VOLUME 18, NUMBER 3, AUTUMN 2005
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Education for Meaning and Social Justice

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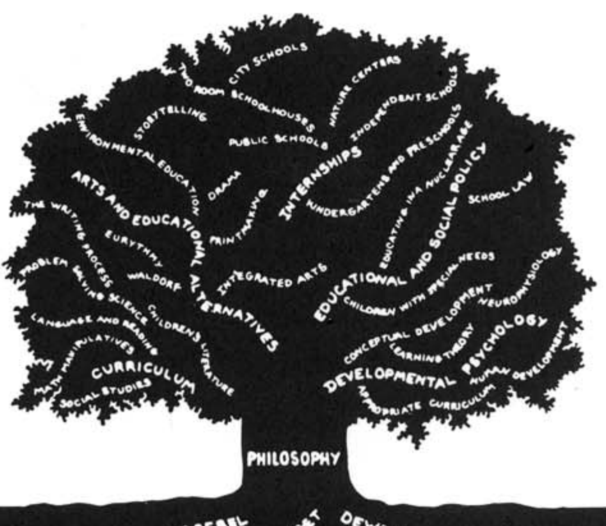

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ENCOUNTER

EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 3 AUTUMN 2005

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Our Oneness with Nature

When Thoreau lived at Walden Pond, he had occasional visitors but was alone for long periods of time. People often asked him, "Don't you feel lonely there?" Thoreau answered that he found kinship with Nature. For example, one rainy day he looked outside his house and felt

> an infinite and unaccountable friendliness…. Every little pine needle expanded and swelled with sympathy and befriended me. I was so distinctly made aware of the presence of something kindred to me. (1962, 202-203)

Recognizing that these perceptions would sound strange to the conventional ear, Thoreau explained, "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?" (1962, 207)

Such thoughts have been roundly criticized. In the language of psychology, Thoreau had fallen prey to animism; he was projecting his own desires and emotions onto impersonal Nature. In literary circles, such projections come under the heading of the "pathetic fallacy."

Nevertheless, many holistic educators would maintain that Thoreau was on the right track. As formulated by Ron Miller (1988, 5), the

> holistic approach starts with the realization that the human being is wholly and innately connected to the unfolding of the universe; we are part of the same process which made the stars, and we are made of the same stuff.

Miller (1988, 5) emphasizes that this unity cannot be fathomed by the rational intellect alone.

> All facets of the human experience — intuitive, imaginative, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual, as well as rational intellect — are needed to fully grasp the awesome depth of our existence.

But, as Miller observes, neither our educational system nor the Western mind in general is ready to explore the possibility of our fundamental unity with Nature. The proposition sounds too mystical and romantic. It is ironic, then, that the proposition receives support from two sources within mainstream science. One source is recent, the other older.

The Genome Project

In the last few years, the scientific community has marveled at the success of the Genome Project, the nearly complete mapping of all the genetic material in humans and several other species. What's more, the Genome Project has produced some real surprises. For one thing, it turns out that humans share 99.9 percent of their genetic material with one another. In terms of DNA, all humans are almost twins (Smith 2005, 56).

Biologists have been equally surprised by the genetic similarity between humans and other species. We share roughly 99.1 percent of our genes with chimpanzees (Smith 2005, 57). Between humans and the Norway rat, there is a 90 percent genetic overlap ("Genetic Mapping" 2004). Even when it comes to simple organisms, we share a large number of genes — for example, 40 percent with the roundworm and 33 percent with yeast (Smith 2005, 57).

Although these findings on genetic similarities are the most important, other unexpected results have emerged. For years, many scientists had guessed that humans possess about 100,000 genes, more than any other species. As recently as 2001, most researchers on the international genome project predicted that their results would ultimately reveal 30,000 to 66,000 human genes. But in 2004, the estimate had to be slashed. The current estimate is between 20,000 and 25,000. Humans have slightly more than the roundworm, but about the same number as the spotted green putterfish, and less than the Arabidopsis, a small flowering plant in the mustard family (Ritter 2004; Wade 2004).

Genome researchers qualify the findings by observing that the absolute number of genes is not all-

important. Some genes are able to combine and produce multiple proteins, and humans seem to have more such genes than other species.

Still, taken together, the results of the genome project are a blow to human vanity. In terms of genetic material, as well as absolute number of genes, our species is not as special as scientists had thought.

This is hardly the first time human narcissism has been deflated by scientific evidence. In the early 16th century, Copernicus cogently argued that the Earth was not the center of the universe. In the 19th century, Darwin made a strong case that our species was not created by God in a fixed and special form, but had evolved from earlier species. In the early 20th century, Freud raised the distinct possibility that our behavior is less governed by reason, and more by animal-like passions, than most people prefer to believe. Now the Genome Project has indicated that we are chemically much more similar to other life forms than we had supposed. But while the recent findings may puncture some illusions, they provide a kind of comfort. They indicate that we are not so isolated and alone. We belong to a much larger family of living things.

Gestalt Psychology

A second source of support for human/non-human unity has been around for nearly a century, but its implications haven't been fully explored. This source is Gestalt psychology.

Gestalt psychology, which must be distinguished from gestalt therapy, was initially developed in Germany by Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler, and Kurt Koffka in the early 20th century (Heidbreder 1933). It is one of psychology's classic theories, and it finds a place in almost all introductory psychology textbooks. Gestalt psychology has the reputation of being passé, but a small number of cutting edge researchers recognize its continuing significance.

The Gestalt psychologists challenge the prevailing notion that the best way to understand behavior is to analyze its elements. When it comes to visual perception, for example, we shouldn't analyze bundles of isolated sensations on the retina. Instead, we should begin with the observation that in our daily lives we see whole objects, such as balls, tables, rocks, and trees. We see, that is, whole forms or patterns — gestalts — and the gestalts extend beyond their elements. For example, a circle might consist of dots, little stars, or little triangles, but whatever its elements, the whole form is a circle. The whole is greater than its parts.

The term *gestalt* connotes a static visual pattern, but the term actually applies to a much broader range of phenomena. A melody may be said to possess a pattern or gestalt, as does the form of a runner, dancer, or swimmer. Some forms, in addition, are "good forms"; they are appealing because they are balanced, harmonious, or graceful. Others are awkward, discordant, or jarring.

In Gestalt theory, these qualities are not learned, but reflect innate organizing tendencies. Like the electric fields that organize around negative and positive poles, our nervous system innately searches for the patterns in the world. We intuitively employ principles such as grouping by *proximity*. In the figure below, we do not perceive seven unrelated lines; rather, we group them according to their nearness to one another, perceiving three pairs and one line left over.

II II II I

Another organizing principle is *closure*. In the drawing below, we don't see a long line, but an incomplete circle. We mentally fill the gap to find the complete form.

Colloquially, people speak about the need to "obtain closure" in many events in their lives, and this expression fits perfectly with what Gestalt theorists have in mind. The attempt to find closure in daily tasks also illustrates the underlying Gestalt view that organizing principles work within field forces and tensions. Until we complete a task, we experience an inner tension. In research, this tension is demonstrated by the Zeigarnik effect; people tend to remember interrupted tasks better than finished tasks because an inner tension keeps the former active in the mind (Kohler 1959, 178).

Central to Gestalt theory is the radical concept of *isomorphism*. The forces and organizing tendencies at work in the human nervous system are identical to

(or "isomorphic" with) those in the universe at large. For example, Gestaltists point out that humans perceive the circle as a pure and basic form. It's the first form children draw and we find simple beauty in it. But much else in the world organizes itself into circular motions and forms, as we see when we drop a pebble into a pond or observe the preferred paths of many animals. In the solar system itself, the planets are subject to forces that keep them rotating around the sun in very nearly circular orbits (Arnheim 1971, 167; Heidbreder 1933, 355).

Animism Reconsidered

A Gestalt analysis throws new light on animism. Those in the arts are often accused of projecting human emotions onto Nature, as when a poet speaks of the fury in thunder. Gestaltists defend the poet. Although thunder and other elements might not possess emotions precisely like ours, the same tensions and forces are present. In thunder, as in humans, there is a fury in the sense of a mounting tension that finds no outlet except through explosion.

Children are often said to be animistic, and their spontaneous poetry seems to include even more animism than that of adult poets. Consider a poem by a 4-year-old girl, Hilda Conklin

> Sparkle up, little tired flower
> Leaning in the grass!
> Did you find the rain of night
> Too heavy to hold? (Rogers 1979, 22).

From a Gestalt perspective, when Hilda calls the flower "tired," she is not just projecting human emotions onto it. Just as human energy rises and falls, so too does that of a plant, and there is a similarity in their expressive gestures.

According to Rudolf Arnheim, who applied Gestalt theory to the analysis of art, motifs such as calm and explosive, rising and falling, and discord and harmony, underlie all existence. Perception, Arnheim (1971, 434) said, fulfills

> its spiritual mission only if we … realize that the forces stirring in ourselves are only individual examples of the same forces acting throughout the universe. We are thus enabled to sense our place in the whole and the inner unity of that whole.

Thoreau

Thoreau, writing half a century before the Gestalt movement, might nevertheless be considered a pioneering Gestalt thinker. Eschewing scientific terms and analyses, he tried to perceive Nature just as she is, letting her reveal her beauty — her "good forms" — to him. Frequently Thoreau saw perfection in Nature's curves — as in the swelling wave, the graceful bird in flight, the waving tree, and the gentle undulations of the members of the cat family (1927, 41; 1981, 184). At one point, he was moved to write, "Always the line of beauty is a curve" (1973, 6).

But Thoreau was quick to add that civilized individuals have difficulty appreciating such beauty. Instead, people constantly try to change Nature, cutting her off where she was continuous, making things angular and formal. Where people have intervened, we see all sorts of squares and triangles, and our eyes can never relax (1981, 203-204).

More than anything, Thoreau concluded, Nature's beauty is to be found in her sounds — in her perfect music. And, ironically, at the center of the music is silence. For all Nature's sounds — even the howling storms and the pattering rain — are variations on an underlying silence which gives the sounds their pattern and harmony (1937, 241).

Thoreau observed that we also have difficulty getting in touch with Nature's silence. We are too impatient and constantly jabber. "A momentous silence reigns always in the woods" — but few take the time to hear it (1981, 303).

Anticipating the Gestalt concept of isomorphism, Thoreau felt that the same harmonies and silences we perceive in Nature can be experienced within our selves. We inwardly undulate to the swelling wave and swaying tree (1981, 203-204), and we can feel Nature's silence inside ourselves. If we would slow down and receptively listen, we would find that we can share Nature's wonderful quiet and peace: the "universal refuge" (1937, 241). "To the sensitive soul the Universe has her own fixed measure and rhythm, which is its measure also" (1973, 11).

Thoreau emphasized our unity with Nature again and again. He frequently urged us to feel our empathy with Nature's seasons, which have real moods. "There is a thrill in the spring, when it buds and blossoms — there is happiness in the summer — a con-

tentedness in the autumn — a patient repose in the winter" (1981, 181). Thoreau believed that with each season, the same moods are predominant in our lives, even though we resist this fact. He said that if we would allow ourselves to share Nature's moods, we would experience greater health and intellectual and spiritual enrichment (1927, 79 and 179-180).

Even more than Thoreau's specific insights, I am impressed by his intellectual approach. Unlike most philosophers, Thoreau didn't construct theory from an armchair, but slowly formed his ideas on the basis of detailed observations. At the same time, his observations were unlike those of the conventional scientist. Thoreau said, "If you would make acquaintance with the fern you must forget your botany" (1927, 322). He tried to approach Nature in a fresh and naïve way — as if seeing things for the first time, much as a child does. This is something we could try, too.

Very few of us, of course, will decide to live, as Thoreau did, for two years in the woods. But we can spend a little more time in settings that are still relatively wild, suspending our preconceived ideas, opening our senses, and allowing Nature to present herself freshly to us. Afterwards, we can, like Thoreau, reflect on our personal experiences and see what we have learned. Perhaps we, too, will conclude that much of the calm and beauty in Nature is also within ourselves.

—William Crain, *Editor*

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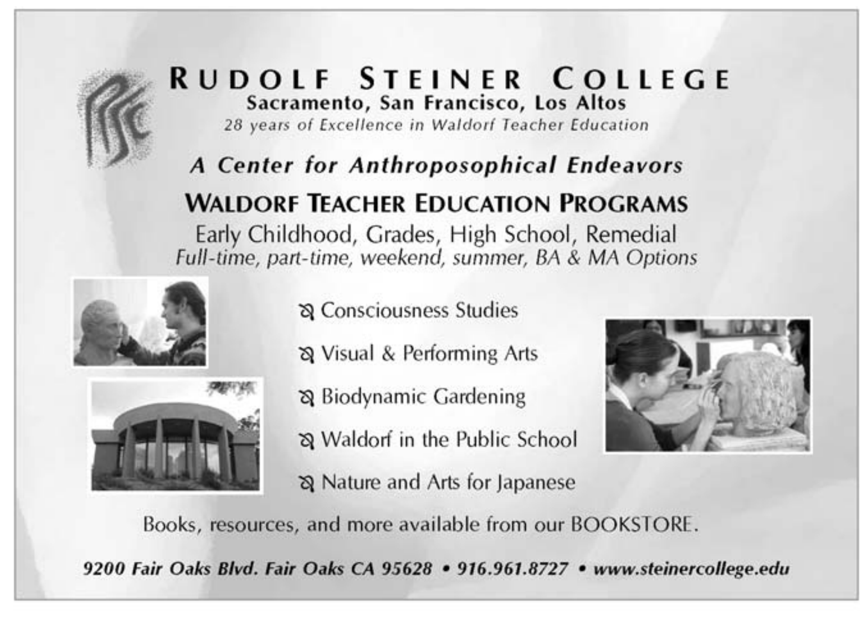

Acceptable Victims?

Sexually Exploited Youth in the U.S.

Rachel Lloyd

We need to recognize that sexually exploited children are victims, not criminals.

It's 5 a.m., and the lights of 42nd Street are still flickering but there are few people left on the normally busy streets. Crackheads and dope fiends roam the streets in search of another hit, young dealers appear from the shadows ready to oblige, and middle-aged men skulk nervously out of the peepshows. Cars pull up slowly alongside the curb, looking for a girl, a woman, from whom they can buy sex. On some of the side streets, 45th, 46th, between 8th Avenue and 9th, girls, young women, and older women blatantly jostle for the attention of these cruising cars. On 42nd Street, by the Port Authority Bus Terminal, girls are more discreet, trying not to attract the attention of passing cops. Tiffany prefers to work on 45th Street, or at least that's where "Understanding," her pimp, tells her to work. She's relatively new on the track and 12 years old, and Understanding knows that a new, young face will attract unwanted attention from not just cops, but from other pimps who will notice a good money-earner and won't think anything of snatching her up at gunpoint and taking her home.

Tonight, however, Tiffany would like to roam a little further than her regular two-block radius. Business has been slow and quiet all night; she's $300 short of her $800 quota, and there's only a couple hours left till daybreak. Maybe there's better business further down the track but if Understanding finds out she left her area, she knows she'll be punished. Understanding left a few hours ago; he'd said that he was coming right back. Tiffany thinks he probably took a girl to a hotel somewhere. He gets bored watching Tiffany on the track and frequently disappears, coming back and surprising her just when she starts to get lax. Although Understanding might not be back for a few more hours, Tiffany's scared that he'll catch her on 42nd Street and give her

Note: This article is adapted from the author's 2005 Master's thesis in Applied Urban Anthropology at the City College of New York. It is largely based on her own fieldwork in the streets of New York City.

