Czar’s hand, but Alexander cordially [embraces] him.

Notwithstanding his eccentricity, Pestalozzi’s words [produce] a great effect, and those about the emperor [think] at one time that he contemplated putting the Swiss philanthropist’s views into execution. (DeGuimps 1892, 307–308)

This encounter is not the only time Pestalozzi’s character and determination produces “a great effect” on a country’s leader. Fredrick of Prussia, Queen Louisa, and the Kings of Spain, Holland, and Denmark also show interest in Pestalozzi’s schools (Warren 2009, 78). However, the primary contributors to the spread and establishment of Pestalozzian democratic ideals are his disciples and influential educationalists and philosophers.

The Early Spread of Pestalozzianism in the US

Joseph Neef (1770–1854), thought to be the first to introduce the Pestalozzian system of instruction to the US, arrives in the US in 1806 upon the invitation of William Maclure, a “pioneer American geologist and philanthropic patron of science and education” (Gutek 1977, 3). With Maclure’s financial assistance and supervision, Neef opens schools in Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio where he practices Pestalozzianism. Gutek notes:

Neef was always a permissive teacher whose schools [are] noted for their freedom from corporal punishment, ridicule and fear…. His classroom conduct was generally much more liberal than that of the conventional nineteenth century
American classroom. Like the twentieth century progressive educators, Neef [believes] that the child [can] exercise his intelligence more freely in an open environment rather than one in which inquiry was closed by fear and authoritarianism. (91)

Clearly, Pestalozzianism identifies with the spirit of freedom and liberation of the students’ minds when it comes to teaching. Neef also opposes “class distinctions, aristocrats, and slavery” (124) and goes further than Pestalozzi in creating a program for civic education. Contrary to Pestalozzi’s romantic hope for a paternal ruler so idealistically delineated in Lienhard und Gertrud, Neef grounds his method in the realities of the US progressive, political environment of the 1800s. His “model for educating the good citizen [is] the self-governing, naturally educated, republican citizen” which the student realizes when he or she can reason and “[formulate his or her] own beliefs and values” (124). This model resonates with Pestalozzi’s philanthropic philosophy, based on the hope that love has regenerative power to minimize suffering through educating people to achieve their fullest potential both intellectually and financially. Similar to Pestalozzi’s educational institutes, Neef’s schools do not stay open longterm; however, Neef’s curricula and spirit have promising beginnings and enjoy popularity. Robert Owen and Robert Jennings establish the last school where Neef teaches: New Harmony.

Shortly after its opening in 1825, the school shows an enrollment of one hundred and forty students. Accepted as equals to boys, girls follow the same curriculum. Moreover, New Harmony has an infant school where children starting at the age of two are taught by Neef’s wife, Eloise, and Marie Fretagiot, a practice corresponding to Pestalozzi’s educational philosophy of early-childhood education (Gutek 1978). Like Pestalozzi’s revolutionary reforms in education, New Harmony School proves an early precursor of early childhood education in the US. Early-childhood education based on Pestalozzian ideas gains its strength in the late 1850s with the US arrival of Pestalozzi’s student, Friedrich Froebel.

**Women in Education and Society**

Pestalozzi is not the first to consider young children as being suitable for educational instruction. John Amos Comenius (1592–1670) and Rousseau present their views on early childhood education prior to those of the Swiss educational reformer. Pestalozzi, however, does not rely on Comenius’ theories when developing his philosophy of early childhood education. He bases his approach on careful observation of mother-child relationships and the educational development that such interactions foster (Peltzman 1991). He concludes that early-childhood education benefits students by giving them a head start in their intellectual development and that women-mothers are the best-suited
teachers of children at this age. These views contradict his contemporaries’ who think education is the realm of reason, women humble assistants to men. However, the Swiss educator continues fearlessly exploring women’s capabilities as educators and ways in which communities may benefit from their empowerment. In How Gertrude Teaches Her Children, Pestalozzi states:

…”[T]he prime object is once more to make home education possible to our people, and gradually to put it in the power of mothers who love their children to use elementary exercises themselves…and practice them with their children. (Pestalozzi 1916, 123)

Home education becomes not only more affordable and accessible, it also gives children a head start in an atmosphere of the loving and secure home. Moreover, Pestalozzi reconceptualizes home education as bereft of the destructive influences of 18th-century-schooling methodologies. Pestalozzi states:

…”we should teach children to think, feel and act rightly, and lead them to enjoy the blessings of faith and love that are natural to them, before we make them commit various points of dogma and theological controversy to memory as an intellectual and spiritual exercise. (97)

For Pestalozzi, nature plays a crucial role in students’ intellectual development as well as the natural home environment. Moreover, he questions and opposes the day’s traditional approach to education and the unquestionably-authoritative figure of the instructor. Conversely, he sees the ideal of a mother-teacher as nearly inseparable from the child’s natural environment and growth.¹

In his most popular novel, Lienhard und Gertrud, the Swiss educator describes a child-centered approach practiced in an emotionally-secure home environment. Gertrude is the ideal mother whose love and Christian faith paves the way for her children’s educational success while opening children’s worlds to the whole community. As a conscientious citizen, Gertrude takes care of her neighbor’s young children whose mother and grandmother have passed away. Gertrude skillfully uses the natural environment to engage her children in learning:

The instruction she [gives] them in the rudiments of arithmetic [is] intimately connected with the realities of life…. She also [makes] them count their threads while spinning, and the number of turns on the reel, when they [wind] the yarn into skeins. Above all, in every occupation of life she [teaches] them an accurate and intelligent observation of common objects and the forces of nature. (Pestalozzi 1885, 130–131)
This example, however, is only a glimpse of her home-school curriculum. Gertrude’s civic engagement, specifically her visit to the Lord of the Castle to act on behalf of her family and the whole community, is another valuable lesson to her children. Through this lesson the children are taught that their civic duty lies in their engagement with the community as well as with their concern and active contribution to the community’s wellbeing. By assigning Gertrude this active civic role, Pestalozzi communicates that community members must not be afraid to question injustices; moreover, they must engage in uprooting them. This example also confirms that Pestalozzi does not limit women to their traditional realm of childrearing and housework. He characterizes women as capable instigators of civic duty and active citizens who can prevent social degradation.

Pestalozzi insists all teachers be trained before starting to teach. Of course, more than men, Pestalozzi’s female contemporaries lack academic preparation. Pestalozzi’s dream of opening a school for girls comes true in Yverdon. In 1806, he establishes an institute for girls warmly called Töchterinstitut or Institute for Daughters. This institute is an auxiliary to his Institute for Boys, and at the schools’ peak, the two share one hundred and fifty students (Krause 1996, 245). Finally, future mothers and teachers are able to receive an education equal to that of their male contemporaries: the ideal of Gertrude is now close to becoming a reality with attention to both sexes’ educations realized. However, financial hardships do not spare this institution or others Pestalozzi has established (Silber 1973). In 1815, Yverdon Institute has to close its doors. Fortunately, its legacy for democracy and equality lives on.

**Pestalozzi’s Theory in Its Application**

Pestalozzi’s theory and practice are works in progress. His great philanthropic endeavors do not come to full realization during his lifetime because of financial hardships, the newness of his method, and the sometimes-harsh critique of his contemporaries (Barnard 1859). The educational reformer’s most influential contribution is the inspiration that progressive thinkers of his time and afterwards take from his ideas. The most influential proponent of democratic education, John Dewey (1859–1952), also borrows from Pestalozzi’s philosophy. The following excerpt demonstrates how closely the philosophies of these great educators relate:

The foundation of democracy is faith in the capacities of human nature; faith in human intelligence, and in the power of pooled and cooperative experience. It is not belief that these things are complete but that if given a show they will grow and be able to generate progressively the knowledge and wisdom needed to guide collective action. (Baird 1940, 322)
In order to preserve true democracy with deliberately- and critically-participating citizens, it is vital to be open to appropriate and needed adjustments in the curriculum in order to address child-centered concerns important to future democratic generations. Civic and parental responsibility rests within individuals’ and society’s hands and calls for rethinking parents’ and teachers’ roles in educating this nation’s children. Pestalozzi’s child-centered methods aim at developing the whole child, are proved successful in his time, and continue to help define good teaching.

Although many now consider Pestalozzi’s methods unorthodox and outdated, isolated cases of their application have proven successful. In her book *Raising Curious, Creative, Confident Kids* (2000), Rebeca Wild describes one such success story. Wild and her husband initiate the Pestalozzi Kindergartens in the 1960s and later Pestalozzi schools in Tambuco, Ecuador. They base their methods on the following philosophy:

…the primary purpose of education is not to get desirable knowledge into the head of an individual as quickly and painlessly as possible. For us the most important thing for children and young people is that they can grow into a rapidly changing world in such a way that their being and thus their ability to make a positive adjustment to new conditions and situations in life is not weakened by the educational process but rather strengthened. (32)

In their educational establishments, the Wilds emphasize freedom of activity fostering children’s understandings of their inner selves thus making children aware of their autonomy as well as helping them adjust to an ever-changing world:

…we sacrifice our autonomy in favor of an external authority if, by doing so, we can spare ourselves the suffering of becoming conscious of our own self, the pain of our individual inner growth, and the burden of our personal responsibility.

(32)

Consequently, children’s developing sense of autonomy triggers positive inner growth and personal responsibility facilitating their evolving into critical- and independently-thinking civic members. A critically thinking, independent membership undoubtedly proves vital to building and sustaining democracy.