Rachel Lloyd is the founder and Executive Director of Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), the only New York State non-profit organization serving sexually exploited young women.

a beating. Then again, she knows he'll give her a beating if her money comes up short tonight. She feels stuck, wondering which decision she should make, trying to calculate which beating would be worse. A grey Nissan rolls up, interrupting her thoughts and she rushes over to the car window. Leaning into the dark of the car, she tries her best sexy voice "Wanna date, baby?" A white man in his forties leans forward eagerly, "Sure, how much?"

"Depends. Whaddya want?"

"A blow job"

"$60" Tiffany says, gambling on his eagerness as the usual rate is $40.

"OK, get in."

Within ten minutes, the man drops Tiffany back off where he picked her up and Tiffany has earned $80 for giving the man what he wanted without a condom. Normally, she wouldn't, but the man looked clean, and she really needed the extra money. She walks to the deli on the corner where the night manager always lets her use the bathroom, and washes out her mouth. Understanding appears from nowhere as she walks out of the deli.

"You got time to be going to the store like that?"

He catches her off guard, "Huh, Daddy?"

"Don't huh me, if you can huh you can hear."

"I was using the bathroom, I just finished a date, honestly Daddy," Tiffany stammers, praying he won't ask how much money she's made. It's a useless prayer.

"How much you got for me then?" he demands.

Silently, Tiffany turns over $130. He's already picked up $370 from her earlier. He does the math quickly.

"You short 220."

"I'm sorry, Daddy, it's been real slow tonight, the cops was out and everything."

Understanding doesn't say anything and just stares at her for a few minutes. Tiffany wishes he would yell; he's worse when he's quiet.

"Let's go home, it's OK." He smiles.

"No, no, I'll stay out here, I can make the rest of the money, I will." Tiffany is scared now, she'd rather stay out in the cold all day than go home with an ominously calm Understanding. The conversation is over though, and they walk back in silence to their motel room on 56th Street.

Once inside the privacy of the room, Tiffany holds her breath and waits for the beating but Understanding goes into the bathroom and turns on the shower for her instead. "Come here and get in the shower."

Tiffany starts to take off her stiletto heels, halter top and miniskirt but Understanding grabs her arm. "Naw, get in the shower just like that." He pulls her roughly towards the shower and Tiffany can already feel the cold mist of water. She tries to pull away but he pushes her in under the blast of freezing water. "Now stay there," he says and sits on the toilet seat to roll a blunt. "I'm anemic, Daddy, I can't take the cold."

"I know, that's the fuckin point."

For the first few minutes, Tiffany cries and Understanding tells her to shut up, but after a while her body feels numb and she tries to take her punishment like a woman. After an hour and a half, as she shivers uncontrollably and her teeth chatter, Understanding seems to feel like she has gotten the point and he turns off the water. Tiffany wants to cry from relief as the water finally stops and she thinks of climbing into bed and letting her cold body warm up again. Understanding seems to have other ideas as he grabs her and marches her out the door and down the stairs. He pushes her out into the street, dripping wet and tells her not to come back until she has the missing $220. It's 7:30 a.m. and the morning air is frosty and cold against her wet skin and clothes. Tiffany wraps her arms around herself and tries without success to warm up. The early morning crowds are on their way to work, but Tiffany ignores the stares and walks back towards 46th Street, looking for a man who might be willing to pay her for something.

Scope of the Problem

Children have been sold for the sexual gratification of adults since ancient civilization. Although little research on the actual practice exists, it has been referenced throughout history in many cultures, ranging from Greek temple slaves and Geisha girls to Vietnamese bar girls and Latin American street children. Its existence has been at various times ignored, abhorred, and outlawed, and yet ultimately accepted as just another social ill. The majority of historical data on sexual exploitation of children can be found within literature written about and during the Victo-

rian era of moral reformation. Depending in the prevailing attitudes and ideologies, sexually exploited children have been treated as victims or criminals, pitied or scorned. The overriding theme throughout history, however, appears to be that the most disenfranchised children and youth suffer most from this exploitation.

> The underlying causes of commercial sexual exploitation of children are diverse and include war, natural disasters, economic injustice and disparities between rich and poor, large-scale migration and urbanization…. Further, discrimination, gender gaps in education and a double standard of morality for men and women contribute to a climate of inequality and exploitation. (Voss 1999, 1)

Developing countries are severely impacted by commercial sexual exploitation, but developed countries, including the U.S., have at different times in history seen large numbers of their youth and children used in the sex industry.

UNICEF, the international non-governmental organization for the protection of children, estimates that 2 million children and youth are commercially sexually exploited each year worldwide. Countries such as Thailand and the Philippines are pointed to as worst offenders, yet the problem affects each continent and region, particularly those that are already vulnerable due to war, famine, and natural disasters. While much sexual exploitation occurs within each country and involves native children with native men, globalization has led to an increased number of children who are traded and trafficked internationally and in a growing business trade of Western sex tourists who journey to developing countries for the sole purpose of purchasing foreign children for sex (UNICEF 2004).

According to a 2001 University of Pennsylvania study, an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 adolescents are sexually exploited annually in the U.S. (Estes 2001). However these figures have been widely criticized by national advocates and service providers as too conservative. National research indicates a clear correlation between factors such as poverty, lack of education, abusive backgrounds and recruitment into prostitution. Statistics show that as many as 90% of prostituted youth have been sexually or physically abused, and many have run away from home to escape such abuse only to encounter far worse on the streets. There are also many societal factors that exacerbate the issue, including racism, sexism and classism. The widely held American cultural values of materialism and consumerism are also contributing factors for young women living in low socio-economic communities; they begin to believe that their true worth can be bought and that their feelings of low self-esteem can be covered up with a pair of name-brand jeans. In addition, the media representation of young women, particularly young women of color, as sexual objects contributes to young women's low self-worth and vulnerability.

These societal factors also contribute to a growing acceptance of pimps and exploiters. The media, both urban and mainstream, is increasingly portraying pimping as a glamorous, desirable occupation. No other form of child abuse is portrayed as such. Songs like "P.I.M.P." a proverbial how-to-guide on pimping became one of the biggest songs of 2003. Although the song's artist "50 Cent" claims the song is about adult women in prostitution, lyrics such as "I ain't gotta give 'em much, they happy with Mickey D's" (Jackson 2003) belie this claim. Thirteen-year-old girls, as opposed to adult women, are generally content with a visit to McDonalds. While songs such as P.I.M.P. may appear to simply be part of the much maligned hip-hop industry, "50 Cent" was rewarded for his misogyny and violent attitude towards women with a 50 million dollar sneaker deal with corporate giant Reebok. An energy drink called "Pimp Juice" marketed by the rapper Nelly is sold in stores throughout the country and is supported by a major soft drink company. Such sponsorships reflect society's acceptance of violence towards women, the categorization of "acceptable" victims, and implicit racism in local and national policies.

Exploitation in New York City

Hard data for New York City is scarce, a failing that is indicative both of public interest in the issue and the difficulties of capturing statistics of an underground and transient population. In New York City, one report estimates that 5,000 adolescents are used in prostitution daily (Spanenberg 2001, 2).

However many advocates are careful not to play the numbers game without hard data and there is much debate over how many youth are actually involved. Yet few deny that there is an increasing problem. Social service providers report a substantial growth in the numbers of youth working at known prostitution locations beginning about four years ago. Their perceptions are backed up by arrest statistics: The number of individuals under 18 charged with prostitution climbed over five years from 74 in 1997 to 212 in 2002, a 187% increase at a time when overall prostitution arrests in New York City have dropped (Office of the Mayor 2003). As the only social service provider in New York City specifically providing services to young women involved in sexual exploitation, Girls Educational and Mentoring Services, GEMS, has seen its referrals increase dramatically and the average age of its participants drop from 17 to 19 in 1999 to 14 to 16 today. In New York City, low-income young women of color are most affected by sexual exploitation and are rarely seen as victims, but rather criminalized for their victimization.

The most common forms of commercial sexual exploitation in New York are streetwalking, stripping, and escorting. Escort services are commonly accepted; the Manhattan Yellow Pages has over 50 pages of advertisements for these agencies, which are seen as the high end of prostitution. Underage girls rarely work for the larger, established agencies but can be found working for small "mom and pop" style agencies that cater to a less wealthy clientele. Strip clubs also run the gamut, from the accepted establishments such as Scores and Hustler that are euphemistically termed "gentlemen's clubs" to much smaller, cheaper clubs that are located in low-income communities throughout New York City. Again, underage girls are usually found in the smaller, less exclusive clubs. Many young girls report beginning in a strip club at 12 or 13 years old before "graduating" to prostitution.

Streetwalking, considered the low end of the prostitution scale, is common throughout New York City with various "tracks" (street areas used for prostitution) found in every borough. Former mayor Rudolph Guliani's efforts to clean up prostitution in high tourism areas pushed many tracks further out into the boroughs and into low-income neighborhoods where residents were less likely to complain and police were less likely to be concerned. Girls and women on the street range in age from 11 to 60, and the vast majority of street prostitution in New York is pimp controlled. Older women are less likely to have a pimp and are far more likely to be drug addicted. In addition, the face of sexual exploitation on the streets is more likely to be that of young woman of color than in an escort agency or an established strip club, where the majority of the girls and women are white or Asian.

Sexually exploited girls have learned that comfort is rare, that tears only get them more beatings, and that staying numb is the best way to survive.

Girls are also trafficked from area to area and state to state, although this is rarely recognized as trafficking per se. A well-established trafficking route from Boston to New York to Washington to Atlanta to Miami brings girls up and down the East Coast, often depending on the warm weather in various locations. While there has been a dramatic increase in the attention and funding given to trafficking programs nationally, domestic youth continue to be largely ignored in the legislation, funding, and services covered by the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Rather than being viewed as victims, sexually exploited young women are seen as criminals or delinquents and as willing participants in their own abuse. It is indicative of the double standards inherent in current attitudes towards domestic sexually exploited youth, that in New York a young person under the age of seventeen cannot legally give informed consent to sexual contact, yet if the young person is deemed a prostitute not only is she/he believed able to give consent, but may also be charged with a violation or misdemeanor. Thus, under one part of the penal code a young woman is a victim of statutory rape protected from adult exploiters, while under another she is a prostitute automatically mature enough to give informed consent to her own exploitation.

Who's at Risk?

Sexually exploited young women in the U.S., like their foreign counterparts, often come from low socio-economic backgrounds and share many of the same pathways and precursors into the sex industry. Yet few articles or studies point to the external or macro factors such as poverty, preferring instead to concentrate on individual factors such as family dysfunction, prior abuse, and low self-esteem. While it is true that sexual exploitation can, and does, affect youth from all socio-economic backgrounds, youth from low socio-economic backgrounds are at high risk for recruitment and often find it harder to leave. Estes and Weiner (2001) do note that low socio-economic status increases risk, but fail to discuss this in depth. Even discussions of psychosocial risk factors, such as families fractured by violence, substance abuse, incarceration or abandonment ignore the links between these factors and poverty, particularly for communities of color. Cusick (2002, 247) notes that most research and recommendations focus on "prevention and alleviation at the individual level rather than locating these social problems in their wider historical, cultural and economic contexts."

Fractured Families

Although flawed in many senses, particularly in that the focus was on individual pathologies, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report in the sixties raised the alarm that the inner-city black community was headed for crisis. Yet the problems that were present in the sixties, and which have significantly increased since then, have still not been addressed as a priority issue on a national level. As poverty and black male unemployment have worsened, the rates of female-headed households have increased. Yet while the absence of fathers is much bemoaned by scholars and politicians alike, (and much blame is placed at the feet of single mothers, particularly those on welfare), little is done to alleviate the real causes of the rising rate of fatherless children.

The noted scholar and author William Julius Wilson addresses these issues in his insightful book *The Truly Disadvantaged* and makes a clear case that black male unemployment, as opposed to welfare policies or individual pathologies, is the true cause of fractured families.

> Studies of families during the Great Depression document the deterioration of marriage and family life following unemployment. More recent research … shows consistently that unemployment is related to marital instability and the incidence of female-headed families…. Only recently has it been proposed that the rise in female-headed families among blacks is related to declining employment rates among black men. (Wilson 1987, 82)

In New York, throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, the crack hurricane tore through already struggling communities, ravaged mothers and their families, and left countless orphaned children in its wake. Children who lost their mothers to crack, the AIDS virus, jail, or the streets were either shuttled into a foster-care system that was in disrepair, (during the early 1990s there were over 49,000 children in the foster care system [Reinharz 2000]), or "adopted" by another family member.

The prevalence of this family structure has led to the development of organizations such as Grandmothers As Mothers Again, which has become an integral part of black communities. While the efforts of the grandmothers are laudable, they are often caring for their own children on meager resources. New children often stretch the grandmothers' financial and emotional burdens to the breaking point. By default, many children take refuge in the culture of the streets.

Abuse and Violence

Most adolescent and pre-adolescent girls recruited into the sex industry have histories of extreme trauma. Not every parent, however, is abusive or neglectful; the child may have been abused by a friend of the family or an extended family member. Mothers struggling to work and make ends meet may find themselves having to take a chance on makeshift daycare, a neighbor, a friend of a friend. Daughters growing up in homes where the father is absent are often exposed to a nonbiological father figure in the home, increasing their risk of sexual abuse. Studies report that an estimated 70 to 80% of

sexually exploited youth were sexually abused as children (Silbert and Pines 1981; Bagley and Young 1987; Satterfield 1981). For many of the girls, their first sexual experience was marked with violence and conflicting messages of love, secrecy, and shame. Sexual abuse or rape, often blamed on the victim herself, distorts a child's perception of her self-worth, sexuality, and relationships with men. This is clear from many of my conversations with the young women, such as Tina.

Tina is a petite white young woman, who at 21 has only recently exited the life. She is extremely articulate about her experiences, yet struggled initially to connect her childhood with her experiences in the sex industry. One evening in late night conversation, she finally admitted to me that perhaps her past was relevant.

> I was sexually abused by my father, so maybe that has something to do with it, maybe. He molested me when I was four; he used to take me to bars and stuff and take me out to the desert, and leave me out there to hide when the cops came. Maybe that's why I'm so screwed up…. I never had a father figure.

Few girls receive any support, counseling, or treatment for their sexual abuse even if the crime is acknowledged by their families. In communities of color, the police are often perceived as the enemy and therefore few mothers report a crime of sexual abuse against their children, especially if they feel a sense of culpability. Even obtaining appropriate counseling for their child may be challenging, due to cultural norms surrounding "telling family business," lack of resources in the community or a lack of knowledge about them. Therefore, many caregivers simply try to ignore the issue, hoping it will go away. As girls enter adolescence, these issues, which may have appeared dormant to those around them, emerge. Girls who have been sexually abused are easy targets for pimps looking for someone who can disconnect emotionally and physically from her "job."

Exposure to familial violence is also common. Sherry is now seventeen years old and has experienced an overwhelming amount of violence in her short life. Sherry was six when her father shot her mother and then killed himself, as she and her two siblings slept in the house. Sherry was then sent to her maternal grandmother's who beat her mercilessly with extension cords and belt buckles because her light skin and hazel eyes looked like her father's face.

The domestic violence movement has long argued that violence could, and did, happen to anyone, anywhere regardless of race, class, or income. However, in recent years, feminists of color such as Beth Richie (1996), have begun to assert the need to recognize that poverty, class, and race do increase the risks of violence and lessen the likelihood of escape or support. Fine and Weis's study, *Crime Stories: A Critical Look Through Race, Ethnicity, and Gender* (1998, 450), documents this intersection of violence and poverty:

> While it is widely argued that violence in the home appears across social classes, it is now generally acknowledged that there is more such violence among poor and working-class families.

The authors add that "We anticipated neither the prevalence nor the power of child sexual abuse and domestic violence in the women's lives." Many sexually exploited girls have witnessed gendered violence in their homes, marking their psyches and leaving them vulnerable to further violence. Tiffany, whom we met in the introduction, describes this connection:

Even after they have exited the sex industry, it is a long and challenging process for abused girls to address these deep-seated beliefs and behavior patterns. In fact, it is during the healing process that many girls must finally confront the truth about their families and face a deep sense of loss that their childhood will never be recovered. For many girls, family reunification is not a possibility. When girls do return home to families that are not overtly abusive, the families can hinder the children's efforts towards healing as they continue to blame, stigmatize, and shame them, often publicly for the exploitation that they have suffered. A good indicator of how well people deal with trauma and abuse is how well those around them validate their experiences and support them. Evidently one of the most damaging aspects to the girls' recovery is that very few people view sexual exploitation as such and are

quick to make character judgments and engage in extensive victim-blaming. Girls grow up believing that they are culpable for their own abuse and exploitation. Too often families, communities, law enforcement, and social service providers do little to disabuse them of that notion.

In his seminal ethnography of crack dealers in Spanish Harlem, *In Search of Respect*, Philippe Bourgois chronicles the account of the kidnapping and gang rape of one of his primary informants' 12-year-old daughter, and the subsequent reaction of his other informants:

> They completely convinced themselves that Jackie had not been raped; they unequivocally blamed the twelve-year-old child for her tribulations…. "Yo Felipe, did ya' hear? Jackie's a little streetwalker now."
>
> When I argued that Jackie had been raped, Primo countered by comparing Jackie to "one of those girls Luis, Ray, and the posse used to train back in the days above the club." He referred to this as "getting influenced into screwing" rather than being raped (Bourgois 1996, 270).

One girl with whom I spoke, 17-year-old Toni, points to societal factors, including gender inequity, that add to the individual difficulties experienced by girls.

> The male population — guys really put a name on girls, the media put a name on females. There's too much pressure on females — once you have sex with somebody, then someone else, you have a name, you're a ho. There's a whole stereotype; it's too much pressure on sex. Some things just don't happen the way they're supposed to. It's a lot of pressure of being pure — nice — like being pure, it's the best thing that could ever happen to you. But then if something happens then you're tainted for the rest of your life.

Toni experienced this tainting when she was raped by her friend's father when she was 15. After she told of the assault, she found that she was ostracized by her friends and family, blamed as a "bad girl," and was sent into foster care.

Girls who have experienced sexual abuse or sexual assault must not only deal with the psychological repercussions of the abuse but the societal attitudes which hold them to a false, and double, standard of virginity and innocence.

Pimps and Promises: Common Entry Points and Experiences

There were many people on the Metro North train to Grand Central Station that day who stared at the young girl hunched in the corner seat. Perhaps it was the fact that she was wearing baggy pajama bottoms and slippers under her big overcoat. But no one approached her. Tiffany was aware of the stares and used her best "tough girl" scowl to intercept any glances that might have turned from curiosity to concern. At twelve, Tiffany had perfected the art of warding nosy people away. She'd learned that nosey people took you away and put you places you didn't want to be — teachers who'd wondered about her absences; the stranger who'd called the cops when she saw the six-year-old girl in the park still waiting for her mother to come back long after dark; social workers who'd investigated her mother's drug use and decided that she was unfit; child welfare workers who asked too many questions and put her in an upstate group home. These lessons had taught her well, so Tiffany scowled, and people went back to reading their newspapers and taking naps. That day no nosey people asked questions about a twelve year old in pajamas, and Tiffany rode the train in peace, away from the group home and back to the city.

When she arrived at Grand Central, she hopped the subway shuttle to the Port Authority terminal. Tiffany didn't really have a plan and she didn't have any money but 42nd Street had always held a certain appeal for her, with its bright neon lights and constant bustle of people. It had that feeling of excitement, of opportunity, and Tiffany figured that she'd place herself smack in the middle and wait for opportunity to arise. It was early in the evening and a light rain had to begun to fall, and people hurried into the train station to escape the rain. Yet Tiffany stayed outside, letting the rain wet her face, enjoying the feeling of freedom. She stayed outside Port Authority as the rain fell harder and, just as she was beginning to doubt the wisdom of her decision to leave

the relative warmth and safety of the group home, she finally caught someone's attention.

Tiffany was a striking child with skin the color of rich espresso and sharply accentuated cheekbones. Her body was still caught in a battle between childhood and adolescence. Tiffany had developed some breasts, but her gangly limbs and her physical awkwardness betrayed a body of a growing child. She was uncomfortable with her body and her appearance; she'd heard that she was "too dark," "too black," her whole life and she carried that knowledge with her like a weight that she desperately wanted to put down. Attention from boys, or men, always helped ease that weight a little and so when the young man, dressed in neatly pressed jeans and a jersey approached her and asked if she was OK, she smiled quickly and easily, grateful for the attention.

The boy, who said his name was Understanding, seemed kind and friendly. He was more polite than the other boys Tiffany was used to and he talked to her like a person. He asked her if she'd like to get something to eat with him at a diner on 44th Street. Tiffany had not eaten anything since lunch, a ham sandwich and an apple, at the group home, nearly eight hours ago, and she nodded enthusiastically. The diner was run-of-the-mill as diners went, but a boy had never taken Tiffany out to eat before, so she viewed the red formica tables and huge menus a little nervously. She was immediately self-conscious about her striped pajamas and furry slippers; the soft pink fur was now wet and bedraggled. But Understanding made a joke about growing up in pajamas and told her she still was the prettiest girl in the place, putting her at ease. Without even looking at the menu, Tiffany ordered her favorite meal in the world, Buffalo wings, and munched hungrily on them.

As she began to dry off in the warmth of the diner, and warmed under the kind and interested gaze of his eyes, Tiffany began to tell him that she'd run away from her group home and didn't really have anywhere to go. She surprised herself by telling him about her family, that her father was in jail and she wasn't sure where her mother was, but that she was somewhere getting high. She told him how she'd been in foster care since she was nine and how she hated the constant upheaval, the moving from home to home, three times in three years. How she lost her virginity to a fifteen-year-old boy in a group home when she was nine, but then he broke her heart. How she wanted to be a lawyer and have three kids. Everything that she felt and thought, she told Understanding as the night grew later and the other customers began to leave. The counselors at her group home were always frustrated that she didn't want to talk about her life; they said she kept things too much to herself, but it was because she didn't trust them. It was just a job to them, they didn't really care, they looked at the clock as she talked and rustled papers around their desk to signal it was time for her to leave. Understanding seemed different. He really did listen, didn't offer advice, just listened as it all came tumbling out of her mouth. When he finally did talk, his words were like music to Tiffany's ears, the words she'd always wanted to hear. He told her that she could live with him and he'd be her boyfriend, they'd be like a family, he'd protect her and make sure that she had everything she needed. Tiffany felt like it was fate, she'd run away and straight into the arms of a man who would care for her and love her. When he said "Let's go home," she agreed. And in the back of the Yellow Cab that they took to his apartment, she smiled to herself and repeated silently over and over again, "I'm going home; I'm going home."

> ***The rape of a prostituted girl or woman is considered by many to be a contradiction in terms, and the police normally believe that what girls claim to be rape is really just a question of not getting paid for their services.***

The first few weeks in her new home were the best time of Tiffany's twelve years. He took her shopping and bought her new sneakers, jeans, shirts and even a pair of high heels and a sexy dress. Tiffany had never had so many nice things; for the first time she didn't have to hide new clothes from other girls in

the group home who would surely steal them. She felt like a proper grown-up housewife. She cleaned and cooked and they had sex every night. Life in the group homes had taught her cooking skills and Understanding appreciated her lovingly prepared meals each night after he came home from a long day of hustling crack on the block. Life was perfect to Tiffany; she doodled their names everywhere, *Tiffany loves Understanding* in big loopy letters with love hearts and arrows through them. She figured that he would marry her when she turned sixteen, in four years, so she practiced saying Mr. and Mrs Jackson in the mirror.

Understanding encouraged her to dress more grown-up and liked her to dance in underwear and high heels for him. At first, she felt shy and awkward but he coached her gently, showing her how to shake her butt, undress in a sexy way, and when he was finally pleased with her performance, she felt so proud. One night, Understanding came home and didn't want dinner; he seemed in a hurry. He told her that he wanted her to go to the club with him; he even picked out the sexy dress and high heels. He said it was a different type of club so they had to make a good impression. He gave Tiffany two glasses of Hennessey before they left the apartment, but Tiffany was too buzzed on the feeling of going out with her man for the night to really feel the alcohol.

When Tiffany awoke slowly the next morning with a pounding headache, she had only a vague recollection of the night before. As the thoughts of dancing, of men, of stripping flooded into her mind, they made her head hurt worse. Understanding was on the side of the bed counting money happily, "Damn baby, that ass sure makes a lot of money." He looked so proud, Tiffany couldn't bear to tell him that she didn't want to do it again.

Pimps

Many sexually exploited girls have run away from their homes in search of a sense of family and connection that their pimps initially happily supply. The overwhelming majority of sexually exploited girls have been under the violent control of a pimp, generally street-level pimps, who on average control from five to seven young women at any time. Occasionally, although extremely rarely, young women are controlled by a female pimp, normally a former exploitation victim herself. The relationship between the pimp and the girl is one of the largest factors inhibiting her recovery from the violent nature of the relationship. For girls who are desperately in need of love and affection, pimps provide a sense of family and connection; it is no coincidence that pimps call themselves "Daddy."

Pimps prey on young girls' vulnerabilities, targeting group homes and homeless shelters particularly, knowing that they house girls without family support and economic options. While a few pimps, "guerilla pimps," are violent from the start, kidnapping girls or gang-raping them as their "initiation," most pimps use a more subtle approach, taking the girl out to dinner, wooing her with a ride in a nice car, listening to her dreams and hopes, promising her a future. Few girls identify the men as pimps at first, believing that they are "my boyfriend" or "my man." Shonna, a fifteen-year-old Latina with a mop of curly black hair and chubby cheeks, was excited when she met a man who told her that he would take care of her. She was a runaway at the time, trying to get away from a drunken mother and an abusive stepfather. In *Breaking the Silence* (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services 2005, 6) Shonna writes of the promises and later disillusionment.

> I was thirteen years old when I found out the real meaning of the word *naïve*. I used to think that only the dumbest girls can be naïve. However, I came to find out that a woman with a 150 IQ can be even the most naïve. See when I was told that a man will pay $100 just to see me, I believed it. But what really happens was they paid me $100 just so I can give them sexual pleasure. I was told that I would live in a mansion and I believed it. However, all I got was his mother's tiny apartment. I was told that I'd get to come home and sleep in a king size bed and I believed it. However, all I got was a dirty couch in the living room, which I had to share with three other girls…. I was told that he would protect me from harm and I believed it, However, all I got was a slap in the face, a punch in the stomach, raped, kidnapped and even pistol whipped…. I was told that I would get to eat fancy, exclusive foods and I believed it. However, all I got was

> 25¢ chips and 50¢ sodas, sometimes nothing at all.… I was told that he loved me and I believed it. However, all I got was a push and a shove and "I hate you."

A rare interview with six pimps for a National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (1992, 20) provides a glimpse into these tactics as shared by the men themselves.

> The job of the pimp was to find out exactly what these young women wanted and use their "wants" to control and hold them in a relationship. They described how the first step is to befriend a young woman and not even raise the question or suggest that she become a prostitute. During that time the pimp provided care and attention. For example, if the teenager was a runaway, the pimp would find shelter for her, sometimes taking her back to his place.… Often this special friendship created an emotional bond between the young woman and the pimp.

Recruitment tactics haven't changed much in the last hundred years. In "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," William Stead (1885, 11) interviewed a former brothel keeper who details his method of procuring girls:

> The getting of fresh girls takes time, but it is simple and easy enough once you are in it.… After courting my girl for a time, I propose to bring her to London to see the sights. I bring her up, take her here and there, giving her plenty to eat and drink — especially drink. I take her to the theater and then I contrive it so that she loses the last train. By this time she is very tired, a little dazed with the drink and excitement.… I offer her nice lodgings for the night; she goes to bed in my house and then the affair is managed.

The relationship with a pimp may often be the strongest connection that a girl has ever felt. While there are many similarities between the pimp/exploited youth relationship and a domestic violence relationship, the nature of the sexual exploitation and the extreme isolation from the "square" (i.e., non-sex industry) world, are generally more extreme. Added to those dynamics is the power imbalance in age between the pimp and the youth. The psychological dynamics of the relationship are like those described by Biderman's *Chart of Coercion* (Amnesty International 1975), normally applicable to prisoners of war and hostages. The techniques of brainwashing utilized by pimps are extremely effective on vulnerable adolescent girls who are already starving for love and affection.

Sexually exploited girls' decisions are influenced by their age, their emotional and mental development, their life histories, their environment, their limited options, and their extreme vulnerability to the tactics of pimps and recruiters.

One stark illustration of the strength of the "trauma bond" was provided by Cassie, who had grown up with a pimp for a stepfather and who had learned that sexual abuse was followed by trips to the store. When she was asked to describe the times when she had felt most loved or appreciated by her pimp, she replied that one day after he had beaten her, he went to the store and bought her a packet of Cheetos and a bottle of chocolate Yoo-Hoo. Because these were her favorites, this simple act to Cassie was a clear indication of his love and affection for her. A gesture that took five minutes and cost him $1.50 was the only time that Cassie could point to in a three-year relationship when she truly felt that he loved her. This level of trauma bonding is rarely understood by others, even within the social service field, and young women are frequently judged for their loyalty and devotion to their pimps, even by those aiming to help them. Their submission and obedience is often viewed as weak-mindedness or stupidity, because few understand the clearly documented psychological dynamics of this type of violent control and power.

Choice or Coercion?

Frequently, sexually exploited girls are considered to be either pitiful, innocent children who have no agency in the situation or are willing, active participants in delinquency and deviance — the child redeemer or the wayward evil girl (Gorman 1978, 370).

The complexities of addressing both victimization and agency has also been a challenge for the domestic violence movement. But when it comes to children, the debate gets even murkier; children are commonly perceived to have less decision-making power, so a discussion of choice and agency is further complicated by debates over the age of responsibility.

The confusion is seen in our laws. Legislation makes it a federal offense to travel abroad for the purposes of having sex with a minor under the age of 18 ("Sharing and Learning" 2001). Yet in the U.S. laws vary from state to state, with a minor generally classified as under 16 or under 17 for the purposes of prostitution policy. It is not my purpose to attempt to define the actual age when a child becomes a youth, but rather to note the ambiguity and the constantly shifting culturally and socially defined categories.

A recent example of this double standard is seen in a *New York Times* article "Determining the Future of a Girl with a Past: Is the Answer to Child Prostitution Counseling or Incarceration" (Kaufman 2004, B1). The article describes the case of Nicolette R., a 12-year-old girl charged with prostitution.

> One psychologist, asked to evaluate her for the court, noted that while Nicolette was still enough of a child to suck her thumb occasionally, she was also dangerous enough to carry razors. He, too, suggested she be incarcerated — if for no other reason than to protect others.

Despite referring to the physical abuse that Nicolette had suffered at home, on the streets and at the hands of her pimps, there was no discussion of the fact that Nicolette may have in fact carried razors to protect herself from dangerous johns, a common practice among sexually exploited girls who are frequently raped. In protecting herself, Nicolette was perceived as a danger to others and was criminalized for her actions. Nicolette was not perceived by the courts as a real victim of exploitation because she had "willingly" run away from the Covenant House shelter at the age of 11 with her pimp and was reluctant to testify against him.