**Conclusion**

True democratic society requires its members to be educated to be free, autonomous beings who empower themselves to act according to their shared values thereby promoting and sustaining democracy. The formal and informal education Pestalozzi and his disciples theorize and
practice is a basis for such democracy. Although perhaps not overtly thinking in democratic terms, Pestalozzi’s theory and resulting schools lay the foundation for ideals facilitating all children to become “curious, creative and confident” members of a democratic society. Additionally, Pestalozzi theorizes that all community members participate emphasizing mothers’ roles as teachers, civic leaders, and caretakers. As Pestalozzi’s theory spreads, women’s position in society starts to change as women gain more social equity. All these historical developments in education contribute to the establishment and spread of democracy. Although methodologies of teaching have dramatically evolved since Pestalozzi’s time, traditional schooling still bears a brand of confinement to the stratified social structure consequently opposing democratic ideals of equal opportunity and success. Pestalozzi’s methods of teaching aimed at comprehensive development of human capacities deserve a renewed emphasis and reestablishment in the theory of education. As the example of the school in Tambuco demonstrates, Pestalozzi’s revolutionary methodology can transform contemporary teaching to foster democratic potential for future generations. The establishment of Pestalozzi’s educational institutions is the first attempt to democratize education while providing all students with equal opportunity for learning and success. Ahead of its time, contradicting his day’s political structure, his philosophy has not yet lost its vitality.

References


**Endnotes**

1 In *How Gertrude Teaches Her Children*, Pestalozzi uses the terms “mother” and “nature” interchangeably.
John Dewey and Thomas Jefferson: Education for Democracy

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Introduction

Thomas Jefferson and John Dewey had much in common. Both were interested in expansion of knowledge through the process of science and experimentation, especially the practical applications that could be found for new scientific discoveries. Both were skeptical of dogmatic religion. Both were interested in the relation between theory or hypothesis and practice or experience. Both were interested in the cultural varieties of human societies. Both were interested in the ideas of liberty, freedom, and democracy. Both valued the idea of systematic change. Both had an appreciation for and a faith in the people as the source of power. Both recognized the importance of economic conditions and relations in politics and society. Both developed educational plans that, while they did have impact, were never implemented any systematic way. Both have been blamed for some of the conditions that now exist in our society.

Dewey and Jefferson are two of the most important philosophers of democracy. Separated by time and divided by political and social conditions, they both tried to influence the development of democratic ideas in their times. By investigating Dewey’s writing on Jefferson and Jeffersonian ideas, we can get a clearer understanding of the changing place of education in US society. This will involve, somewhat, the comparison of the ideas of these two philosophers with a view to a better understanding of how they are connected and why their thoughts remain important.

Dewey and Jefferson had ideas about the place of education in a democratic society. Dewey’s progressive ideas were expressed in many of his early books. Five of the ten books he wrote between 1899 and 1916 were on education. After 1916 Dewey used essays in books and journals to focus on specific educational policies, ideas, and practices. He published only one other book on his broader views of education. Jefferson’s educational ideas were expressed as proposed legislation and the effort to provide for a basic education for all, and to reform the higher education available at that time. He proposed a public system of free education based on local elementary schools, sectional secondary schools, and regional higher education with practical curricula that could be put to immediate use. Both Dewey and Jefferson believed that education was the key to furthering of democratic ideals.
What follows is an examination of some of the important ideas of Dewey on Jefferson’s ideas, philosophical and educational, beginning with Dewey’s interest in Jefferson. A comparison of Dewey’s ideas about democracy with Jefferson’s highlights some of the differences between Dewey’s thought and Jefferson’s. This discussion of Dewean and Jeffersonian education focuses on their educational ideas.

**Dewey and Jefferson**

Most of John Dewey’s writing shows a singular disregard for Thomas Jefferson. From the index of the *Collected Works of John Dewey*, no citations are found for Jefferson in the *Early Works*. Only five references occur in the *Middle Works* which mention his name. Not until the mid-1930s did Dewey show an appreciation for Jefferson in his writing. In 1936 Dewey wrote,

> The social philosophy of Thomas Jefferson is regarded as outmoded by many persons because it seems to be based upon the then existing agrarian conditions and to postulate the persistence of the agrarian regime. It is then argued that the rise of industry to a position superior to that of agriculture has destroyed the basis of Jeffersonian democracy.3

Dewey calls this perspective a “highly superficial view” supported by Jefferson’s political rivals in his time and kept alive by opponents of the broad-based democracy desired by Jefferson who believed “that the ideas put forth about freedom, self-government and republican institutions were deliberate insincerities…”.

On the two-hundredth anniversary of Jefferson’s birth Dewey wrote:

> Even those persons who are akin to the men who abused and vilified him while he was alive have given lip service to his memory. In sober fact, only those who are continuing to fight for the freedoms for which he strove so valiantly have a right to appeal to his name.5

Dewey called Jefferson “the most intellectual and the most definitely explicit of all the American leaders.” Dewey admitted nevertheless that for a long time he had also not considered Jefferson as important as “the English writers who have attempted to state the ideals of self-governing communities and the methods appropriate to their realization.” In a letter to Max Otto he noted, “I enjoyed making the acquaintance of Jefferson at first hand.” And that, “You had right in your forecast of what the effect of more intimate acquaintance with Jefferson would be— I think he is one of the world’s great figures.”

Dewey found the founder’s shortcomings to be a lack of understanding of society regarding political and social development. He said,
They were certainly not wrong in emphasizing the need for free press and of common public schools to provide conditions favorable to democracy. But to them the enemy of freedom of the press was official governmental censorship and control; they did not foresee the non-political causes that might restrict its freedom, nor the economic factors that would put a heavy premium on centralization. And they failed to see how education in literacy could become a weapon in the hands of an oppressive government....

Literacy is insufficient; if it lacks appropriate experiences it leaves one vulnerable to organized propaganda. Jefferson, for his part, came to understand that,

In truth, the abuses of monarchy had so much filled all the space of political contemplation, that we imagined everything republican which was not monarchy. We had not yet penetrated to the mother principle, that “governments are republican only in proportion as they embody the will of their people, and execute it.”

John Dewey’s *The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson* was published in 1940 with Dewey’s essay, “Presenting Thomas Jefferson.” Dewey became very familiar with Jefferson’s impact on the development of American political philosophy with that book and with *Freedom and Culture*, published in 1939. In his essay, “Presenting Thomas Jefferson,” Dewey called Jefferson the first great democrat. He also had an appreciation of the “range and depth” of Jefferson’s knowledge. Jefferson was a product of the Enlightenment and, along with Benjamin Franklin, could be considered the epitome of learning and knowledge in their time. Jefferson was interested in architecture, archaeology, astronomy, ornithology, technology and invention, philology, anthropology, philosophy, and paleontology. Dewey noted Jefferson’s interests in botanical and agricultural theory and practice including his proposal of a professorship in Agriculture for University of Virginia—the first in higher education—and the development of agricultural societies for the “checking of theory by practical experience.” Jefferson thought that the study of languages made possible the understanding of the relations of different peoples to each other. He made a collection of the vocabularies of fifty different Indian tribes looking for similarities among them and with European languages. Jefferson believed that different ethnic groups had different social and psychological propensities. The English, he thought, are more interested in parliamentary government, the French more in monarchy. “The Germanic body,” he said, “is a burlesque on government.” In America the combination of peoples provides a variety of social and political ideologies which provide a check on tyrannical government.
From the age of twenty-two, Dewey notes, Jefferson was involved in “every movement for freedom and independence, usually somewhat in advance of other ‘rebels’...”\textsuperscript{14} Jefferson professed that he had no wish for the public life into which circumstances had thrust him. He preferred “the tranquil pursuits of science,”\textsuperscript{15} but circumstances called him to public service. Jefferson began his forty-year political career as a representative of Albemarle County in the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1769, the Second Continental Congress as the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, Virginia House of Delegates and Governor of Virginia, United States Minister to France, and Secretary of State. He was Vice President and President of the United States. He founded the University of Virginia and became its first rector.

Dewey found a kindred intellect in Jefferson. Jefferson’s interest in natural sciences, especially the development of theories backed by practical experience and observation, anticipated pragmatic thought and Dewey’s instrumentalism. Jefferson’s use of scientific method and his recognition of the importance of hypothetical speculation applied not only to the practical sciences and technology but also to abstract sciences like paleontology and astronomy. Dewey writes,

Jefferson’s emphasis upon the relation of science and learning to practical serviceability had two sources...the newness of his own country, and his conviction that needs should be satisfied in the degree of their urgency.... Necessities first; luxuries in their due season.\textsuperscript{16}

This connection between science and learning and practical serviceability can be applied to Jefferson’s ideas about education. He wanted to put a working system in place that would provide basic education for all and opportunities for those with ability. Such a system was a necessity for the general improvement of citizens and participatory democracy. Educational luxury would come with the expansion of the educational system, the improvements in pedagogy, and the increased opportunities for higher learning.

Dewey felt that it was wrong to accept the notion that Jefferson’s five-year stay in France influenced his political philosophy or ethical views. In fact, the intellectual and practical movement was from the United States to Europe, not \textit{vice versa}. Dewey wrote, “Every one of Jefferson’s characteristic political ideas was definitely formulated by him before he went to France.”\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Deweyean and Jeffersonian Democracy}

John Dewey’s concept of democracy was unlike the democracy of Thomas Jefferson. Dewey recognized that “the problem of freedom and of democratic institutions is tied up with the question of what kind of culture exists; with the necessity of free culture for free political
institutions.” Dewey’s democracy was grounded in the industrial America of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. It was a reaction to the economic excesses of big business and the social stratification apparent in that era. Dewey lent his voice to the voices of so many progressives in the early-twentieth century. He called for the expansion of democratic ideals in the economy and a more egalitarian society substituting economic democracy for the existing economic aristocracy.

Dewey’s 1939 book, *Freedom and Culture*, was concerned with the movement away from free societies in favor of more controlled, totalitarian states. Dewey wondered if “…the driving force in political history has been the effort of the common man to achieve freedom…” and if “attainment of freedom is the goal of political history.” In short, he questioned whether freedom was an end or the means to other ends? Is it too difficult to be free and not have security, to be free and not have the things we think we should have? Dewey sought the wisdom of Thomas Jefferson in analyzing questions about freedom and democratic institutions and about the kind of culture required for their continuance. Dewey wrote,

The state of culture is a state of interaction of many factors, the chief of which are law and politics, industry and commerce, science and technology, the arts of expression and communication, and of morals, or the values men prize and the ways in which they evaluate them; and finally, though indirectly, the system of general ideas used by men to justify and to criticize the fundamental conditions under which they live, their social philosophy.

Jefferson was a product of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. Skeptical of dogmatic religion and sectarian differences, Jefferson seemed anti-religious and highly secular. Jefferson believed in a God who provided man with his essence. Human liberties and self-government were the most important “inalienable rights” given man by God and are absolute. “Individuals exercise them by their single wills, collections of men by that of their majority; for the law of the majority is the law of every society of men.” But Jefferson was mindful of the tyranny of the majority. He wrote “…that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate which would be oppression.”

Thomas Jefferson’s enlightenment democracy was based on the rural life and the needs of the farmer, “the chosen people of God.” Such a democracy is dispersed and focused on local government more than on state and national governments. Jefferson feared the increasing industrialization of America, preferring that in Europe would remain
“the general operations of manufacture.”25 This view is that of a southern landowner and aristocrat. It overlooks the conditions of New England where farming was not as profitable as in the south, and many factories used the locally-available resources; he overlooks the middle states where commerce and trade were becoming increasingly-important. This sectionalism became an important feature of America beginning in Jefferson’s time.

To appreciate Jefferson’s views of American democracy, Dewey had to recognize that certain terms of Jefferson’s had to be translated into terms appropriate within Dewey’s philosophy. For example, substitution of the word moral for Jefferson’s word natural, substitution of ideals and aims for Nature—in short to translate Jeffersonian Deism into Deweyan Naturalism,26 Jefferson writes “Nothing is unchangeable but the inherent and inalienable rights of man.”27 For Jefferson democratic theory postulated a widespread desire for personal freedom and for release from dominion over personal beliefs and conduct that is exercised from sources external to the individual. Dewey reads the ends of democracy, and man in the collective not singular. Thus, it is problematical to equate Dewey’s views with Jefferson’s. Dewey wrote,

It would be a great mistake…to regard the idea of the isolated individual possessed of inherent rights “by nature” apart from association….28 (T)he future of democracy is allied with spread of the scientific attitude. It is the sole guarantee against wholesale misleading by propaganda…it is the only assurance of the possibility of a public opinion intelligent enough to meet present social problems.29

Dewey came to appreciate the practical yet evolutionary quality of Jeffersonian democracy, quoting Jefferson when he wrote,

I am certainly not an advocate for frequent and untried changes in laws and constitutions. I think moderate imperfections had better be borne with; because, when once known, we accommodate ourselves to them, and find practical means of correcting their ill effects. But I know also, that laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened, as new discoveries are made, new truths disclosed, and manners and opinions change with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance also, and keep pace with the times.30

Jefferson’s notion of government was the diffusion and limitation of powers. He understood the lure of power and the corruption that often accompanies the possession and use of power. He was a strict constructionist, mistrustful of a strong executive and supported regular
revision of the Constitution. As President, however, Jefferson found it expedient to be strong. He had “faith,” said Dewey, “in the right of the people to govern themselves in their own way and their ability to exercise the right wisely—provided they were enlightened by education and free discussion.” Jefferson’s solution was the development of self-governing communities.

Jefferson’s plan of education was included in his plan of government and was consistent for fifty years. In his 1779 Bill for the “More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” Jefferson would have broken down the counties of Virginia into wards or hundreds, five- or six-miles square, governed by a warden. Wards would not only establish and maintain elementary schools but also perform all the functions of government. Wards would become the foundation republic, making up the county republics, which would make up the state republics, and the republic of the union would consist of the state republics. The size of the ward would be sufficient to provide a company of militia and would be responsible for providing a free, three-year elementary school. Jefferson continued to petition for his education/government plan. He wrote to Virginia Governor John Tyler in 1810, again proposing the ward system:

I have indeed two great measures at heart, without which no republic can maintain itself in strength. 1. That of general education, to enable every man to judge for himself what will secure or endanger his freedom. 2. To divide every county into hundreds, of such size that all the children of each will be within reach of a central school in it. But this division looks to many other fundamental provisions. Every hundred, besides a school, should have a justice of the peace, a constable and a captain of militia.... These little republics would be the main strength of the great one.32

Such a hierarchy of government was meaningful. Dewey said this proposal indicates “a theoretical opposition to all government save as a necessary evil”33 and that to obtain justice, society and government are created conforming to “the moral sense and reason of man.”34

Jeffersonian and Deweyan Education

For Jefferson the value of science, natural and social, was the enlightenment of the people. It was the “people,” said Dewey, “whom he (Jefferson) trusted as the foundation and ultimate security of self-governing institutions.”35 But the people need at least a rudimentary education in order to be competent citizens. Education, thought Jefferson, should identify those of talent, regardless of class so that they might participate as leaders in a society that values personal ability over birth status. Merle Curti in The Social Ideas of American Educators called
Jefferson, “The first American to emphasize education as an instrument for the realization of democracy and for the furthering of social reform.”

Jefferson was familiar with economic theory of the time. He read Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith, and corresponded with French economists, Jean Baptiste Say and Destutt de Tracy. He was also well aware of the emerging class consciousness and proposals that would do away with the ownership of property as the requirement of suffrage, the idea that common people, not the rich, were the rightful repositories of liberty. Jefferson recognized the necessity of education and would have based suffrage on literacy.

Social reform, the breakdown of the stratified society that provided the means neither for intellectual development nor social and economic mobility was one of the goals within Jefferson’s educational plans. Jefferson thought that if the will of the people is the moral basis of government, then it would be best if the people are educated with an awareness of their rights and responsibilities and that education—not wealth, property, or family—should create the aristocracy of the society.

The schools of each ward in Jefferson’s plan would teach reading, writing, and common arithmetic. “At this school,” Jefferson wrote,

...shall be received and instructed gratis, every infant of competent age who has not already had three years of schooling...no person unborn or under the age of twelve years at the passing of this act, and who is comos mentis, shall, after the age of fifteen years, be a citizen of this commonwealth until he or she can read readily in some tongue, native or acquired.”

The ward schools would be supplemented by twenty-four district schools or colleges where:

...shall be taught the Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian and German languages, English grammar, geography, ancient and modern, the higher branches of numerical arithmetic, the mensuration of land, the use of the globes; and the ordinary elements of navigation.

Jefferson as governor sought to reform William and Mary College to make it a true university by amending the constitution to enlarge its sphere of science and limit the governance of the Church of England. When it became clear that William and Mary could not be wrested from the control of the Church, Jefferson proposed a new University of Virginia and devoted considerable time and resources to assist its creation. Jefferson was involved in everything from the design of the buildings to the structure of the curriculum.
Dewey’s views of education, like his views on democracy, were grounded in his environment. Where Jefferson could conceive of his educational system where none had existed, Dewey was forced to recommend changes and reforms to an existing system in which he found “deadness, dullness, formalism, and routine.”

Dewey considered the school to be a form of community life in a simplified form providing social participation, stimulation based on the student’s own instincts, powers, and initiative. He thought education “is a process of living, not a preparation for future living.” What was available to Dewey and not to Jefferson was pedagogy. For Dewey teaching is both an art and a science. The art of teaching consists of “giving shape to human powers and adapting them to social service,” while the science of teaching marshals psychology, especially child development, social sciences, and our increased understanding of methods.

By educating for democracy, Jefferson meant providing the opportunity to become literate and, if capable, to attain higher education. For Dewey educating for democracy meant preparing the student to “have the full and ready use of all his capacities.” Both Jefferson and Dewey realized that education is for an unknown future not preparation for a continuing present.