Like Nicolette, most girls are not kidnapped or forced into the sex industry, but may "choose" to enter the industry. However, it is clear from the experiences of girls, the pimps' stories, and the statistics that this may not necessarily be defined as a choice. Webster's Dictionary describes the act of choosing as "to select from a number of possible alternatives; decide on and pick out." Whether in entering the sex industry or remaining with their pimp, this definition of choice indicates a certain degree of reasonably equal options, something that these girls did not believe they had. Toni, who met her pimp outside her group home, just a few months after her rape, described it to me this way:

> It has to do with your surroundings and your situation — that you was put in. At the time, look at the situation I was in, the group home was going to kick me out. I had nowhere to go. He [her pimp] put something in my head. He gave me other options 'cause I had no options.

Thus the issue of choice must be carefully framed and understood in the context of the individual and cultural factors facing girls at risk. The sex industry may initially appear to provide a life of economic freedom, independence, and a secure future with someone who loves them in contrast to the bleak futures that they may believe for themselves. Selling sex may seem like a small price to pay, particularly for girls who have been abused and raped. Adolescent girls, particularly girls of color, are also surrounded by media images of young women as sexual objects. Combine the power of these images with the girls' familial and environmental situations, and even when a girl realizes that her boyfriend is actually a pimp, the choice to stay or go may not seem obvious to her. It is often not until the reality of the situation begins to sink in that girls may want to choose to go; at that point it is no longer a simple matter of choice, but rather escape.

"Bad" Girls?

Sexually exploited girls have learned that comfort is rare, that tears only get them more beatings, and

that staying numb is the best way to survive. There is little understanding from justice officials and juries about different cultural responses and the varying effects of trauma. Girls are simply interpreted as having bad attitude or not being upset enough. *The New York Times* falls into this trap in describing Nicolette.

> The lanky and sour Nicolette did not cut a terribly sympathetic figure to some in court. There was also no evidence besides her word that any abuse she described had taken place. (Kaufman 2004, A1)

Kaufman goes on in the next paragraph to contradict her last point.

> No one argued, though that she hadn't suffered — either at the hands of her family or her pimp. A physical examination of Nicolette turned up burns from a hot iron and cigarettes as well as a recently broken rib.

Despite this clear evidence of abuse, Nicolette was sentenced by a judge to a juvenile detention center who said that she needed to learn "proper moral principles."

Sexually exploited girls, prostituted women, and even girls and women who are considered promiscuous and held to society's gender-based double standard, are not believed to be capable of being hurt or raped. They are perceived as "asking for it" or "deserving it." The victim of the 1983 "Big Dan" gang rape, who was assaulted by six men on a pool table while others cheered them on, was vilified by her Portuguese New Bedford, MA, community. (The case was later popularized in the movie *The Accused*.) Candlelight vigils were held on behalf of the accused men and the victim was portrayed as a prostitute, a loose woman who had deserved whatever happened to her because of her willingness to go to a local bar alone to buy a pack of cigarettes.

Sexually exploited girls who are raped and assaulted by johns or pimps know that their abuse will not be taken seriously. The rape of a prostituted girl or woman is considered by many to be a contradiction in terms, and the police normally believe that what girls claim to be rape is really just a question of not getting paid for their services.

It is significant to add, here, that the U.S. remains one of two countries, (the other being Somalia), to not ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and continues to prosecute, not protect, its own children who are victims of sexual exploitation.

Conclusion

Sexually exploited girls are, on some level, actors with agency, but their decisions are influenced by their age, their emotional and mental development, their life histories, their environment, their limited options, and their extreme vulnerability to the tactics of pimps and recruiters. In light of these factors, sexually exploited girls cannot be considered willing participants in the sex industry. We are not empowering youth when we frame them as such; rather we are leaving them vulnerable to serious harm by framing them as mini-adults who are emotionally, cognitively, financially, and legally able to make free choices and decisions. All children and youth must be afforded the same protection, compassion and safety, and sexually exploited girls must be seen and treated as victims. Yet in this context, discussions of, and services for, these youth must also recognize their individual strengths and their strategies of resistance in response to the often overwhelming individual and societal challenges that they face.

Prevention efforts must focus not only on educating youth about the dangers of predators, but on building safe, productive communities and families. Intervention must not only treat the victims, but create viable educational and vocational opportunities for their future. Advocates must not ignore conversations that may make people uncomfortable but must address institutional racism, media bias, and the links between poverty and exploitation. Most importantly, we must ensure that the voices and experiences of the youth themselves are integral in this work and their experiences are afforded the value that they deserve. Finally we must change our policies and laws that criminalize sexually exploited youth and begin the work of social change by treating them all, by law, as victims.

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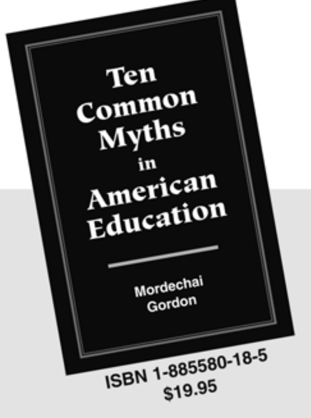

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A Path Among the Brambles

Brian Swimme's Concept of Allure

Donna Glee Williams

Simply asking a student what is alluring or interesting about a particular topic may open floodgates of learning and understanding.

The intelligence of a seed hungers for minerals, water, light, and heat. A human has the same needs, as we realize whenever we go without them. But at the level of complexity at which humans have their being, other "foods" become necessary as well: stories, images, information. Education is about supplying these essential nutrients for the full development of the human mind and soul. But schools provide only a tiny part of the broth of stories, images, and information on which the human-in-training feeds, and this proportion is shrinking as the electronic media takes over a larger and larger share of our time and attention.

Some of us struggle against this media takeover for esthetic, philosophical, political, or spiritual reasons, or because we have a deep fondness for the physical reality of this world. Some, for instance, refuse to have televisions in our homes. Some churches organize "television fasts" to try to create the warm family occasions that many people only experience during power outages. "Retreats" are a growth industry, as people become willing to pay big bucks to go to places without TV, radio, or Internet access. Research explores the developmental dangers of early exposure to television and computers. More and more parents are homeschooling their children, hoping to prevent or delay their kids' brains being eaten by the mass media.

But what is, is. No matter what we wish were true, the overwhelming majority of students are more absorbed with the media than the standard course of study in our schools. Educators often complain. We talk about how our electronic culture shortens children's attention spans and forces teachers to become entertainers. We lament how media exposure makes students vulnerable to advertising and the cult of

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consumption. We cope with the daily consequences, physical and emotional, of mass media portrayal of sex, gender roles, and the human body. We fear the violence it promotes. And we fight these things, in a sort of hopeless defiant rear-guard action.

Could there be a way to work with popular culture that changes it from a distracting enemy of education? I am not talking here about the education of test scores. I'm talking about the deeper issue of searching for our true path in the world. Pop culture may not be a big black hole — instead, it may be a mine.

Allure

The Universe is held together by attraction. We call this attraction by different names at different levels of organization. When we consider atoms, we speak of the attraction of the negatively charged electron to the positively charged proton. If we pull back to the scale of the solar system, it is gravity that holds things together. Between the atomic and the astronomical, attraction may be known by many names: magnetism, cohesion, phototropism, hunger, thirst, sex appeal, interest, love. At all levels of organization, attraction creates bonds that hold bits of reality in relationship to each other, resulting in forms: the crystalline structure of a grain of salt, the social structure of a family, the mass-and-gravity structure of a star. At all levels of organization, these forms are temporary, from the petals of a violet breaking back down into the soil to the galaxy torn apart by forces too large for us to comprehend.

In *The Universe Is a Green Dragon* (1984), cosmologist Brian Swimme offers us the general term "allurement" as a concept that includes attraction in all these spheres so that we can think about it as a universal principle. He proposes the idea that we humans are responsible for being faithful to our allurements. In the big scheme of things, our role in co-creating the Universe — our cosmic job description — is to give ourselves fully to these attractions, as fully as the sun commits to holding its planets, as fully as an oxygen atom clings to its hydrogen atoms in a molecule of water.

When Joseph Campbell (1988, 120) counseled "Follow your bliss," he was talking about the discipline of fidelity to our allurements. The vocational advice "Do what you love and the money will follow" points in the same direction, as does Shakespeare's "To thine own self be true" (*Hamlet* Act 1, sc. 3). The "discernment process" in some spiritual traditions may frequently have to do with listening for the promptings of the "still small voice within" (1 Kings 19:12) that is the compass-needle of true allure.

When Joseph Campbell counseled "Follow your bliss," he was talking about the discipline of fidelity to our allurements.

There are many distinguished voices telling us to respect the call of allure. The message comes to us not only through advice but also through example. The theme of following the sparse and idiosyncratic trail of allure's breadcrumbs echoes throughout Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1996) studies of the lives of creative geniuses, as well as throughout the biographies, autobiographies, and interviews of the people we call great.

As an educator, I've found Swimme's concept of allure richly fruitful. It gives dignity to the process of attending to the tugs of our own interest and attention. It helps floundering students to settle on term paper topics that can take them to the depths. Better than any extrinsic carrot-or-stick, it mobilizes the energy to work *hard*. Pursuing your allurement is intrinsically rewarding. It focuses parents and teachers on finding out what students love and helping them to follow that love wherever it may take them. It helps people who don't see themselves as artists learn how to begin: "Notice what materials or colors you feel drawn to, then place them in an arrangement that pleases you." It helps open the door for students into nature, novels, art works, myths, and dreams: "What detail draws your attention? Tell me about it." It helps teachers, pressed by mandated one-size-fits-all standards, find the courage and energy to follow their own vision and truth as they seek to meet those standards. It gives a name to something that good teachers already know, that the road to achievement and happiness is traveled by doing what you love.

Can allure also help us deal with our media-congested culture? As stories, images, and information proliferate like kudzu, can allure be the divining rod that points to the specific stems of meaning that can be nourishment to one soul even though they may be nothing but a tangle of distractions to another? Can we teach allure as a technique of navigation, a way to find the way through the swollen sea of electronic input?

Allure Versus Addiction

A seed doesn't contain within itself the elements that comprise the tree it will become. But the soil does. By some mystery of chemical allure, the seed is "interested" in the nutrients it needs. It draws them to itself and lets them in through its tough protective overcoat. Attracting them and accepting them, it gains what it needs to grow.

Some parents say that, given a choice of foods, infants and toddlers will naturally select the nutrients they need to grow healthy, unless they have been exposed to chemically attention-grabbing substances like refined sugar, chocolate, or caffeine. There's evidence to support this observation (Spock and Rothenberg 1992, 395-397).

This raises the question of addictions. If we take allure seriously as a reliable signpost for the direction of our lives, what are we to make of the cravings of an addict? The addict certainly feels the attraction of the drug, whether it's alcohol, narcotics, gambling, pornography, shopping, eating, television, computer games, or any of the countless human activities that may wreck the lives of those of us who get hooked on them. How can we fit this untrustworthy attraction into a picture of allure as the basic wisdom underpinning the universe?

Someday there may be a simple lab test to show us whether or not an activity is born out of the neurochemistry of addiction or allure but, in today's world, what we have to go on is behavior. At any given moment, the choiceless compulsivity of addiction can look, from the outside, like passion driven by allure. But "by their fruits ye shall know them" (Matthew 7:20): Addiction and allure take us to different places.

Following Dewey (1959), I would suggest that we consider whether an activity promotes or limits growth. Ultimately any addiction is destructive to the person driven by it, while any allurement can be creative and life-enhancing. Addiction gets stuck in itself; allure, patiently followed, leads us beyond itself to our life's *next* adventure. The addict doesn't develop new capacities or insights. The pilgrim on the path of allure does. The child who becomes addicted to video games may still be squandering 8 to 10 hours a day at a computer screen after a decade, neglecting all other areas of life — intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, and physical. For another child, the same video games may provide an entrée into the world of the creative imagination or the first experience of mastery based on practice, leading to a fruitful, satisfying life's work.

Non-educators may have the idea that teaching is mostly about telling somebody something, but real teachers know that the art in the question.

I once asked Patte Mitchell (an educator, therapist, and wise woman who has established a number of wilderness-based programs for youth in trouble) what her take on addiction was. She told me that she thought addiction was a deformity of a person's search for the Divine. As people reach for life-enhancing spiritual experience — inner peace, union, ecstasy, joy, detachment, intensity, and the like — sometimes our world offers them experience that masquerades as the Divine, a "false fix," to use David Forbes's (1994) term. It's not real, but it seems to be the best our society has to offer. So they go for it: the ecstasy of cocaine, the peace of Valium, the excitement of gambling, the intensity of risk-taking. As they say in 12-Step programs, "I heard the Call, but I went to the wrong address." And then the neurochemical claws of dependence clamp down on their minds and the soft call of the true nutrients of the soul is drowned out by the clamor of addiction, just like the two-year-old who has been fed Hershey's kisses can no longer sense a need for protein.

The unexamined addictive behavior becomes a barrier between people and the real growth experiences they crave, like a piece of paper between iron filings and a magnet. The iron may *seem* to be attracted to the paper, but really it is the magnet underneath that draws it. In this framework, the work of recovery is to discriminate between what a person is *really* reaching for and what the addiction is giving them. The work of education may be to give human beings enough experience of true allure so that they can tell the difference and hold fast to the true while letting go of the counterfeit.

We often act as if our students' (or our own) passion for some part of the world outside the standard course of study is an addiction which must be shaken loose. Movies, bands, actors, styles of dress, games, television shows, athletes, comics — almost anything, really — can capture a person's attention with such power that it seems outside the boundaries of conventional mental health. In fact, we often call this "obsession," misusing a psychiatric term that has a very specific technical meaning. We may dismiss these fascinations as something children will grow out of, teenagers will survive, and adults should curb, or we may try to distract the patient and tempt them with what we regard as more wholesome interests. A non-school passion can seem like The Enemy as it takes time and attention away from school-approved subjects and so runs afoul of our agenda for what and how a student is supposed to learn.

But what if we organized education around a belief that passionate interests can promote growth? What if we trusted allure like we trust gravity and God?

Getting Personal

Once I went out to dinner on a Sunday evening with a colleague. "What did you do this weekend?" my colleague asked. With some hesitation, I told her I watched *The Lord of the Rings* three times. It's a long movie; the triple viewing had pretty much taken up the weekend. Then my colleague, whose name is Connie Hanna, gave me what may have been one of the most valuable gifts of my lifetime: she asked me, with serious focused attention, *why* I had watched *The Lord of the Rings* three times in one weekend.

In trying to answer the question fully and honestly, I searched my own experience like a text. I realized that with each viewing my attention narrowed in on certain scenes. I found myself waiting for some scenes to be over in order to get to what was (for me) the good parts. Connie asked about the "good parts" and I found myself sobbing in the restaurant as I described a specific scene, brushing away the waiter who wanted to know if we would care to order dessert. My tears and deep shaking sobs were strong visceral evidence that this thing that was "just a scene from a movie" was *important*. As we talked, Connie reflected back to me the ways in which the (for me) essential scene in this movie mirrored the drama of my own life. I gained not just conscious awareness of aspects of myself that had been hidden from me, but also an icon to represent those aspects on the stage of my imagination. This led, later, to one of the few mystical experiences I've ever had, which changed the way I carry myself in the world.

All because someone asked "Why?"

Asking Questions

Teaching is about asking questions. Non-educators may have the idea that teaching is mostly about telling somebody something, but real teachers know that the art is in the question. Good questions work on the edge of the known, but point to the unknown; they are hard enough to challenge, but not so hard as to defeat; they are personal enough to engage, but not so personal as to threaten; they are meaty enough to provoke thought, but not so controversial as to cause a furor bigger than our moderating skills can handle. It is through questioning that we nudge our students, each other, and ourselves towards critical thinking and awareness of perceptions, feelings, and values. In classrooms, most questions center on the topic of study, even though students constantly give us hints (through what they doodle in their notebooks and what they talk about when they are not supposed to be talking) that what *really* calls to them is somewhere else.