Conclusion

The work and thought of both Jefferson and Dewey have been under attack since their expression. Jefferson’s scheme of government and education had some impact on educational thought but was never implemented in any meaningful way. Of Jefferson’s four educational objectives—elementary education, residential secondary grammar schools, university education (all three paid by the state), and the establishment of a true university—only the last was achieved. The common schools of the 1830s and 1840s provided a partial application of Jefferson’s first objective. The growth of the public high school resembled the secondary grammar schools, and the provision of the land-grant universities recall the practical curriculum of the University of Virginia. Still, Jefferson is criticized by fundamentalist Christians for his humanism, by scholars for the discrepancies between his theory and practice in politics, his sexism, his hypocritical stance on slavery, and his Hemings relations, and by the Texas school board whose members believe that Jefferson’s Enlightenment ideas are not as important as those European. He really believed that nowhere in Europe was to be found a government worth emulating. One scholar “goes so far as to suggest that Jefferson’s reputation has been so thoroughly tarnished that the Jefferson Memorial would most likely not be built today. As he puts it, ‘the values celebrated by the Jefferson Memorial have not lost their cultural credibility. What has changed is the confidence that Jefferson is a fitting representative of them.’”
Dewey’s child-centered, experience-driven, interest-based, and community-oriented ideas on education remained mostly an academic system written about in the journals of education but implemented, if at all, in a non-systematic way. Dewey’s followers created any number of applications of his thought with varying degrees of success. The successful of those did not survive the career of their leader. In other words, Dewey’s educational ideas became a dogma, and the application, when successful, was carried out by true believers. Despite the decades of educational thought since, it is still Dewey’s name that is equated with the “decline” or the ruin of American education. From Bagley and Bode to Ravitch and Kliebard, Dewey is responsible for much of what is wrong in American education.

These criticisms of Jefferson and Dewey are hardly surprising considering the conservative climate of contemporary politics and the impact of that conservatism on education. A brief internet search will locate any number of sites that are heavily-critical of both Dewey’s and Jefferson’s visions for education and government. But times change. If Diane Ravitch, Frederick Hess, and Chester Finn can change their minds about the benefits of school choice, charter schools, and accountability, maybe there is a light at the end of the teach-to-the-test tunnel. There is more to schools than achievement on tests. Dewey knew it, and Jefferson knew it. We need to revisit their ideas in light of our educational needs.

Endnotes

1 The School and Society, 1899; The Child and the Curriculum, 1902; Moral Principles in Education, 1909; Schools of To-Morrow, with Evelyn Dewey, 1915; Democracy and Education, 1916; Experience and Education, 1938.


6 Dewey, Freedom and Culture, 54.

7 Ibid., 155.


9 Dewey, Freedom and Culture, 41.


12 Ibid., 14.


14 Dewey, The Living Thoughts of Thomas Jefferson, 10.


17 Ibid., 23.


22 Thomas Jefferson, “Opinion upon the question whether the President should veto the Bill, declaring that the seat of government shall be transferred to the Potomac, in the year 1790,” In The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson, Adrienne Koch and William Peden, New York: Modern Library, 316.

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Guarding Against Complicity: Educating for Democratic Privilege

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Introduction

A few years ago, Barbara Applebaum, in an article for Educational Theory, discussed the need for educators to work against systemic oppression resulting from white complicity and the act of ignoring race (2006). To that end, in this paper I expose school choice as a particular effect of ignoring race and maintaining white privilege. Though it is often argued that unregulated school choice promotes democratic freedom, I argue that it is in fact a detriment to democratic freedom due to its roots in white privilege and race ignorance. Here, the groundwork for a solution to this problem is offered—the concept of democratic privilege. This concept draws heavily on the thought of John Dewey, particularly his views of education’s aims put forth in Democracy and Education (1997). Dewey’s aims serve as a useful tool in guiding educational thought towards authentic democratic education.

Contemporary, school-choice programs often result in patterns of segregated schooling which has at least two effects. The first is a disparity in opportunity to learn standards in the public schools. The second is a fractured society hidden beneath a homogenous normalcy of whiteness. While there is a definite correlation between increased segregation and school choice, I am not arguing that school choice causes segregation, for that would be a simple answer to a far-more-complex problem. The cause of segregation is institutionalized and socialized racism. Further, the effects of segregated schooling are rooted in racial discrimination hidden by an assumption of meritocracy perpetuated by white complicity and race ignorance (Applebaum, 2006). Thus, school choice is simply a vehicle for the perpetuation of those of causes of racism. Although there may be cases when it does not result in perpetuating racism, school choice advocates should be aware of this particular danger and employ methods that guard against it. The concept of democratic privilege is formulated in recognition of this danger. Properly theorized and executed, it may potentially be employed as a method to guard against an increasing complicity in institutionalized racism.

School Choice

School choice covers a range of programs that allows students to attend schools they would not normally attend given their place of
residence. Among these programs are voucher systems, magnet schools, open enrollment schools, voluntary-integration plans, desegregation programs, scholarship tax credits, homeschooling, and virtual schooling. Importantly, as Nel Noddings (2007) points out in *When School Reform Goes Wrong*, choice is usually connected to education in the sense of parental choice.

One way to characterize kinds of school choice is to determine whether they are regulated or unregulated. Regulated forms of school choice are those controlled by a governing authority. According to Cobb and Glass (2009), regulated school-choice programs may be race-conscious or race-neutral in their attempt to promote equity. Regulated school choice programs consider “a range of student and school characteristics to balance school enrollments by race, family income, or achievement” (p. 262). Most regulated school choice programs are also court-ordered—beginning with *Brown v. Board of Education*. School-choice programs where race is considered for enrollment are far less prevalent today than during the Brown years (Cobb & Glass, 2009).

Charter schools are considered unregulated school-choice programs. Although the states encourage charter schools to reflect local demographics, practice reveals a lack of attention to that encouragement (Cobb & Glass, 2009). Unregulated school choice rests on market-based assumptions about the relation between competition and quality (Cobb & Glass, 2009). Unfortunately, whereas regulated school choice was meant to decrease segregation, unregulated school choice has been shown to increase segregation. In this paper I concentrate on school choice as unregulated.

**Effects of School Choice**

Though *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was meant to integrate public schools, it resulted, unintentionally, in white flight—a move towards the preservation of racial inequality. In fact, while Southern schools created “freedom of choice” plans under the pretense of complying with *Brown v. Board*, it turns out, whites just happened to choose schools with other whites. The North was no different. For example, the population of Boston-area schools’ minority population increased from 29 to 80 percent between 1972 and 1992 (Gillon, 2000, p. 24) resulting in busing programs as a way better to enforce the court’s decision (Mickelson et al., 2008).

In their study on the effects of unregulated and regulated school-choice programs, Cobb and Glass (2009) find that unregulated school-choice programs often isolate particular groups—mostly minority and low-income populations. The result of this isolation is a restriction of the human capital, or peer diversity, in school environments (Cobb & Glass, 2009). Saporito (2009) echoes this position in a study of school choice and private school enrollment between 1990 and 2000, finding
that a lack of regulation or control in school choice concerning desegregation results in the unlikelihood that segregation will be reduced. His findings imply that choices of white parents concerning the education of their children are significantly influenced by race. Saporito (2009) also finds private school enrollment rates contribute to racial segregation and believes this is the result of “out-group avoidance patterns” (p. 188). Furthermore, with an increase in black students in a community, there is a corresponding increase in private-school enrollment among whites. These findings give credence to Noddings’ (2007) claim that school choice today is equivalent to parental choice.

Previously, urban, white students reappearing in the suburbs and private schools resulted in less support for increasing taxes aimed at improving urban, public schools (Gillon, 2000). Thus, school choice, insofar as it increases racial segregation, results in a disparity of opportunity to learn standards among schools (Burns, 2004). A decrease in academic opportunity portends a decrease in academic achievement. Interestingly, diverse school populations are correlated with increased opportunities to learn (Mickelson et al., 2008).

The first effect of school choice, then, is a decrease in equity regarding opportunities to learn. The second effect is, in a sense, much worse. Segregated schooling separates and fragments society. This fractured society remains hidden beneath a homogenous normalcy of whiteness created by white privilege and race ignorance. Thus, school choice, as it tends toward segregation, serves as a vehicle for the perpetuation of institutionalized racism.

White Privilege

White privilege is both a conscious and subconscious fact of American culture. Federal policy, such as the GI Bill combined with white flight, gated communities, disproportionate numbers of minorities in poverty, racial slurs, and low academic expectations are all forms of conscious white privilege (Brodkin, 2004; Miron, 1997). Forms of subconscious white privilege are manifested in the concept of “color-blindness,” power relations, language, and explaining “away inequality by blaming the victims of it for not acting white” (Revilla et al., 2004, p. 285). Ignoring race is also a form of white privilege. The notion of “color-blindness,” defined by Applebaum (2006) as “the position that the race of a person is and should be irrelevant to the decision-making process” (p. 345), is translated in educational terms to mean that the student’s race does not matter. As long as all students act like white children, under the logic of color-blindness, they will do well in school. This notion stems from the belief that denying “the existence of race” is “making progress” (Revilla et al., 2004, p. 299). Many of these students are expected to achieve the same educational standards as the majority population of students and given less opportunity to do so, especially in instances of segregation.
The normalcy of whiteness is the result of ignoring race to the extent that “acting” white is the norm (Revilla et al., 2004, p. 285). According to Michael Apple (2004), “There is a national myth in a number of nations that its citizens live in a ‘racial democracy.’ Such a claim may act to cover the ways whiteness works in the daily lives in all too many of its dominant economic, political, and cultural institutions” (p. 83). Understanding white privilege and race ignorance in this way can help us understand how the concept of meritocracy as a genuine operative in social life is a false assumption.