But what if we pointed our questioning, this lens with which we are already so skilled, at the subtle mysteries of allure? What if we asked our students questions about what is grabbing their attention this week — today — now? Would the simple act of asking raise awareness of allure? Would the act of observing one's own allurements invite a state of mind-

fulness about them? What questions can we ask to help focus and refine their attention on their allurements in the same way that we focus and refine their attention on a curricular topic?

Tony Bland, a Mississippi Zen monk and storyteller, often stops a folktale in mid-performance and asks his audience to notice what specific detail of the story so far seems most vivid and intriguing to them. In sharing this detail with one or two others, insights often emerge for his listeners. When someone is burning with enthusiasm for a new movie, song, or TV show, asking them what they liked about it may quickly get you to the dead-end of "I dunno" or "Everything, I guess." But asking what *specific* details grabbed them may take you further.

When working with definitions of complex concepts, some teachers ask groups to come up with an example that captures the essence of the concept. In the same way, we can ask students what scene or image (or line from a song) holds, for them, the essence of what attracts them. Once they identify the scene or image that holds the juice for them, we can ask them to characterize it. The qualities they attribute to the scene will be what they are particularly sensitive to at this particular point on their path.

If the passion is for something that can be fast-forwarded (CDs, cassettes, DVDs, or videos), we can ask about what parts they tend play over and over again and what parts they tend to skip. When a friend and I, both in the grip of Buffy the Vampire Slayer fever, compared notes about this, we learned that she (a tall, strong athlete with a loud voice who knew how to use it) tended to fast-forward through the fight scenes, which were the very thing that fascinated me (soft, nurturing, and non-athletic in the extreme.) She was captivated by the images of belonging and being accepted, specifically of a *strong* woman belonging and being accepted, while I was captivated by the images of female physical warriorship. For both of us, the images we introjected were predictive and supportive of our next steps in growth. The same story but different allure for different people — and it was through mutual questioning that we each became aware of the specificity of the gifts.

If the fascination is with a story, sometimes we imagine a different ending, a better, happier ending. One young man who was entranced by a TV show in which a girl did not have a date for her prom told me wistfully that he imagined the girl's fatherly mentor stepping out of the crowd and dancing with her. The young man who created this alternative ending was the son whose father had been taken away from him for all practical purposes by mental illness. In his actively engaged imagination, he used the stage of a television drama to present to himself the scene of warm and competent fathering that he needed.

There are other questions that clarify the source of allure: What element would you like to discuss with a friend? What feature is most vivid in your memory? What did you really hate about it? What aspect, if it were no longer there, would mean that this wouldn't captivate you in the same way?

Once we have opened some awareness of precisely where the allurement lies, then there is the possibility of taking things to the next level; we can raise awareness not only of the attraction, but of the reason for the attraction, including unknown things about the self. To explore the roots of allure in the self, we can ask questions such as, "What in your life connects with this?" or "Where does this scene/line/quality intersect with your life?" (a phrasing I learned from Parker Palmer 2002). Our hunger for what allures us reaches outward but teaches inward. Just moving towards our allurements puts us where we need to be for our next steps in growth and learning, but reflecting on the process leads to self-knowledge.

Russell Crowe

Kathy had a crush on Russell Crowe. She studied every one of his movies, including the obscure Aussie ones that nobody else has heard of. She devoured all his interviews. She read all the reviews of his work. She even listened to his music. She analyzed the lyrics to his songs, his love life, and his relationship with the media.

Kathy was not a teenage girl when this crush hit her. She was a 47-year-old professional woman, a teacher and an artist, a spiritual person. She practiced yoga, talked to trees, and kept a journal. She was on the School Improvement Team at her school. And she went totally around-the-bend about Russell

Crowe, an attraction it would be easy to dismiss as trivial or even embarrassing in an adult woman.

One day Kathy was caught in a freak snowstorm and had to drive up a steep hill to get home. She started the incline and noticed a car in the ditch. "Not good," she thought. Then she passed a truck, also abandoned at the side of the road after a long skid. Not good at all. And then, almost at the top, her car started sliding backwards. She felt her heart speed up and the choky clutch of fear in her throat.

But then she had a visitation from one of Crowe's movies, *Proof of Life*. In that film he plays a battle-tested hostage negotiator and has a tense, manhood-testing showdown. After he and his buddy have out-flanked, out-maneuvered, and out-gunned the bad guys, he smiles lightly and says, "That was fun."

That was Kathy's visitation. In her moment of crisis and danger, Russell Crowe, hostage negotiator, came to her and reminded her that difficulty could be "fun" and the hill could be a worthy adversary. She was in a contest, a battle of wills. She *was* going to get the car up over the hill, dammit.

Of course, she could have parked her car and gone for help, but she had gotten in touch with her Inner Russell Crowe and nothing could stop her. By skill and stubbornness, she got her car up the hill, and felt like cussing a blue streak and pounding a buddy on the back. She felt, she said, "like a football player."

It is no coincidence that in that same year Kathy, a fourth grade teacher, became increasingly successful in dealing with "the bad boys" that none of the other teachers wanted to have anything to do with. She didn't have a particular strategy was; she simply found herself, on a new level, liking them. In Jungian terms, she was reclaiming a neglected part of her own personality, and it was expanding her effectiveness as a teacher.

At the end of school she told me, June-weary but proud, that one of her pupils, a boy who had had 21 disciplinary write-ups the year before, had only had 6 in the year he spent with her. An attraction that we could brush away as "silly" or take seriously as "allure" — did it cause Kathy to feed on the images, stories, and information that she needed to fill out some gap in herself? How will this make a difference for the rising generation of young boys whose lives she touches?

Mystery

It is the testimony of the oldest spiritual traditions and the youngest sciences that there is a creative conjoining Mystery that gives shape to the Universe like vapor gives shape to a cloud (Fox 2000; Swimme 1984; Swimme and Berry 1992). It is problematic to name this Mystery in a way that can be discussed across the boundaries of beliefs, but it is not controversial to say that it is one of the consuming interests of humanity. (We can't speak for the other creatures.) Once the bottom tiers of the Hierarchy of Needs are taken care of, people tend to get very concerned about investigating, understanding, and experiencing this Mystery that we might refer to as "the Divine."

Another uncontroversial thing that can be said about this creating, uniting force that is so difficult to name is that it "likes" variety, because we see evidence around us in nature at every level, from the constantly evolving flu virus to the constantly reorganizing galaxies. An expression of this divine taste for diversity is that every human being seems to be born with different sensitivities to the divine in different aspects of creation. Some people tell us they sense the divine in rainstorms or sunsets. For some, it's Bach's *Art of the Fugue*. For others, it is the intricacies of botany, the grandeur of cosmology, or the *koans* of quantum physics. For many, it's a garden. Or a story. Our unique personal sensitivities are our different windows onto the same vista of wonder and communion.

Wherever that window opens for us, the experience saturates our lives with meaning. Our hearts crack open, which makes more room and less barrier between us and the world we live in. We feel a heightened sense of connection or union. This sense of meaning, spaciousness, and connection — of being "in love," in several senses of the word — may manifest as action with the natural diligence that flows easily from real caring.

Allure is the signpost. Allure pulls humans to the aspect of creation that will be their special pipeline to Mystery. And that pipeline, unique and personal, may or may not be part of the standard

course of study. It may be writing fan fiction for a favorite television show, or drawing maps of worlds that don't exist, or creating voices for imaginary characters, or dancing in a way that nobody else dances. But as we diminish our experience of the natural physical world and increase our experience of electronic media, we can expect that more and more of the breadcrumbs marking the path of allure will come in the form of television shows, movies, music videos, music recordings, and computer games.

Educators may not be in the habit of taking these things seriously, but the world needs the diligent action that springs from educated passion. If we care about the Universe's experiment with human consciousness on this planet, we must serve this need. This means teaching our students about how to feel their way through the thicket of too much information to the specific stories, images, and information that will be food for their growth and steps on their way to finding their own unique experience of wonder and Mystery.

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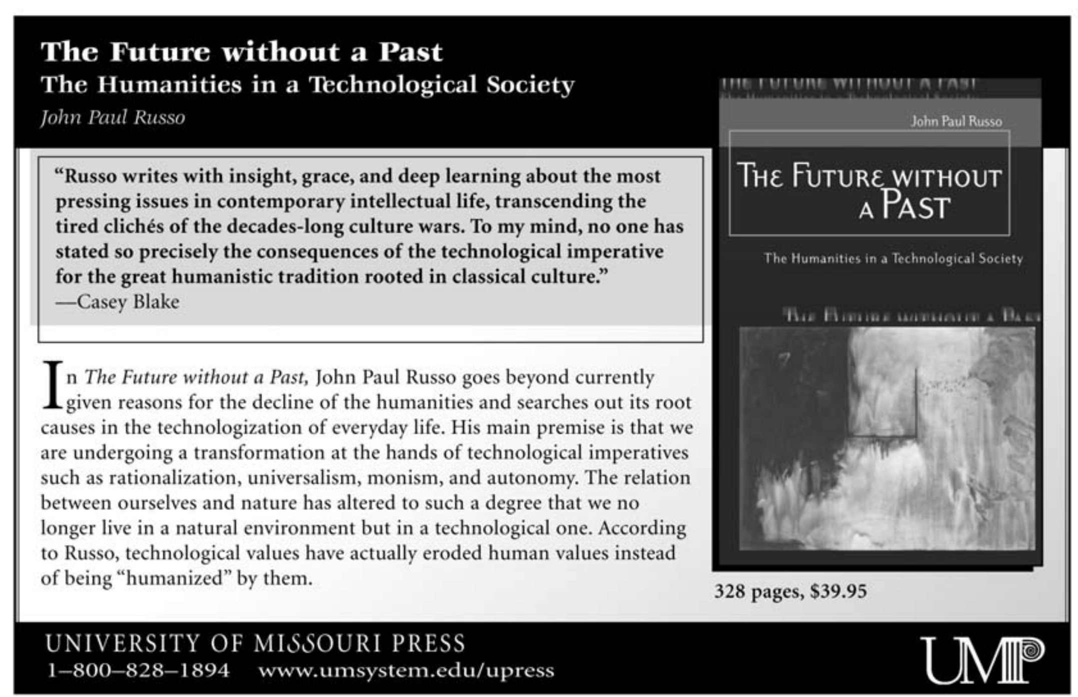


Dreaming Into Waters

Richard Lewis

"My imagination is a place where there is water and light."

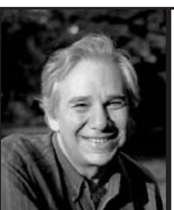
> It takes a lot of dreaming to understand a
> stretch of still water.
> (Gaston Bachelard 1988, 28)

When I was a child I used to like going out on a lake in a rowboat. I was supposed to be fishing, but the lazy drift of the boat, the endless patterns of small waves, and the flooding sunlight all seemed to hold my attention instead. Even now, as I remember those moments, I feel myself tapping into sensations that seem to me more visceral then definable, and I ask myself, are such sensations actual knowledge? Are they, in our empirical and fact-saturated culture, worth lingering over? Will they, in the end, matter to anyone except myself?

After many years of trying to help children discover their poetic and imaginative abilities, I am now convinced that such sensations are not only valuable but are one of the foundations of a child's instinctive propensity to daydream. For daydreaming is often triggered when we are brought into contact with the most basic phenomena of life and we become intuitively aware of our primordial past, as it exists in both the visible and invisible elements of the natural world.

How many of us can vividly remember occasions when we stood silently watching the falling snow, a tree moving in the wind, the passage of morning light — and, if only momentarily, letting our minds succumb to something inarticulate in ourselves: something that seemed far removed from our daily existence yet brought us closer to a memory, a remnant of feeling perhaps much older then ourselves. Even though we were fully conscious, our thoughts ebbed and changed as if we were dreaming, as if we were inside what we were watching.

Not long ago, I happened to look out of my apartment window and saw a girl about five years old step into a puddle. Her mother disapproved and tried to get her to continue walking, but the girl



Richard Lewis is the founding director of The Touchstone Center for Children. In addition to teaching poetry to children, he has edited and written a number of books on the imaginative and poetic life of childhood, including *When Thought is Young*, *Living ByWonder*, *The Bird of Imagining*, and *Cave: An Evocation of the Beginnings of Art*.

would not leave. Instead she wiggled her yellow-booted feet until the water in the puddle was stirring in all directions. She seemed, despite her mother's pleading, to be perfectly content to be right there, in the middle of the puddle, lost in her delight. While I can not fully vouch for what she was thinking, I suspect she was, like most children, perfectly at ease in her watery universe, dreaming happily with its liquidity, with its aliveness as water. She was in the most obvious sense, playing, but her fleeting moments in the puddle remind me that her playing, her dreaming, was also a part of our larger human endeavor to link, through our imaginative abilities, the action and gestures of nature with the inward movements of our thoughts.

Like this girl, many indigenous cultures have felt the influences of the powerful nature of water. The puddle she stepped in could just as easily have been the sacred water holes where various Aboriginal tribes of Australia come into contact with their totemic ancestors who make up their dreamtime, their highly complex mythic story of the creation of our world and its universe. Or perhaps her puddle could have been one of the pools of water the Plains Indians of North America believed were created from the glowing pieces of a star that crashed on to the earth, out of which a young girl took some "star water" to hang "around the necks of her people, so that everyone could see where everyone else was" (Lewis 1979).

While these understandings are part of deeply rooted spiritual traditions passed on from one generation to another, they also demonstrate how we attempt to bring meaning and continuity to our experience. Somewhere in us is our need to move away from a purely scientific definition of water, and go to a place where we, like the child in the puddle, do not wish to be separated from the puddle. And this place, I suspect, is where our dreaming, our imagining, comes into play.

In the Classroom

I recently completed a collaborative project with an art teacher and a visual artist in a public school in New York City where I worked with a mixed classroom of 1st/2nd graders. Over a period of ten weekly one-hour sessions, we explored the elements of air, water and light. Our goal was to bring the children to those spaces of imaginative thinking where their conscious dreaming could return these elements to how they were being experienced — on another level of knowing.

On the first day of our thinking about water, I brought in an eyedropper filled with tap water. I slowly pinched the head of the eye-dropper so that only a small drop of water hung at the bottom. We were all quite breathless — as this tiny fragment of water reflected the room around us — and moved, ever so slightly from the air touching it. As the children stared at its fragile body, I asked them: "If you could go inside this drop of water, what would you see there, what does it feel like, what might the water be feeling?"

How many of us can vividly remember occasions when we stood silently watching the falling snow, a tree moving in the wind, the passage of morning light...

Of course, there were lots of spontaneous replies — and I realized how little effort it took these children to move, imaginatively, into the interior of the drop of water. After a while I asked them if they would like to make a watercolor painting of the drop of water we had been looking at. And paint they did, creating vibrant abstract and impressionistic images. Using their paintings as a guide, I then suggested that they might want to translate these paintings into words. While some of the children needed help in getting their thoughts down, everyone seemed eager to write, to find a quiet corner in the room, where on their own, they could dream and write about the transparent world they had just entered.

> Water swishes to a beach and goes back.
> It wishes it can walk.
> Little children swim in the water.
> Water feels happy.
> But still it wishes it can walk.
> Sunlight shines on the water, all the time.
>
> —Olivia

When you are on the water
it feels like you are on the sky.
—Max

Water is soft. It is wet. It can move a lot of ways.
There are a hundred different waters in your imagination.
Water is magic.
—Darrow

Darrow's insight — that "there are a hundred different waters in your imagination" — brought to mind the Taoist thought of Chuang-tzu, who said, "The sound of the water says what I think" (Watts 1975, 90). And isn't this way of thinking how we bring ourselves into the framework of natural phenomena; how the "nature" of our imagining connects to the "nature" that lies outside of ourselves? Evidence of this became apparent when we saw the children the following week. During this interim period, with the inspired help of their classroom teacher, they continued to explore the drop of water now as only an image in their memory — and they reached further into the actual qualities of the dreaming.