We assume our society is meritocratic when in fact resources are distributed according to race and socioeconomic status. We assume that achieving success is possible regardless of skin color, gender, or socioeconomic status. In fact, these attributes greatly affect the type and quality of education a student receives. America is not the land of opportunity we normally assume it to be. It is whites’ privilege to participate in a meritocracy of the white elite. This state of affairs is the result of American life “organized around structures that perpetuate racial inequality” (Rosenberg, 2004, p. 268). John Dewey writes, in Human Nature and Conduct, “Conditions have been framed for producing a bad result, and the bad result will occur as long as these conditions exist” (Dewey, 2002, p. 29). Although he was writing about the individual habits of people, his is a perfect analogy for the existence of racial discrimination within the system and surrounding the discourse of public schooling today. Further, these conditions include not just racial but socioeconomic inequality.

School choice proponents assume all parents have the money and information needed to choose a “quality” school for their children. Vouchers do not cover the complete costs of private education. Those who send their children to private schools often pay much more than lower-income parents can afford, even with a voucher system in place. Noddings (2007) calls the type of thinking that ignores this inequity to be “ludicrous” (p. 73). Resources given to schooling do not encompass all the resources necessary for academic success. Those who are afforded extra opportunities are the beneficiaries, not of a meritocratic nation, but of privileged status.

The type of racial inequality caused by segregated schooling in the form of school choice is hidden in the same way that socioeconomic discrimination is hidden as discussed by Jean Anyon (1995). In her classic, “Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work,” she defines the working class school, the middle class school, the affluent professional school, and the executive elite school as ways in which we hide, and at the same time provide for, socioeconomic discrimination. At the working class end, curriculum resembles factory work. At the executive elite end, curriculum encourages a high level of autonomy.
School types serve to reproduce social inequality in the classroom, just as school choice reproduces racial segregation in the public school system. Both have miseducative results. Both are rooted in notions of privilege. As Burns (2004) writes, “Students live their context, not automatically nor remotely but interpretively, using the information and resources at their disposal to make sense of and navigate their world. And if we ask them to maintain privilege, many of them will” (p. 390). When we promote school choice without paying attention to its tendency to cause segregation, we maintain white privilege and are thereby complicit in a system of institutionalized racism. In the interest of working against the systemic oppression resulting from this type of privilege, we need a solution that both recognizes the importance of difference and holds those differences together toward the common good.

**Democratic Privilege**

The right to education is a privilege of democratic society. When we are complicit in institutionalized racism, within and surrounding the discourse on public schools, we deny the right of genuine democratic education to a select group of societal members. To move away from this, we need to take seriously the notion that heritage and status inform the daily lives of people in important way instead of assuming a normalcy of whiteness. One way to take this notion seriously is by consciously assuming a normalcy of democratic privilege. By democratic privilege, I mean that which enables each of us to participate fully in democratic life and to reap its rewards.

Privilege may seem an odd term to use when talking about “rights,” as in the “right” to an education. However, in an important sense, the exercise of rights relies on privilege. For example, in the era of regulated school choice, the law states that schools must end desegregation—*de jure*. However, the *de facto* situation disregards the law, and hence the need to posit the terms *de jure* and *de facto*. Everyone has a right to education, but we must also, as citizens, actually give that right to one another. Sometimes, as was the case in the aftermath of *Brown v. Board*, the right to attend desegregated schools was often unrealized. It was not afforded students, even though students had a right to such an education. In a sense “privilege,” as I use the term, can be phrased as “afforded rights.”

Before introducing the specific criteria of democratic privilege, I want to set the stage within Deweyan thought to help clarify the notion of “privilege as afforded rights” talk. There are two aims for education discussed by Dewey that pertain to democratic societies. Dewey’s first aim, the growth of the individual, is founded on his beliefs concerning personal interest in social relationships, habits of mind, and individual growth as the starting point of self-renewal in society. Of the first two claims, Dewey (1997) writes,
A society which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms and which secures flexible readjustment of its institutions through interaction of the different forms of associated life is in so far democratic. Such a society must have a type of education which gives individuals a personal interest in social relationships and control, and the habits of mind which secure social changes without introducing disorder. (p. 99)

As for individual growth and its relation to the self-renewal of society, he writes, “We have seen that a community or social group sustains itself through continuous self-renewal, and that this renewal takes place by means of the educational growth of the immature members of the group” (p. 99).

In a democracy, we need individuals to grow in such a way that they will be able to see their connection to broader social life. They need to understand that participation in that society is necessary where their personal interest in society rests. They also need to be provided the habits of mind that can enable society to change without its collapsing. Regarding the self-renewal of society, Dewey echoes the plea of Jefferson (1816), who, writing to Pierre Samuel DuPont de Nemours, said, “Although I do not, with some enthusiasts, believe that the human condition will ever advance to such a state of perfection as that there shall no longer be pain or vice in the world, yet I believe it susceptible of much improvement, and most of all in matters of government and religion; and that the diffusion of knowledge is to be the instrument by which it is affected” (ME 14:491).

Dewey’s second aim, concerning the good of society, has two foundations. The first foundation is politically-motivated and is served by his insistence on an educated people capable of the duties of citizenship. He writes, “The Public is here a collective name for a multitude of persons each voting as an anonymous unit. As a citizen-voter each one of these persons is, however, an officer of the public” (Dewey, 1988, p. 75). The second foundation is motivated by his view of democracy as “the clear consciousness of a communal life” (Dewey, 1988, p. 149). Citizens, properly construed, must be aware of their relationships with other citizens. They must, in a sense, care about one another in the same way that they care about themselves. For Dewey, citizens are an organic part of society and find themselves in social interaction. The citizen’s altruism is not a type of psychological egoism. They have a duty to one another, insofar as they are related socially. Echoing this thought in Democracy’s Discontent, Sandel writes, “More than a legal condition, citizenship requires certain habits and dispositions, a concern for the whole, an orientation to the common good” (1996, p. 117).
As outlined above, Dewey provides us with good advice on how adequately to maintain a democratic society. To be educated as citizens in a democracy, we should focus on individual growth and the good of society. That is, we should recognize schooling as a place for enabling the growth of students into conscientious and democratic citizens. Doing so better assists us in the progress and growth of democracy we have so far achieved. Importantly, it also enables us to preserve our democratic nation.

Given Dewey’s two aims of education and keeping in mind that privilege is the affording of rights, there are two criteria for democratic privilege which give the concept some clarity. First, democratic privilege implies a shared status. It is Dewey’s reliance “upon the recognition of mutual interest as a factor in social control” (Dewey, 1997, p. 86). Second, democratic privilege is a framework for individuals to understand how they can responsibly interact with others. We do not respect others solely because of what they have accomplished but because they are with us, here and now, in a communal life. In very practical terms, we share a common status as citizens: as office holders. Further, we should constantly recognize that the formation of the individual is contingent upon a variety of factors—race, religion, heritage, family life, etc.

Teachers operating within the classroom can help effect the social change needed to reconstruct institutions in a way that perpetuates democracy. Keeping the concept of democratic privilege at the forefront of how we think about education, we, as educators, need constantly to ask ourselves such questions as: how am I adequately to reach those in my classroom with a Hispanic heritage; in what ways might they respond to a debate on immigration or a discussion of the Mexican American War; in what ways have I ignored the heritage of those in my classroom who are Native American, and what does Manifest Destiny mean to them? These generalizations may help guide us in situating the content of learning into the particular experiences of our students. Various methods are available to teachers who focus their attention on the democratic privileges of their students. We can focus our attention on curricula that utilize such democratic techniques as discussion, participation, and collaboration in accomplishing democratic goals. This is what, according to Noddings (2007), encompasses “real” choice—giving students a voice in decision making and learning how to make their own informed choices.

We give students these choices and inform them of democratic ideals because, rather than an economically-prosperous nation (the ostensible purpose of school choice), our schools must educate students to live in a healthy, democratic society. This is achieved by eradicating
pervasive discrimination, racism, and prejudice in the public school (Miron, 1997) but will not occur until we recognize the root of those ills and stop ignoring the role that race occupies in building our institutions. Consciously and explicitly assuming the democratic privilege of students can serve as a vehicle for eradicating white complicity in regard to institutionalized and socialized racism.

References


Ludwig Feuerbach versus Max Stirner: What a Few Old Germans Can Tell Us About Our Present Educational System

Angelo Letizia, The College of William and Mary

Hegel, Schopenhauer, and the Battle for Meaning

In 1799 German philosopher F. H. Jacobi puts forth an ultimatum for modernity: faith or reason. Jacobi sees the Enlightenment notion of reason paradoxically as threatening the very foundations of stability and order it is supposed to establish. He argues if one applies reason to such questions as God’s existence, as Robespierre tries to do, that reason will never uncover a provable answer, thus leaving absolutely nothing for man to believe in. Jacobi describes this deplorable condition as nihilism: eradication of all traditions, beliefs and, most threateningly, morality. To avoid this condition, man has simply to believe in God and no longer pursue limited reason. Dismissing reason alarms many, though, because it calls into question the preceding one hundred years of humanities development.

Two later thinkers, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Arthur Schopenhauer take up Jacobi’s challenge. Their challenge is to modernity: can the ideas of the Enlightenment hold? Can a world be built on reason? Hegel says yes, Schopenhauer no. Hegel sees all of history as a dialectical progress toward a goal, toward freedom. As the contradictions of age became evident to Reason, a new age begins. Conversely, Schopenhauer sees history and existence as ultimately nihilistic, with no inherent meaning or pattern. Here Hegel and Schopenhauer stand at an historic crossroads where the Reign of Terror and the Napoleonic Wars force many to ask if Enlightenment rationalism has been taken too far.