Water dreams about the beach.
And the water likes to go down on
the ground.

And rain likes to go on the
ground too.
—Justin

Water dreams about going in a cup
and waiting for someone to drink it.
The water wants the kids to love it.
—Dylan

In each piece of writing these children have expressed a way to fuse their observations of water — with what we, as humans, are also about. This is not false personification or animism. It is the blending of our human impulses and feelings with what we share with lives outside of us. It is a recognition of a mutual "livingness" existing everywhere; and it is a knowledge as important as anything we might learn from a textbook. It is, as the late philosopher Paul Shepard (1999, 13) suggested, recognition of our thought as "an ecological activity, a process" in which "we are recipients as well as actors in a world of Others."

Could my daydreaming in the rowboat have been what all children do in order to come closer to the life within water — and in turn — the life within themselves? Could it have been the other side of knowing, our imaginative knowing, that cannot be taught but only encouraged to come to the surface?

Whatever I might say about these questions, I will leave it to one of the children to sum up what dreaming means.

My imagination is in a place where there
is water and light.
There is a boat. When you see it, it stops.
Then you get on it.
—Isabella

Note

The children's poems in this essay are quoted from *I can see the air: Writings by children, 1st/2nd Grade, East Village Community School*, Roberta Valentine, Classroom Teacher, Spring, 2005, published by the Touchstone Center as part of its arts and education project Air, Water, Light.

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Moon and Fireworks

John Moran

Red, gold, green, white
Fireworks popped
In Central Park tonight
As the full moon behind them
Great dignified sphere
Its silver light steady
Familiar for eons
Waited calmly
For the turmoil to pass.

John Moran is a retired Professor of Philosophy at Manhattan College in New York.

Children and Standardized Tests

Charles Turner

Competencies that are important and real to children are often not academic.

Like most schools in low-income, immigrant neighborhoods, our school has some difficulty with standardized tests. This year I made a special effort to stimulate my second grade students to discuss the tests they must take at the end of school year. I wanted them to express their feelings and perhaps put the tests in some perspective. They wrote in their journals about their feelings after they had experienced some of the test and then again at the end of the test. Their first writings mirrored their bravado, but by the end of the test they were willing to admit the test was grueling.

I also began a related activity long before the test started. I engaged them in a prolonged discussion about what they, as seven- or eight-old-year people, thought was important that every second grader know. I explained to them that the tests they would be taking were made by professional test writers and reflected the views of the general society as to what was important for every second grade child to know. But no test writer, educational expert, or politician was asking students themselves what they considered important to know. This was their chance to get their ideas on the record.

We brainstormed words and ideas and then distilled it all down to twenty or so most important things. The plan was to list the important things down one side of a large piece of graph paper, together with the list of their names, running across the bottom of the paper, so that they could color in the boxes on the graph paper if and when they knew or could do the important thing.

They came up with some things which I initially thought were silly, like it is important to be able to ride a horse. This was in response to a story they had read about cowboys and the Old West. I went along with their ideas as much as they made sense, but, at first, did not let them include horse riding. It might be nice for someone to be able to ride a horse, I ar-

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gued, but I don't think we can say everyone must be able to ride a horse. Several students immediately began to defend horses and their idea that riding them was important enough. Joey, a classroom lawyer, said that horseback riding was just like swimming. When I pointed out that swimming was one of the high school graduation requirements, and I reminded them that horses are even less common than swimming pools in the city, Joey said, "Yeah, but some people don't like to swim and would never swim again after they pass the test" "And," Joey added, "there's a horse rental stable right next to Fort Funston. We saw it on the bus." Impressed by their fervor for the issue and by their arguments, I said that maybe we could make how to ride a horse the twenty-first item on the chart, and add it when we expanded the chart, after they had a chance to color the first twenty boxes — and they accepted it. In the end I think they came up with some interesting ideas, ideas that mirror the quality of their thought. Here they are, in no particular order:

- How to ride a bike.
- How to read a second grade book.
- How to read a chapter book.
- How to swim.
- How to play a musical instrument
- How to be brave #1: go on an airplane by yourself and be met at the other end by your auntie or some family member.
- How to be brave #2: go to the doctor knowing you will get a shot and not having to be held down by the nurse.
- How to cross a busy street.
- How to help another person cross the street.
- How to take care of a pet.
- How to take care of baby brother or a sick family member.
- How to take care of myself #1: Take a bath or shower.
- How to take care of myself #2: Comb and brush my hair, brush my teeth.
- How to take care of myself #3: Dress and undress myself completely.
- How to tie my shoes.
- How to wash dishes and clothes.
- How to ride a scooter.
- How to do a magic trick.
- How to tell a joke.
- *How to ride a horse.*

Most of these competencies are not strictly academic. I think the kids all recognize the importance of academic skills, and my students did include reading as one of value. But the children placed a high value on many other skills, such as being able to care for oneself and for another person.

Some of their choices reflect the fun and excitement they want in life. For example, they value many sports, magic tricks, and joke telling. In the case of magic performances, and even joke-telling, their abilities are still in a formative stage. A typical joke is

> "Knock, knock, who's there?"
> "Banana."
> "Banana who?"
> "Banana peel."
> "Ha, ha, ha."

But they believe joke-telling is extremely important.

What's really telling about this exercise, I think, is how much it reflects the problem we have as teachers. The children would seem to see school as largely outside of, and almost superfluous to, their real lives. And just as they quickly learn not to think too deeply about questions during a standardized test, they often dummy up in school and refuse to show just how smart they really are. It's only outside the school setting that many demonstrate their true capacities. For example, many second-language learners have difficulty with the school curriculum, but can go home and take care of two younger siblings without batting an eye.

Dewey (1899/1959) addressed the gap between school and home over a century ago, but today's schools are so test-driven that the gap is wider than ever. The trick is to get the children to relax just enough, and open up enough, in the classroom so that they can start to work on learning what they need to survive and thrive in this society. That's some trick.

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The Dragon at the Top of the Stairs

Chris Mercogliano

You won't find it mentioned in any Albany guidebook, no matter how obscure. And forget about Google. Even the beefed-up security force of the post-911 era hasn't a clue that there is a dragon residing at the rear of the New York State Museum. That's right, a real, live, fire-breathing dragon, one wise and powerful enough to survive St. George and all the other knights in shining armor, and in modern times, Walt Disney, Harry Potter, and reality TV.

It was my wife who first uncovered this startling fact, quite by accident, not long after the museum's construction over thirty years ago. One morning Betsy was walking with her kindergarten class behind the building. It was midwinter. Suddenly someone spied a plume of steam coming out of the roof directly above a giant spiral staircase that rises up mysteriously and appears to lead to nowhere.

Now any other observers would have foolishly assumed what they were seeing was the exhaust from an unseen heating vent, made visible by the frigid January temperatures. But for Betsy and her kids there could only be one possible explanation: dragon's breath.

The group boldly decided to investigate. Slowly and with much trepidation, they wound their way up the stairs, stopping frequently to listen for any sign that the dragon might be awake. At the top, some fifty feet above the ground, they found a bronze colored door, big enough for an elephant to fit through, set into the museum's top story. The door was locked. They decided not to knock, unanimously agreeing that arousing a slumbering dragon might not be such a hot idea. Besides, it was almost lunchtime and their bellies were beginning to growl.

But why the museum? Was the ancient reptile attracted to the almost medieval cast of the building's ultramodern design? Or to the excellent hunting opportunities afforded by the adjacent Lincoln Park, which covers a dozen city blocks and is replete with small tasty mammals? Or maybe it wanted to be near its dinosaur cousins, who stand frozen in time inside.

Later that evening Betsy reflected privately on the morning's events. Perhaps, she mused, if children had a wish — not the Santa Claus variety but some urgent, deep-seated need — and if they had the courage to walk up those stairs *alone* and drop their handwritten supplications on the dragon's doorstep, then possibly the dragon might read them and make them come true.

So Betsy came in the next morning and talked with her kids about the magical powers of dragons. She asked them if there was anything they thought they might need their own dragon's help with. Not surprisingly, all seven heads nodded vigorously. Then she met with each child privately to help write down the messages. After that they bundled up and headed off for the back of the museum, freshly penned, or I should say penciled, notes tightly in hand.

Thus a tradition was born, one that has become an annual rite of passage for Albany Free School five-year-olds. After fifteen years or so, Betsy left the school to become a midwife, and I was appointed leader of this bizarre pilgrimage of preschoolers. This year, when I returned to working primarily with our elementary-age students, it was time to pass the torch on to Mike, the new kindergarten teacher.

Which is how it happened that 5-year-old Marie, trembling with a delicious blend of terror and excitement, looked up at me yesterday morning and said, "Chris, Mike told me I should ask you if you will take our class up to the dragon's house today."

Chris Mercogliano has been a teacher at theAlbany Free School for 32 years and an administrator for the past 20. His most recent book is *Teaching the Restless : One School's Remarkable No-Ritalin Approach to Helping Children Learn and Succeed* (Beacon Press, 2004).

I nearly choked on the coffee I was sipping. Marie was holding two carefully folded pieces of loose-leaf paper, the letters done in purple marker.

"Can we, *please?*" She was probably beginning to wonder why I wasn't responding to her question.

But I was too stunned — of all children, Marie! Mike and I had just been discussing her the other day, both concerned about Marie's upcoming transition into the elementary section of the school. She is a timid, sometimes tentative child, and leaving the preschool nest can be quite daunting at first.

"I wrote down my wishes at home last night," persisted Marie, not a trace of hesitation in her voice. "I sounded out the words all by myself."

"Wow, Marie, you already have your notes?"

Her grin broadened.

"Of course I will take you, but I really think we should talk first. I want to make sure you all know what you're getting yourselves into."

"Can we do it now?"

Before I could answer she had already dashed off to round up the others.

I counted seven young heads sitting at the low table in the kindergarten room. How perfect. "Do you all know what a dragon is?"

My question set off a flurry of descriptions, to which I added occasional embellishment so that everyone would be sufficiently wide-eyed before we departed.

"And do you understand that the dragon will only honor your wish if you are brave enough to climb up to his doorstep by yourself?"

"Oh, that's okay; I'm not scared," chimed two boys in the class, almost in unison.

I left Mike to help the kids with their notes, and about a half-hour later the nine of us set off up the hill. Normally our outings start out like the Indianapolis 500, with the kids racing madly to the next corner and waiting for the slowpoke adults to catch up. But this time no one seemed eager to set the pace. At times Mike and I had to be careful there were no little shoes underfoot as we walked. The two "fearless" boys were uncharacteristically mute.

When we arrived at the base of the staircase I reminded everyone about the necessity of making the ascent alone. "And it's okay if you don't make it the whole way the first time," I added. "Mike can bring you back as many times as you need him to."

What ensued was as funny as any Three Stooges outtake. "I'll go second," said one of the kids.

"No, *I'll* go second."

"No. *I'll* go second."

There is a dragon residing at the rear of the New York State Museum. That's right, a real, live, fire-breathing dragon, one wise and powerful enough to survive St. George and all the other knights in shining armor, and in modern times, Walt Disney, Harry Potter, and reality TV.

As the echo continued to ripple through the group, the scene grew even more comical. The kids actually formed a physical line — very uncommon behavior for free schoolers — and each time they found themselves in the front, they hastily dropped out and retreated to the rear.

Meanwhile, Mike and I did what any good teacher should do in a novel situation such as this: We became invisible. While the kids chattered on like nervous birds driven to cover by a hungry falcon, we sat back against a concrete pillar and stared off blankly into space.

A full ten minutes passed before any feet touched the first step. And then an interesting kind of group support began to emerge. It took shape organically, in the wonderful way that children's play does when it isn't adult structured and managed. The kids, each in turn, began climbing one step higher than the classmate before them. Their joint strategy got them up and around the first turn, out of sight of the ground. But for some time this remained the upper limit. No one was willing to chance it any further. It was simply too scary.

And then up stepped Marie. "I'm going to try to go all the way," she announced quietly.

There was still fear in her expression, but also an unmistakable look of determination. Mike and I turned toward each other and nodded. It didn't take a mind reader to sense that something big was about to happen.

Mike and I did what any good teacher should do in a novel situation such as this: We became invisible.

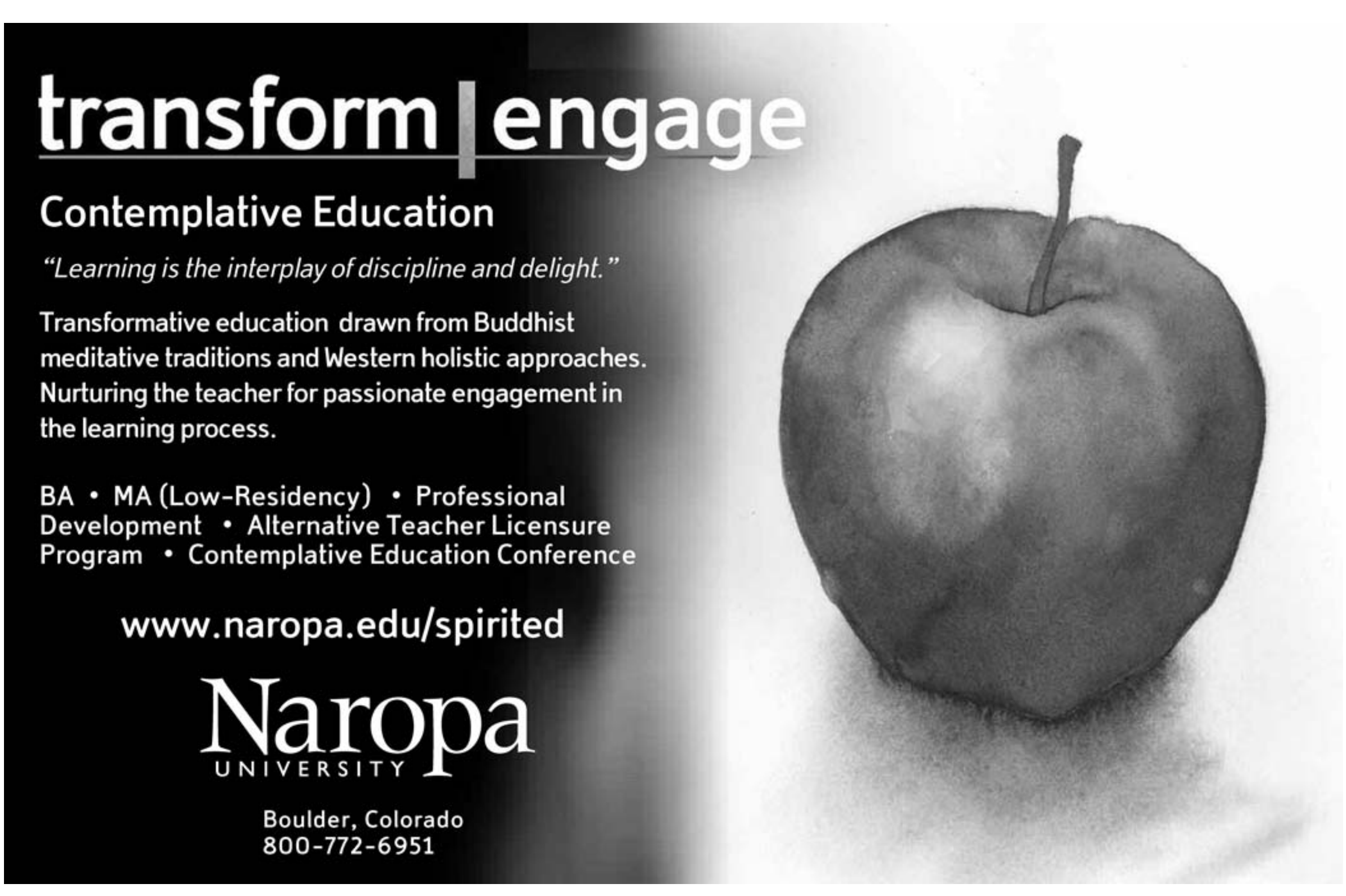
The other children must have felt it too, because one by one they fell silent when Marie climbed beyond the first curve and disappeared from sight.

A minute or so passed, but it seemed much longer. Then there came a high-pitched call from the top. Not a shout, but somehow that voice could've been heard over the rush hour din in midtown Manhattan.

"I made it!"

I looked to my left and saw Mike quietly take out the blue bandana that he sometimes wears over his closely shaven head and begin dabbing at his eyes. It was quite a sight. This former personal trainer, with thick gold rings in his ears and muscles bulging out of a tee shirt that always seems two sizes too small, had been moved to tears by the triumph of his student.

There are so many teachings embedded in this very true story, about Einstein and the power of imagination, or Bruno Bettelheim and the positive uses of enchantment, or children's inner knowing and their instinctive ability to create the growth experiences that are right for them, or the importance of facing our fears in our own time and our own way. I could write a whole book, really, but instead I will conclude like I think the wise old dragon might — and leave the readers to draw their own conclusions.



Let's Put Labor Studies in the Elementary Classroom

Bill Morgan

Elaine Chow, G. W. Bush's Secretary of Labor, was asked one day by a reporter why she didn't include unions more in her discussions of labor policy. Her answer was a question.

"What percent of workers are members of unions?"

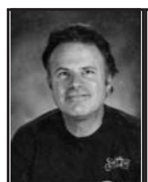
The reporter replied, "About eleven percent."

Chow didn't even continue the conversation. She looked at him for a moment, then shrugged and walked away, as if to say, "There's your answer."

It's doubtful if Elaine Chow, or any Secretary of Labor appointed by George W. Bush, cares at all about unions anyway, but in this case, she was saying, "I don't care about them because I don't *have* to."

One tenth of the workers in the country is, of course, a substantial amount, and if you ask me, she should include unions in her discussions of labor policy. But she is also absolutely right: Given the weakness of labor unions in present day America, she *doesn't* have to.

When it comes to our schools, we see a similar indifference. Social studies lessons give only cursory treatment to jobs and the work people do. The books typically identify not workers, but owners and politicians as the people who do things. Advances in the standard of living are routinely assigned to new technologies, not history's labor movements for social justice. But despite Elaine Chow, our schools have an obligation to teach about union history and the promise unions offer. Here are some reasons.



Bill Morgan, a longtime elementary school teacher in San Francisco, is a member of the California Federation of Teachers' Labor in the Schools Committee.

Workers are Family. There is an iron rule in teaching. If you can get parents involved in the education of their children, the children will do better. Many schools are not quite aware of how to do this. But lessons about work immediately draw upon the experiences of parents, and those of sisters and brothers and uncles aunts and cousins as well. Kids can interview their parents; parents can come to school and talk about their jobs. One Teamster dad came to the elementary school where I teach and told a particularly moving story about a worker who had a heart attack at a job site. The boss came up, saw the body on the ground, and told the workers to quit standing around and get the body the hell out of the way so the work could continue.

Unionism is the Future. A solid social studies curriculum can provide the fundamentals for those who wish to develop a union/social justice movement in the years ahead. Most public school teachers in this country are members of unions, yet there is no teachers'-union-produced social studies curriculum in the schools. It's as if we want to do the work of teaching, but leave the content of our work to others, who are often the enemies of unionism itself. Where are the books by the union education committees that will enable union members can educate their own children?

Work is Inclusive and Multicultural. Many schools nationwide have adopted multicultural programs, reaching out to what is, more and more, nonwhite English as a second language student body. Traditional textbooks and social studies units present the views and conclusions of the dominant class, and tend to ignore the more militant movements and cultures of America's different ethnic and language groups. The work and contributions of women are

largely ignored. Labor's history — which includes movements ranging from the unionization of Mexican migrant farm workers and Irish textile workers to Polish steel workers, African-American sleeping car porters, immigrant women garment workers, and Appalachian miners — can bridge this gap.

Work is Fundamental. American employers traditionally import workers (or export their work) from/to all over the world in the endless search for cheaper labor. We are told that the various ethnic groups came to America for "a better life." Simply put, they (the ones who did not come as slaves) came to find work. In fact, in a market economy, most social problems, past and present, are based in labor issues. Consider crime: Much can be attributed to unemployment (Wilson 1996, 49). Who dies in our wars? The sons of the rich, famous, and powerful? No way. It's the workers who shoulder the guns and fill the graveyards.

School children everywhere are familiar with Martin Luther King, Jr., and the civil rights movement. African Americans are familiar with the more subtle forms of segregation, but we don't often hear that King decided to broaden his movement because he realized that labor was *the* issue which unites the exploited peoples of all races.

"Civil rights are meaningless without the ability to earn a living," he wrote, and the last campaign of his life was in support of striking sanitation workers in Memphis.

Children Work. You want to get the attention of an elementary school class? Show them pictures, films, statistics on the world-wide scandal of child labor. It's conservatively estimated that 250,000,000 children worldwide work regularly, and of those, 180,000,000 are virtual slaves (Clark-Bennett and Sherer 2004). Labor tends to interest children, but child labor positively rivets their attention. Have kids look around at their clothes, their tennis shoes, and the soccer balls they kick around. Where were they made? Why? By whom? The issues of child labor will strike children at the personal level and stimulate thinking about the kinds of economic policies that foster child labor practices.

Union History is Their Birthright. James Baldwin (1985, 331), in writing about the effects of public schools on African-American children, writes of a "criminal conspiracy" against them. The same logic applies for working class children. The children of working families have a right to know about the movements that have made their own lives better — and what is available to them for the future.

Discussions about working class issues invariably bring howls of protest from the right: "But that's promoting class warfare!" Corporate capitalism itself is class warfare. To send young workers out into the world *without* labor education, *without* some awareness of social justice movements that have made life better for all working people, is to send them out unarmed in a war that becomes more and more vicious each day.

Chambers of Commerce routinely send their people into public schools in programs like "Junior Achievement" to extol the virtues of business ownership. But how many kids will grow up to be business owners? Won't most of them grow up to be workers? Of course they will. We should prepare them through history lessons, simulations, interviews with parents, and careful examination of the real world around them, for that workplace in a world increasingly hostile to their class. Hope, too is part of our message. The great social movements of the past, the great achievements of working people and their allies can only be repeated and extended if our children learn about them. At stake is the future of democratic society itself.

Public schools, are, by and large, filled with working class kids. Our social studies lessons should include them, should see history from their point of view, and extol working class movements for justice both in the society at large and the workplace.

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Teaching the Talk, Teaching the Walk

A Dialogue on the Pedagogical Uses of Martin Luther King Day

Carol O'Donnell and Grace Roosevelt

The Manhattan Country School's annual MLK Day March highlights social justice issues while providing valuable academic experiences for students.

I woke up this morning with my eyes …
Set on freedom.

Roosevelt: These words from a 1963 Civil Rights song take on special significance for the approximately 400 children, teachers, parents, and friends of Manhattan Country School who gather at 10 a.m. each Martin Luther King Day to begin a two-hour march in celebration of King's memory.

Although the march takes a different route every year, the participants usually assemble in front of the school's landmark building on East 96th Street in New York City, a location deliberately chosen by the founders of the school for its symbolic demarcation of the dividing line between Manhattan's Upper East Side and what is sometimes referred to as Spanish Harlem. Inspired by the integrationist vision of Martin Luther King and the progressive educational ideals of John Dewey, the PreK–8 school has for nearly 40 years stood at the forefront of national efforts to educate children about ethnic, racial, social, and gender-based differences and about living constructively in a divided world. Although a private school, its enrollment reflects the ethnic and socio-economic diversity of the city.

The MLK March plays a key role in the school's educative process because unlike other observances around the country on that day, the entire event is

Carol O'Donnell has taught 7th and 8th grade students for 22 years, enjoying literature and engaging in the pursuit of social justice with them. She and her students are featured in the documentary film, *It's Elementary: Talking about Gay Issues in the Schools* and in an upcoming PBS Series, *Teaching Multicultural Literature*.

Grace Roosevelt is Associate Professor of Education and History at Metropolitan College of New York. She is the author of *Reading Rousseau in the Nuclear Age* (1990) and the editor and translator of an on-line edition of Rousseau's *Emile*.

planned, organized, and led by the school's 8th grade students. Beginning in November, part of their English and Social Studies classes are devoted to learning activities related to organizing the march. These include studying the history of the Civil Rights Movement and King's role in it, learning about the founding of the school, deciding on a theme and a route for the march, contacting community leaders and inviting them to participate, drafting a press release about the event, researching the historical significance of each of the carefully selected stops, and finally writing short compositions that are presented at each stop by individual students on the day of the march. Students develop skills of interviewing, map reading, brainstorming, listening, researching, measuring, and writing; they learn from the experience how important both literacy and leadership are in producing public outcomes.

As a parent of three children who attended the school in the 1970s and as a grandparent of two who are there now, I have participated in the MLK Day March almost every year since its inception. Having personal ties to the school always makes the march a very moving event. Meeting up with the parents of one's children's friends, seeing favorite teachers, noticing how much everyone has "grown" are part of any school get-together; the MLK March provides the added heart-tugging experiences of singing the familiar Civil Rights Movement songs and marching — in the midst of winter — along with the children who are bearing banners commemorating Dr. King.

As an educator, however, the most impressive part of an MLK Day March for me is hearing, at each stop, the carefully composed speeches read by members of the graduating (8th grade) class. The speeches are informative, authentic, and grammatically correct; each paper elaborates on the significance of the site to the student, to the school's mission, and to King's legacy. Most surprising is that so many of the speeches demonstrate both creative imagination and a thoughtful understanding of recent social history. On each occasion in recent years that I have heard the students' speeches I've come away from the march curious about the process that produced them. How does the teacher do it? What inspires the students to write so well? What does the curriculum that produced these learning outcomes look like?

This past January, as we gathered back at the school for the traditional snack of hot cocoa and cookies that marks the end of each march, I decided to ask Carol O'Donnell, the 8th grade teacher who guides the students through the process of planning the march, to reflect upon the experience. Here are my questions and her responses.

Roosevelt: What is the origin of the idea of having students organize the march?

O'Donnell: Eighth graders at Manhattan Country School first organized our school's annual Martin Luther King March in 1999. In prior years the march had been organized by adults, including the school's co-founders Gus and Marty Trowbridge, who in 1988 decided to take the annual MLK school assemblies into the streets. "The assassination of Dr. King greatly affected us," they explained to the children and me in an interview I set up with them.

> We started the [MLK Day] assemblies and eventually wanted to bring what happened in the Music Room — the spirit, the focus on equality, the freedom songs, the parents spilling into the halls — out into the streets.

So for many years Gus and Marty organized MLK Marches that started at Manhattan Country School, wove their way through Harlem and East Harlem and sometimes traveled to Gracie Mansion. In 1999, as the 7th and 8th grade English teacher, I proposed a new version. Let the 8th graders, our oldest class, our "leaders" and seniors, take on the leadership and organization of the marches. The 8th graders would be graduating at the end of the year and journeying to diverse and quite different high school environs; the MLK March could be their parting platform and gift to their school community. Our students would have the chance to put into action the principles of equity at the heart of the school's mission and at the same time would learn valuable skills by putting on a grassroots community event for 200 or more people.

Roosevelt: What steps do you take to get the process started?

O'Donnell: We begin by talking about past marches the students have attended. Some students have attended every march since they were in the 4-5's (pre-kindergarten); others have entered the school at older ages or have never attended a march before. Some went to their first march the previous year when they were 7th graders, when the idolized former 8th graders organized it. Invariably the students talk about the cold weather, the hot chocolate at the end, the speeches (some long, some inspiring, some barely audible). Many remember special places visited by previous marches, such as the Malcolm Shabazz Mosque and the Indian Embassy, or they recall the generosity of individuals such as East Harlem artist James de la Vega, who gave away headbands and hats to marchers at the corner of 101st Street.

Martin Luther King Jr. is a school icon and grandfather; his picture pervades the school building from the lobby to individual classrooms to the teachers' bathroom. The students and I quickly move into discussions of MLK and his legacy. I remind students that King was assassinated in Memphis while supporting the strikes and marching of sanitation workers who were fighting for higher pay and fair benefits. Some years the students wonder (and we discuss) whether Malcolm X's militancy would not have been more effective in changing society. Students respond to a set of questions, including the question first asked by the very first organizing 8th grade class, "If Dr. King were alive today, what do you think he'd be marching for?" Early brainstorming about themes, issues, and a potential route is prompted by students' answers to a list of interview questions that I have all the students respond to as a homework assignment early in November. The questions on the list range from what concerns them in terms of current events to which committee they would prefer to work on.

Students identify many issues of concern and many areas of civil rights. Part of our mammoth challenge at this point is to develop a focus, a title and a route for our march. The themes students wanted expressed this year included discrimination against people of Middle Eastern descent, gentrification, gay/lesbian rights and gay marriage, national polarization, and the future of King's legacy. Suggested routes ranged from Harlem and MLK Boulevard, to the United Nations, to Brooklyn; as in other years there was a clear interest in including religious institutions as stops on the route. We finally decided on the theme of "The Ongoing Fight for Equality" and planned a route that crossed Central Park and wound through the Upper West Side.

Roosevelt: What comes after the brainstorming phase?

O'Donnell: With some minimal adult assistance (for example, negotiating the march route with local police officers), the students must complete the majority of tasks in small groups. They choose to work on one of four committees: press, invitations/guests, outreach/music, and route.

The Press Committee writes the press release that describes and titles our march. From our brainstorming, the Press Committee writes our collective statement about the issues we were highlighting and the class focus. They also help update our media list and begin faxing our press releases to newspapers, radio, and TV stations.

The Guests/Invitations Committee invites guests who are active in social justice efforts or who might bring star-studded relevance to the march (even though I emphasis the students are the community's biggest stars), and possibly draw attention to our cause. At first students on this committee become overwhelmed by the prospect of inviting celebrities; this year their long list included all the Yankees, Jamie Fox, Halle Berry, Latrell Spreewell, Jennifer Lopez, Bobby Cannavale (an MCS parent and actor in numerous movies who also plays a gay cop on "Will & Grace"), countless other NBA players, 50 Cent, Kelis (who graduated from MCS), Yoko Ono, and Bob Dylan. Other students question their choices—"Why Spreewell? Didn't he just get into a fight?" "Are you inviting Jamie Fox just because he's an actor; What about Tom Cruise?" "What do any of them have to do with MLK?" Ultimately students calm down and think about how the celebrity's role relates to the MLK March.

They begin to think more politically, drafting letters to Barack Obama, Oprah, Bill and Hillary Clinton, Charles Schumer, Michael Bloomberg (should we or shouldn't we?), congressional repre-

sentatives, and a large number of city council representatives. They always invite Coretta Scott King and have a hard time accepting that she may be too busy that day to attend the Manhattan Country School March.