Hegel and Schopenhauer’s debate opens up a space to understand the modern era as either a “battle” between a purposeful society based on the ideas of Enlightenment reason and a society predicated on nihilism. Specifically, in regards to education their debate forces the question, “what role will education play in the modern era?” To answer this, I look at two of Hegel’s followers, Ludwig Feuerbach and Max Stirner, in opposition to one another as to which should be the course of Hegelian progress, applying their ideas to education. Feuerbach argues it is modern man’s duty to contribute to his species, while Stirner argues the individual has finally been freed from all obligations and his
only “duty” is self-aggrandizement. In this paper I argue that, if US educators hold a vision of education similar to Feuerbach’s, namely one based on a public communal notion, this vision be a potent weapon against nihilism. As such, many attributes of the current system resemble Stirnerian ideas, such as standardized testing and a devaluation of the humanities, and may actually be contributing to the nihilistic state of which Schopenhauer speaks.

**Ludwig Feuerbach**

Jacobi states only one’s belief in a transcendent God can save man from nihilism, and any such deviation from this belief as pantheism also leads to nihilism. For Feuerbach, however, the notion of a transcendent God no longer holds up in the modern age. He goes down the path that Jacobi expressly forbids in order to root the modern age in meaning. Feuerbach defines “Man,” the species-being or the entire species taken together, as God. An individual human being, in isolation, is limited, with a limited number of talents and capabilities as well as many faults. It is only in union with others that an individual might rise above his limited nature because the positive attributes of the species annul the faults of the individual. For Feuerbach, “the ego [the individual] attains consciousness of the world through the consciousness of the thou [another].” Feuerbach’s “I-thou” notion is the cornerstone of his philosophy. Individuals need each other, not (Jacobi’s transcendent) God or even the Absolute, in order to be happy and, more importantly, to have a reason to exist. The “I,” or the individual, can only be perceived in the consciousness of the “thou,” another being. Feuerbach argues God is not one, undividable supreme substance, rather, “God” can only exist as an exchange between two beings, and in the most profound instance, as a sexual union between man and woman. He writes, “without other men, the world is not only empty and cold, but meaningless.” In short, purpose resides only in another.

Here, Feuerbach approaches Jacobi’s and ultimately Schopenhauer’s nihilism. He fears that without others, without love, companionship, and cooperation, the world becomes meaningless: a nihilistic abyss of aimless individuals with no society, no interaction, no creation. By worshiping a transcendent God outside of himself in the modern, scientific age, modern man alienates the “thou,” fragments the species, fragments the true God, and hovers over this abyss. Feuerbach seeks meaning in the “thou.”

The crux of Feuerbachianism, as adopted from Hegel, is: modern man has a duty. No longer can he hide behind the wall of faith and wish for a better life or meaning as Jacobi argues. Instead he has courageously to take it upon himself to realize his own earthly salvation through hard work, not prayer. A man’s vocation, his actual work and livelihood has to become his true purpose, “every man, therefore, must place before
himself a God, i.e., an aim, a purpose.” His work, his contribution to the species, becomes his worship, and “he, who has no aim, has no home, no sanctuary; aimlessness is the greatest unhappiness.” Without some form of responsibility and duty to the species, the individual in modern society severs himself from the new divinity of reason and community. Ultimately, he faces nihilism; his life has no meaning.

Man’s highest calling then is to contribute to the spiritual life of humanity, to art, science, literature and other creative endeavors. The knowledge and talents of one person are limited, for only in conjunction with each can the true powers and capabilities of mankind emerge. The individual’s entire existence is only a result of the common work and achievement of the species and thus he owes a duty to it, for without that achievement, he is nothing. Feuerbach’s ideas, when glimpsed through an educational lens, offer a public notion of education grounded in the ideas of community, public service and collaboration with specific regard to the “I-thou.”

Max Stirner

During the height of Feuerbach’s fame, an unknown secondary school teacher, calling himself Max Stirner (his birth name is Johann Casper Schmitt), prepares an assault on Feuerbach’s humanism. Stirner crafts the most radical and extreme method to interpret the modern epoch. Ironically, Stirner’s method, derived from Hegelianism, comes to represent what Jacobi fears and what Schopenhauer carries to its ultimate, nihilistic conclusion.

Stirner attacks Feuerbach’s use of “Man” to articulate the changes of the modern age. He argues Feuerbach’s notions of Man, species-being, and society are meaningless phantoms that demand the individual’s allegiance and freedom as does the former notion of the Judeo-Christian God. He writes, “after [Feuerbach’s] annihilation of faith only the God is changed.” Stirner balks at Feuerbach’s “raising of the individual to the species,” for there is no species, only competing individuals; there is no brotherly bond of virtue between men, only power. Feuerbach simply retorts, “I am my species.” For Stirner, the “I,” the flesh-and-blood self, the individual of Max Stirner, is the end of the Hegelian progression, not God, the Absolute, Love, Man, or any other fictitious entity. Stirner, like Jacobi and Schopenhauer, faces the prospect of nihilism because for Stirner, there is absolutely nothing outside the concrete individual with which the individual must affiliate. Instead, everything outside the individual is there for the taking with no rule, no norm, no morality—nothing—just the individual lost in an indifferent world.

Stirner charges liberalism and the likes of Feuerbach’s Essence are the last manifestations of Christianity. The Enlightenment and French
Revolution have destroyed the traditional notion of God, but Stirner argues new Gods reside in traditional God’s place by liberals and socialists. He believes the historical progression will eventually divest the individual of all alienations and lead straight to the flesh-and-blood individual. Since absolutely nothing exists outside the individual, Stirner feels as little compelled to work for the species as he does to pray to God. This refusal to adhere to any outside authority is the crux of the Feuerbach/Stirner debate. In opposition to Feuerbach, Stirner argues Hegel’s teleology does not lead to humanism, which is simply enslavement. Rather, for Stirner, Hegelian teleology leads to the individual, who in the modern era has no calling, duty, responsibility, or possibility. Stirner holds the word “possible” responsible for all the enslavement in history because it compels man to pray, to work, to believe, etc. It leads man to believe he can achieve something he cannot. Regarding the word “possible,” Stirner writes, “thousands of years were…in ambush behind it” because for centuries men force other men to pray, to believe in God, to be rational, etc., all because they envision some unattainable possibility and then coerce others to pursue it. Stirner does not want to be moral, give his life to the species, or obey laws. All he wants is to enjoy life with no moral restraints; he believes the modern era finally makes this enjoyment possible. He sees Hegelian teleology as leading to the extinction of any responsibility of the individual in the modern era.

Stirner’s idea, when glimpsed through an educational lens, lends itself to a privatized notion of education. Stirnerian ideas of modernity dispense with any ideas of a public good or communal meaning. Rather, the only meaning is individual gain, consequently it seems that education in the US, with its emphasis on standardized testing and its devaluation of the humanities in some ways at least; seems to be moving in this direction.

The End of Meaning

Alas, the buzz Hegel and Hegel’s followers create is only temporary. While it is hard to argue a single event such as the failed revolutions of 1848 can change history almost overnight, the revolutions are a turning point for many European societies. Simply put, Schopenhauer denies any meaning in history exactly as Hegel affirms it. Along with the defeat of the radicals in 1848, due to the advances of the sciences (especially Darwinism) and the pauperization of Europe as a result of cutthroat capitalism, many began to agree with Schopenhauer that life is ultimately nihilistic (many even in the midst of material progress); teleology suffers a major blow. During the early 20th century, nihilism immigrates to the US.

After the horrors of the Second World War, it seems nihilistic attitudes and antipathy toward teleology become permanently-fixed
within Western thought. Schopenhauer’s victory is then complete. By
and large, since the late 1940s, serious historians scorn questions of
teleology and universal histories. As Francis Fukuyama opines on the
generations following World War II, it is much easier to be a pessimist.
One can read Fukuyama’s work and such other works as Peter
Dickson’s Kissinger and the Meaning of History as signals, calls to construct a
new future from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries’ ashes. Recognition and appropriation of the Feuerbach-Stirner debate can
become the first act of courage in the void, in spite of the chaotic
movements of history.

In The Closing of the American Mind and Education’s End, Allan Bloom
and Anthony Kronman, respectively, argue those running humanities
programs in US higher education institutions are more interested in
gaining funding, initiating research, being considered politically-correct,
and, above all, emulating the natural and social sciences’ quest for
objectivity and validity than in pursuing the purpose for which they were
created: helping students answer the fundamental questions of existence
and life’s meaning. (As stated earlier, Bloom traces this back to the US’
adoption of German ideas, especially its nihilism). Likewise, in their
2010 article, “The Knowledge Triangle,” Peter Maassen and Bjorn
Stensaker claim the European university is changing from a social
institution to an economic one, its main aim now economic vitality and
advancement. This change is occurring in the US as well, as many state
governments and businesses mold higher education into a vehicle for
economic advancement. In the framework of the battle for meaning,
these interests and changes can be said to be Stirnerian and even
Schopenhauerian. Students are not taught to contribute; they are taught
only to compete for meaningless accolades, strive for arbitrary goals, and
pursue profit at all costs. Such teachings can only foster more nihilism,
more purposelessness.

While Bloom and Kronman urge the humanities to reclaim its lost
position, their “Great Books” approach is nonetheless static in many
respects. Contemplation of Plato and Augustine and the “timeless”
questions of humanity can only yield a type of knowledge for curiosity’s
sake. Only contemplation of Plato and Augustine, along with
contemporary thinkers through a modern cultural framework with
modern problems in view can be of true practical use to contemporary
students. Humanities education cannot be a hobby for the curiosity of a
rich aristocracy privileged and lucky enough to attend Cornell. Humanities must not only reclaim its position, but invent a new position
for itself, one respectful of modernity’s void. Bloom urges modern
universities to adopt some sort of authority in prescribing a cultural
standard to what he sees as aimless undergraduates. Here, I turn to
Feuerbach and his call for contribution couched in the battle for meaning.

**Feuerbach in the Present**

Before one can contribute however, one must be taught to contribute.\(^{14}\) But how is this to be done? One can take the German historian Hans Blumenberg’s opinion; he argues any generation inherits questions not answers. These questions form the basis of that generation’s actions. Yet Blumenberg fails to see the power that education possesses regarding this enterprise. If through a humanities education students are taught to grapple with the ultimate question of our time, the question of historical nihilism and void, they then can enter the battle for meaning.\(^ {15}\) If modernity is approached as a question, students can begin to contribute answers, or new questions to the rebuttal of nihilism. They can start to create new foundations of meaning through dialogue with their peers and professors. Some willing teachers in the humanities could perform this dialogue or perhaps create a new course in education departments called “educative teleology.”

Another ethical question arises with Feuerbach’s call for contribution: should one be taught to contribute to the battle for meaning, or as Stirner suggests, should one be left to oneself? I argue the I-thou can be evoked here. In a radical way, the “I” owes much to the “thou” (something Stirner does not recognize), the recognition of its various achievements, its language, even its consciousness of itself. Thus, the “individual” cannot be an individual without the species and conversely, the individual cannot be subsumed into the abstraction known as the species. With this in mind, a true moral commandment can be fashioned for our time or at least a value for those who have the will to believe it and the will make it true, that students must engage in the battle for meaning, with attentive professors as guides.

As I have stressed, teaching one to contribute is not just a practical, utilitarian action. In a much broader sense, when one is taught to contribute, one enters the battle for meaning, makes oneself teleological in the void. This teleology is not, however, Hegel’s rational and other-worldly Spirit, is not some pedantic dialect of abstract contradictions, is not Fukuyama’s struggle for recognition, and is not a straight line, but pure human action fraught with setbacks and deviations. In short, contribution, or at least the initial grappling with historical nihilism, taught at universities can begin to alleviate nihilism. Yet the void is not a locale in which one finds themselves; it is the product of prior generations up to and including the present generation. If one is taught to contribute weapons to the battle of meaning, than perhaps a degeneration into Stirner’s self-aggrandizing individuals with no higher purpose than themselves may be avoided. In the widest sense, one may prevent the ultimate victory of Schopenhauer’s nihilism.
Endnotes


3 Feuerbach, *Essence*, 82.


5 Feuerbach, *Essence*, 64. Feuerbach echoes similar sentiments in his “Provisional Theses.” Feuerbach, “Provisional Theses,” 163.


7 Stirner, 55.

8 Stirner, 261.

9 Stirner, 236.

10 Stirner, 236.

11 While it may be misleading to say that nihilism immigrates wholesale, nonetheless, from the 1880s to the 1930s, German thought, mainly Nietzsche’s, Heidegger’s and later Weber’s and Freud’s, tremendously influences US universities. While my account differs sharply from his (he does not include Jacobi, Feuerbach, or Stirner), Alan Bloom’s controversial work *The Closing of American Mind* charts this immigration, the end result being what Bloom terms “Nihilism, American Style.” Anthony Kronman, while not speaking of nihilism per se, also cites the major influence of the German model on US universities and society.

12 The crucial difference is that while Fukuyama sees history itself as purposeful, or at least moving in some direction, Dickson calls for us to forge a path *in spite of* the chaotic movement of history. He calls for a new and credible philosophy of history, a set of values and meanings. For Dickson, Kissinger’s policies, mainly détente, are attempts at some type of meaning in the void of modernity. Kissinger, schooled in German philosophy, recognizes nihilism, but tries to overcome it with his “Imperative for peace.” Dickson sees this as a noble attempt in a nuclear world where history moves with no apparent purpose. The crucial difference is that while Fukuyama sees history itself as purposeful, or at least moving in some direction, Dickson calls for us to forge a path *in spite of* the chaotic movement of history. Specifically, he calls for a new and credible philosophy of history, a set of values and meanings.

14 Here, however, lies a significant obstacle. Bluntly stated: children in Nazi Germany are also taught to contribute to the greater good (and after 1939 forced to). As Michael Kater shows in his work *Hitler Youth*, Nazism merges nicely with certain tenets of the increasingly-authoritarian, German, public education system of the 1930s. This is illustrated by the teaching of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche in an effort by conservative educators (who increasingly are the only types of educators after the Civil Service Restructuring Act of 1933) to show the depravity of modernity and justify the Nazi’s actions to the young. Thus, the gloomy tenets of nihilism must be treated carefully, especially in times of heightened economic and political troubles, so as not to give rise to demagoguery. Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 41.

15 Of course it would never eradicate nihilism; this is both impossible and undesirable. Fukuyama notes human life is paradoxical. He argues human life requires injustice, because it is the struggle against injustice that makes man truly man. Instead of injustice however, such as racism, can the object of struggle be nihilism? This is an unwinnable, but necessary struggle. The goal is never achieved, nihilism remains as a constant pressure on modern man, but one that helps foster higher forms of humanity. See Fukuyama, 311.
Talking About Sunlight in the Cave: Working Toward a Democratic Approach to Spiritual Reality in the Public School Classroom

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Introduction

Two important aspects of democratic education in the tradition of John Dewey are respect for the diversity of the various individuals in the educational community and a recognition that education should address and involve the whole individual, not artificially isolated parts of the individual related to particular academic subjects. Respect for individual diversity includes respecting such aspects as race, ethnicity, ability, gender, sexuality, and religion. Naming the components of the whole individual is more complex, and perhaps more controversial, than naming characteristics of groups, but could include such dimensions as the physical, the intellectual, the emotional, the moral, and the aesthetic. The question of a spiritual reality, or a spiritual dimension of existence, has implications in democratic education for both respecting diversity and conceptualizing the whole person, and poses some particularly complex and difficult questions.

One thing that makes discussion of spiritual reality particularly complex is the intersection of its alleged ontological status with its alleged ineffability. For those who believe in the existence of a spiritual reality, both as a part of the reality in which we live and as a part of our own being, this alleged reality is not reducible to the terms of other alleged components of reality, such as the physical, nor to other alleged components of the self, such as the psychological or emotional. Furthermore, the nature of this alleged spiritual reality is generally believed to be ineffable, incapable of being contained in any verbal formulation of it. Thus, we have the problem of how reasonably to discuss something which, for at least some of the members of our public forum or our public school classroom, has an independent, even a preeminent, existence, and which, by its nature, eludes encapsulation in any verbal expression.

Democratic Education

The extent to which this problem posed by the nature of any alleged spiritual reality exists for public education, if it exists at all,
depends upon how we conceive the nature and purpose of education itself. Clearly, we can choose to define the nature and purpose of education narrowly in a way that puts any concerns about such things as the possibility and implications of any spiritual reality outside the bounds of education. For example, if we define education as being only about academic subjects that are amenable to standardized testing, any discussion about whether or not students might be in some sense spiritual beings and what that might mean is irrelevant. Democratic education in the tradition of Dewey, however, rejects such narrow definitions of public education. In clarifying the range of a part of what is included in his conception of education for democratic citizenship, a part he terms “social efficiency,” Dewey warns that “we have to be on guard against understanding the aim too narrowly,” and goes on to state:

It covers all that makes one’s own experience more worth while to others, and all that enables one to participate more richly in the worthwhile experiences of others. Ability to produce and enjoy art, capacity for recreation, the significant utilization of leisure, are more important elements in it than elements conventionally associated oftentimes with citizenship.

(Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 120)

A more recent educational philosopher in the tradition of Dewey, Nel Noddings, states that for teachers in public schools, “instruction in subject matter...is not their main task” (Noddings, 2005, p. 10). Noddings argues that public schools, like all institutions, “have multiple goals and purposes,” adding “if the school has one main goal, a goal that establishes the priority of all others, it should be to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people” (p. 10). Noddings goes on to include a section on “spiritual life” in her plan for how education should be conducted (pp. 81–85).

Dewey emphasizes the importance of understanding that the individuals that make up a society are unique, and that the diversity of these individuals contributes to the value of the society. With regard to the uniqueness of the individual, he states “he would not be an individual if there were not something incommensurable about him” (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 121). Later in the same work, he adds:

A progressive society counts individual variations as precious since it finds in them the means of its own growth. Hence a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures. (p. 305)

Of course, for Dewey, everything that is said of a democratic society applies to the school, which “must itself be a community life in all which that implies” (p. 358).
Spiritual Reality in the Democratic Public School

For a democratic education in the tradition I have described, who each student is as a unique individual is of prime importance—all of who each student is. Thus, we are not just concerned with a student’s intellectual capacity, but also, for example, with his or her emotions and values. Put another way, we are not just concerned with the intellectual portion of the self, but with the whole self, which can be variously described, but might commonly be thought to include such components as the physical, the emotional, and the moral. Some believe and allege that the self is also constituted, in whole or in part, by something that can be called spirit, that the self either is spirit or that spirit is a constituent of the self. This belief is not universally shared, of course, but neither is the belief that there is no such thing as spirit, either as constituent of the self or otherwise. There is a fundamental divide here with regard to the nature of the self, and, for that matter, with regard to the nature of reality. While there may be some on both sides of this divide who will claim that their position is clearly true, and can be proven to be so, it is generally acknowledged that there is no way to prove either point of view. It seems clear, therefore, that it is not appropriate in the context of democratic education to accept either of these positions as true and deny the other. As stated in A Teacher’s Guide to Religion in the Public Schools, a publication of the First Amendment Center, “Teachers must remain neutral concerning religion, neutral among religions and neutral between religion and non-religion” (Haynes, 2008, p. 6).

With regard to diversity of individuals in terms of this issue, we are dealing not with an ontological diversity, but with a diversity of belief. While we could pick nits about all sorts of possible positions, I would argue that it is reasonable to assert that either everybody is a spiritual being or no one is, and that it is impossible to establish which one of these two positions is true. The diversity that we have in our schools is that some students believe themselves, and everyone else, to be spiritual beings, and others believe the opposite. One important question for democratic educators is how schools should respond to this diversity of belief, and a lot has been written about this issue (see, for example, Blacker, 2007; Kunzman, 2006; Noddings, 1993; Nord & Haynes, 1998). I am concerned here with what seems to me a more subtle and difficult question, and one which, to the best of my knowledge, has not received much attention, and this question can be phrased thus: for a democratic education that attempts to address and educate the whole human being, what are the implications of the possibility that students may be, at least in part, spiritual beings?
What is Spirit?

The first difficulty in dealing with the question of how democratic education should respond to the possibility that spirit exists in the students being educated is developing some sort of common understanding of just what spirit is, if it does exist. This question is made particularly difficult by what I am calling the intersection of ontology and ineffability. Based on the sort of things that are said about spirit by those who believe in its existence, spirit, whatever it is, is something that has its own unique mode of being—it is qualitatively distinct from anything else and cannot be reduced to any quality or phenomenon of some other mode of existence. This is the ontological part of the intersection. In addition, spirit is widely acknowledged to be ineffable, incapable of being adequately understood or described in terms of language.

Steps toward an adequate definition of spirit can be taken by understanding and taking seriously the implications of its alleged ontological status—being clear, for example, that it is not legitimate to understand spirit in terms of some other mode of being. This understanding opens the door to a time-honored method of attempting to gain knowledge of spiritual reality that can be found in at least some of the world's major religious traditions proceeding by continually recognizing that anything one can see or conceptualize is not the reality one seeks. This could be practically applied to the question of the nature of spirit in public school students by delineating clearly all the things that spirit, if such a thing exists, is not. It is not, for example, a feeling that arises in response to some other phenomenon, such as some beautiful thing in nature or a work of art. It may be important to note here that some people do use the words “spirit” and “spiritual” in this sort of way, as descriptive terms for certain kinds of experiences, terms that do not imply any non-material ontological status for “spirit.” I see this sort of use as involving a separate definition for spirit, just as uses such as “school spirit,” “that's the spirit,” and alcoholic “spirits” draw upon separate definitions. The sense of “spirit” with which this paper is concerned is that shared by those who do have a belief in a reality distinct from the material reality that is the realm of science.

While we cannot, due to the ineffability problem, construct anything approaching a complete definition or description of spirit, we can, based on the above, make some progress toward defining the term in a way that will be adequate for our purposes in democratic schools. Spirit, if it exists, is something that exists on its own terms, and is not reducible to anything else. It is ultimately ineffable, incapable of being completely encapsulated in language. Therefore, with regard to discourse in democratic educational settings, spirit is that which those who believe it
to exist refer to as spirit when they talk about their own beliefs and/or experiences.

**Implications for Practice**

Up until this point none of this has any meaning in the pragmatic sense if it does not provide any guidance for what we can actually do in school settings. As Dewey puts it, “Only that which has been organized into our disposition so as to enable us to adapt the environment to our needs and to adapt our aims and desires to the situation in which we live is really knowledge” (Dewey, 1916/1997, p. 344). It is then a question of what sorts of things we do in schools to create an environment that establishes a neutral stance toward the possibility that the students gathered there are spiritual beings, privileging neither the belief that they are nor the belief that they are not.

There are some useful guidelines to such practice in the existing literature. Habermas' (2006) notion of “translation” is one valuable idea, as is Blacker's (2007) concept of “spherical pluralism,” and Kunzman’s (2006) argument for the place of religion in “ethical dialogue,” which he summarizes as:

1. Mutual respect is a vital feature of any good society.
2. Amidst ethical conflict, mutual respect requires that we strive to understand others’ ethical frameworks.
3. Many people's ethical frameworks are deeply informed by religion.
4. Ethical dialogue will often need to foster understanding of religious perspectives. (p. 36)

The irreducibility of spirit must continually be kept in mind, however, regardless of which approach we take. There is always the danger of trying to understand the spiritual in terms of something else which inevitably distorts meaning and marginalizes the person speaking of the spiritual or from the spiritual point of view. In critiquing Habermas' idea of “translation,” Bergdahl (2009) states:

So, how can religious ways of life be translated without, at best, being reduced to something familiar or, at worst, being ignored or rejected? What needs further attention, in my view, is what gets lost in Habermas’ model—that is, those aspects that do not lend themselves to translation and therefore continue to be sites of conflict and tension. (p. 34)

Neuhaus (1984) expresses a similar concern:

Even if we take a rigorously phenomenological tack that is careful to attend to the described experience of others, we can attain only a tentative and approximate understanding of what
is going on in the sphere in which others believe they encounter the divine. (p. 17)

Finally, Caputo (2001) frames a similar argument in the context of Wittgenstein’s notion of “language games”:

Philosophers have largely rejected the idea that there is some overarching meta-language (say, the language of atomic sub-particles) into which the various particular languages can be translated and adjudicated and they have taken up the idea of what Wittgenstein dubbed “language-games.” There are multiple games, each with its own internal rules of consistency and meaning, each of which serves a different end. On that telling it would be a mistake to try to translate or to reduce on game to the other, to reduce what is going on in a prayer, for example (which clearly belongs to an especially religious language game), to the terms of economics or psychoanalysis. Something would surely get lost in the translation (namely, the prayer). (p. 65)

All of this provides argument for an educational practice of openness, of creating space in the classroom and the school such that multiple points of view, including those that are spiritual or religious, can be expressed, respected, and accepted as part of the discourse on their own terms. Maxine Greene (1988) seems to have something like this in mind when she writes of “developing a praxis of educational consequence that opens the spaces necessary for the remaking of a democratic community” (p. 126). She goes on to discuss what this entails in terms of student voice and “multilinguality”:

It would mean the granting of audibility to numerous voices seldom heard before, and, at once, an involvement with all sorts of young people being provoked to make their own the multilinguality needed for structuring of contemporary experience and thematizing lived worlds. (pp. 126–127)

It may be helpful at this point to attempt to get concrete and specific, and to provide one tentative example of just what sort of practice in a classroom these theoretical ideas discussed so far might entail. Let us imagine a group of students studying poetry, and focusing this particular day on Wallace Stevens’ (1982) poem, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” and especially on the following three parts of that poem:

A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.
I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.

The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying. (pp. 93–94)

After a bit of class discussion, the teacher might allow a block of
time, say thirty minutes, for students to break off, either singly or in
groups of their choosing, and try to see what sorts of meaning they can
draw out of these lines. In keeping with the principles of openness,
multilinguality, and space for multiple points of view discussed
previously, students will be told that they may use that half hour in any
way they choose to engage with the poem. They could discuss the lines
in a small group, go off alone to draw a picture about what the lines
seemed to be saying to them, pray or meditate about possible meanings
in the lines, write in a journal, or any one of a number of possibilities
that the teacher might suggest, making clear that all of the suggestions
are just that, and that any student or group of students may decide on
their own way in which to work with the poetry. It would be essential
for the teacher to provide a broad list of suggestions that makes clear to
the students that any approach they decide to take is equally valid as part
of the class discourse. After the half hour, the students could come
together and share any insights they have gained with the rest of the
group. One of the ground rules for this discussion would be that
everyone will be making an effort to hear each student’s contribution
respectfully on its own terms.

Conclusions and Recommendations

To speak in terms of Plato’s allegory of the cave, to which I allude
in my title (Republic, Book VII), the public school classroom exists in the
cave. Some of the students in this classroom believe there is someplace
outside the cave, and some do not. Those who do believe there is
someplace outside the cave have beliefs about something that could be
called sunlight including, for at least some of them, a belief that this
sunlight is part of who they are. I have tried to make the case that
democratic educators, in order genuinely to educate democratically, need
to make room for talking about sunlight in the cave. My allusion is also
meant to hint at the difficulties inherent in this endeavor, some of which
I have attempted to address.

I believe it is clear that much more investigation of this issue is
needed, and I hope my work serves to indicate some of the directions in
which that investigation might proceed. Of particular importance, I
think, is working toward a more fully developed vision of just how the sort of openness that has been discussed could be implemented in public schools, just how we could create the space for students to be able to speak from their multiple perspectives and make sense of things within their own frameworks while at the same time maintaining a classroom and a school that remains a shared space, remains a community. In order for this to happen, we educational professionals will have first to create this sort of openness and make room for this sort of discourse among ourselves.

References