The Outreach/Music Committee procures our portable sound system that is the key to hearing 8th graders speak to large audiences on the move and on various street corners. This committee negotiates with our head of school and bookkeeper, and its members are responsible for checking the working order of several large megaphones. They examine the tried-and-true MCS song handbook (photocopied and passed out on the march) to see what could or should be added. One year the Music Committee felt strongly about the inclusion of some of the MLK songs they sang as kids that weren't in our booklets. Another year they added Bob Marley's "Exodus" and an Irish freedom song "We're on the One Road." The Outreach component originated when one group of students felt we should work harder to invite other schools and organizations to the march. Groups such as Teach for America, local city schools, and a visiting high school class from Minnesota have joined our marches. One year we were almost joined by a New Jersey marching band, but alas, they never showed up.

The Route Committee has one of the most challenging tasks, planning a march of no greater than four miles that will probably either start or end at MCS with pertinent stops representing the class's themes. The very first 8th grade organizers immediately selected Fifth Avenue as the route. "We always walk to Harlem. Let's walk to where the money and power is," said one member of the group. Ingenuity and belief guided the rest of the stop selections; for example, marchers were very moved by our reception at the Indian Embassy. We were given books on India and the embassy's delegate spoke eloquently about Gandhi's role in India's independence. "Many Indians," she said, "see Martin Luther King as Gandhi's son." Students loved marching down the tourist vista of Fifth Ave., garnering attention and appreciation.

Roosevelt: What has struck me as an academic is the quality of the children's speeches. Can you describe some of the steps in their writing process?

O'Donnell: Interestingly, months later what students often remember most vividly about the march is writing their speeches and reading them in front of 200 to 400 people. This is the event that is most terrifying and most awe-inspiring to accomplish. Once the route committee has chosen up to ten march "stops," students both select and are assigned stops. In a prewriting meeting I encourage students to write original, short, expressive speeches that represent their individual beliefs, reflect the sentiments of their class, reveal history of the stop, and link that history to the MLK March and the ongoing fight for a more equal society. Students only have the two weeks following winter break and preceding MLK Day to finalize their speeches (while continuing with other academic expectations). They write three to four drafts of their speeches, handing in each draft first thing in the morning so that I may have feedback ready for them by class time. I'm a very engaged editor, asking them questions about their stops, inquiring about meanings or equity connections they might observe. I also ask them questions about their own lives, inquiring about experiences of relationships and curriculum at MCS, about their racial and ethnic backgrounds, and about issues I've heard them bring up. The students and I have individual conferences, sometimes only two or three minutes, daily. They occasionally work in pairs or small groups; they often show family members at home their work, but ultimately the writing process is individualized with strong teacher feedback.

Roosevelt: In their speech writing do students use a set format or do they experiment with different genres and structures?

O'Donnell: Since the writing task is framed as a speech there is some consistency in overall format, but a wide range of approaches and voices is encouraged and prevails. Students love to hear "yes's" when they propose writing ideas. And while they begin to absorb the content of what their speeches "must tackle," students become excited about the creative scope allowed for self-expression (poetry, personal narrative, storytelling…), even if they choose a standard format.

This past march, for example, Alex described the the Museum of Natural History in a straightforward way and then went on to suggest symbolic meanings

of the institution that he (and the group) might not otherwise have considered:

> Inside the Museum of Natural History, which we stand in front of today, there is an exhibit dedicated to the theory of the evolution of man. It shows how all of us originated from the same place and the same species. Then from there we spread out all over the globe evolving further to best suit our environment. We changed skin color to deal with the sun and camouflage. However, we still came from the same place.
>
> The creationist theory followed by Christianity and Judaism is that God created the first man, Adam. From Adam's rib, he created the first woman, Eve. This would mean we all are descendents from them. Even the Hopi believe that we are all descendents of the first four men and women created by Spider Woman (Kótyangwúti.) All of these theories, even with their different politics, tell us that we all came from the same place, people, or the same god. We are essentially all brothers and sisters.

Other students choose to write more personally about their experiences and struggles. At the Advent Lutheran Church on Broadway and 93rd Street David's speech was written as follows:

> Standing in church like this is a little odd for me. I mean, how do Protestants know how to be Protestant? How do Catholics know how to be Catholic? Standing in a synagogue, I have the same feeling. What makes you Christian or Jewish or Muslim? For me, well, I'm still trying to put the puzzle pieces together. I don't really know my religious identity like I know my address or my phone number. My religion is not something I wear off my sleeve. Maybe that's because at this point in my life, I really don't have a religion. . . .
>
> Being half-Jewish and half-Catholic is not as easy as you may think. People think I'm so lucky that I celebrate both Hanukah and Christmas because of all the toys I get. Sure I love that, but that's not all there is. There's a part of me that not many people know…. Of course, the Jewish side of my family tells me they want me to be Jewish and the Catholic side of my family wants me to be Catholic…..
>
> It's so confusing because you struggle to please everybody. But sometimes you just can't. I am not living my Jewish Grandmother's life, or my Catholic uncle's life. I'm living my life. And in the end, when I'm eighteen and I decide for myself what I'll be . . . I will decide what I want to be so that I will be happy and proud, what will be the best thing for me, what will make me, well, me.
>
> This church, in my mind, is what Dr. King really wanted. The people in this room right now, both black and white, all different religions and ethnic backgrounds, all different people — in my mind, MLK would have lived off what I am seeing right now. This is what he wanted for the world. To be one, united group of different people…. I think that it takes time for everybody to find out what they're meant to do, succeed in, or believe. MLK figured it out and once he did, he began to preach and sing out his voice for what we have in this room. I think all the people here should be proud of themselves for being part of his dream. Even though he has left us, he hasn't left our hearts.

On our most recent march some students chose to add poetry or rap to their speeches. For the stop at Strawberry Fields in Central Park Taylor wrote a rap celebrating the power of music:

> You hear the music. It's blasting loud.
> It brings us together, makes us proud.
> You see us together, different races.
> Doing everything at the same paces.
> Learn to care, share and love.
> Music brings us together like the skies above.
> Care for your pride; keep your head up like Pac.
> Listen to music whether it be rap or rock.
> You see MLK that was his dream.
> Black, White, or green, we on the same team.
> You heard his words, they'd always gleam….
>
> Music is god, we are the kids.
> Fighting over something stupid, stop being pigs.
> I'm trying to tell you, that we have to learn to deal.
> This is no lie, this is all real.
> So calm down, and learn to have fun.
> Don't fight, don't knife, don't play with guns.

Other students express their creativity in the connections that they are able to make between a New York City landmark and King's legacy. Here is what Jessica wrote for her speech at the Romeo and Juliet statue in front of the Delacorte Theater:

> The Delacorte Theater is one of New York City's most beloved theaters. In 1957 NYC granted Joseph Papp, a theatrical director and producer, a plot of land in Central Part. This plot of land is where Papp put into creation his brilliant idea of a theater that allows people of every class to view free public showings of Shakespeare and other fine plays…. [It] has put on free performances of Shakespeare's plays and others during June, July, and August….
>
> In this theater, all barriers are let down; there is no race, class, age or religion. The combination of the amazing actors and the subject matter of the plays help people to see from one another's perspectives and find a common ground.
>
> *Romeo and Juliet* is a timeless love story that people everywhere can relate to. The plight of these two lovestruck teenagers transcends all interpersonal, interracial, and all socioeconomic barriers; people everywhere know what it's like to be young and in love facing family oppositions. Thus, if in no other earthly way, people of all different religions, socio-economic backgrounds, races, ideologies, ages and sexes have found a common ground in which they could relate to one another, as well as Romeo and Juliet. This is exactly how Martin Luther King Jr. wished us to be, proud of our uniqueness, yet humble enough for "black and white children to walk hand in hand." Our class embraces this equality and ability to relate, which is one of the reasons this march is entitled "Carrying on Martin Luther King's Legacy: The Ongoing Fight for Equality."

Roosevelt: How do you get students to connect the personal and political?

O'Donnell I ask them to! More seriously, though, in a curriculum and school that espouse constructivist pedagogy and principles of democratic equity, students continually learn that culture, including knowledge, societal divisions, human bonding, action and inaction, literature and humanity are constructed and open to inquiry; that their personal stories are both utterly unique, important and quintessentially human; and that writing is a process of exploring what you think and who you are. In our 2004 MLK March through Harlem, Travis spoke at the Booker T. Washington Learning Center that had been started by his mother in the early 90s for crack-addicted babies and that has evolved into a multiservice community center with adult education programs and teen afterschool classes. He spoke about the meaning of growing up at Booker T. with his mother and with educators in his programs:

> This small place has afforded me the opportunity to receive academic support, meet incredibly caring people, travel through the country and have many "once in a lifetime" experiences. The program has sheltered me from what can sometimes be a brutal place and offered me a rich and nurturing environment in which I could develop myself and live up to my potential…. Every day at Booker T. I see people beating the odds and working to change their realities despite the obstacles.

That same year Carly honored the activist East Harlem artist James de la Vega with the following observations:

> (He) is a person who has dedicated much of his life to making art something for all to enjoy. He feels that art shouldn't just be hanging on walls of museum. It should be where anyone at any time has the opportunity to view it. From this you learn that art isn't a privilege…. It is a right…. It is a tradition of many Latino artists such as Diego Rivera and Jose Orozco who turned the streets of their town or neighborhood into their own art studio…. Through long-lasting murals and temporary creations on sidewalks and fences, de la Vega shares his message of hope and tolerance with phrases like "Become your dream" and "Beauty magazines make my girlfriend feel ugly."

Students decode dimensions of their racial and political identities and their beliefs in the privacy of

writing that will be presented publicly. For example, Roger's poem/rap for the 2005 march included aspects of his Latino and working class roots, as well as his values of economic justice.

> You might think because where I'm from I have no manners
> But while I hold your doors you pass me saying nothing just paying attention to your planner.
> You look down on me without saying a thank you
> Then I look down on you and thinking how rude.
> I know because you're a different race
> And own more of George's face
> Doesn't mean you have to hate.
> How about we sit and share the cake
> Because in the end we'll all have the same fate.

Roosevelt: The students seem to be making lots of connections as they craft their speeches. As their teacher, what are some of the pedagogical issues pertaining to social justice and student learning that the march raises for you?

O'Donnell: For all teachers, but especially for middle school teachers, daily life in the classroom is a balancing act between the clash of ideals and realities, where pedagogy bumps into passion, indifference, adolescence, and society. Planning a Martin Luther King March epitomizes the lofty and the gritty. The core philosophy of Dewey drives our approach. We try to foster both self-reflection and educational experiences that encourage the child "to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the group to which he belongs" (Dewey 1995). Here I think of Anya's introduction to this year's stop at B'nai Jesurun/St. Paul's where she spoke of New York City as a place where "to this day you can still see the faces of the immigrants in the faces of their descendants" and that since most people in the U.S., including herself, are descendants of immigrants, "instead of feeling more separated from other Americans you should feel united." This, she went on to say, is what King was fighting for: "He believed in celebrating your differences and treating others with respect and tolerance." In the midst of test-driven, tracked and disparately resourced schooling, progressive educators strive to create curriculum that "is a process of living and not a preparation for future living" (Dewey 1995).

Sometimes the beauty and poignancy of what students share goes beyond a teacher's expectations. As a new student and 8th grader in 2003, Sean was a well-liked, somewhat shy, but increasingly involved student. In November 2003, just as MLK March planning was underway, Sean was savagely beaten by a group of older boys who took his coat on his way home from school. He required surgery and missed almost a month of school. I wasn't sure how much meaning the march would have for Sean as he tried to catch up with work and recover emotionally and physically. This was also a year in which students were grappling with the Iraq War; many who had supported the invasion of Afghanistan after 9/11 and who had been enamored by the initial virtual-video type invasion were increasingly critical of government policies and rationales. Sean was assigned a Central Park stop, the first time our march had crossed to the West Side. I mentioned to Sean that MLK had given an anti-Vietnam War speech in the park in 1967, and that he might want to check it out. I asked him to come back with ideas for what he might want to say about the group's themes. This is part of what he wrote, which became even more powerful considering his recent experiences with violence:

> Dr. Martin Luther King was a man of peace.… On April 15, 1967, starting in this very park, he led hundreds of thousands of followers to the United Nations to show their defiance to the war. Many of his allies felt betrayed by him joining the anti-war movement. They said, "Why are you speaking about the war, Dr. King? Why are you joining the voices of dissent? Peace and civil rights don't mix," they said. "Aren't you hurting the cause of your people?" they asked. He faced this criticism and simply said that if they believed that peace and civil rights didn't mix, they never understood him or his cause.…
>
> [King] had to watch as the Poverty Program that would have helped the poor was washed up and instead went to fund the war cause. Isn't the same thing starting to happen now? America has started a campaign against terrorism, which was reasonable and noble in the beginning, but has seemed to revert to finger pointing

> and an excuse to announce war against America's political enemies. In Dr. King's eyes, and many others, including my own, it seems we are ready to fight battles overseas and deal with other nations' problems more quickly than we deal with our own problems.
>
> I personally believe in many of Dr. King's beliefs of non-violence and equality. He's one of the reasons that I took up writing and why I have a mellow approach on life and why I didn't just rise up and beat down any problems I had when I was younger (unlike many kids I knew from my past schools). When we're younger, many of us see violence as a way out of a situation, and unfortunately, many of us revert to this behavior in moments of anger and depression and we attack other people. But, in the end, does it really help? Does it really solve anything?

As always, conflict and pragmatism jockey alongside ideals. One student announces that her family is going away for the MLK holiday so she'll help plan but doesn't want to write a speech. Another student becomes fixated on the fact that the parents of someone in the class know Steven Spielberg. One year as we planned a route in Harlem, a student suggested we carry signs urging black kids not to mug white kids. During every planning session, I am reminded of the tensions between cooperative learning and finite deadlines, between shared philosophy and individual opinions, and between producing a smooth community event and learning from a rocky process.

Roosevelt: You have mentioned Dewey, but are there other ways that the experience of organizing the march relates to the tradition of Progressive Education?

O'Donnell: On a pedagogical level, the idea of a student-led march embodies four classic dimensions of Progressive Education: the importance of student-centered, inquiry-based learning; the teaching of meaningful, hands-on skills; respect for each student's own ways of learning; and the centrality of community.

The MLK March embodies all these principles, but extends even further into the political waters that Progressive educators often avoid, by turning over to 8th graders the school's inherent mission — our individual and collective responsibility for creating a more equal society. When asked about their individual and class contributions to organizing the march, many of the 2005 students spoke about making a difference. Shannon wrote: "Despite all the walking and how tired my mother and I were at the end, I felt proud and accomplished because I was promoting a good cause…. I realized that I have the capacity of making a change and my role as a teenager on this planet is of great importance."

One of the most rewarding aspects of the march is the way it so often gives students a new sense of their capacities. Roger wrote,

> I think my favorite part of the march was when I read my speech because everyone was around me, the cameras were rolling and being the second (to speak) made it exciting. It was an honor to be finally a part of the march and reading my poem and speech for everyone to hear…I think I'm a good leader and organizer. I think I would plan something in high school because it is fun, and yes, the march helped me realize I can read in front of a crowd.

Ultimately the march is a curricular process of discovering community: the community of an 8th grade class; the communities of New York City (Harlem, East Harlem, Yorkville, Upper West and East Sides, Chinatown, the Lower East Side); the community of our school and other people who march on MLK Day; and the community of one's mind, beliefs, and capacity in dialogue with an ever-changing society.

Roosevelt: With the idea of the march as a process of discovering community we come full circle back to the moral ground where King's and Dewey's social visions intertwine and overlap. King asked us to broaden our concept of community and Dewey asked us to use the school as a place to engage students in social life. The experience of organizing the march clearly fulfills both these aims.

Thank you, Carol.

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Literature That Helps Children Connect with the Earth

Ann M. Trousdale and Emily A. DeMoor

"Well-chosen works of literature are one way to immerse children in the universe, giving them a sense of place, of mystery, wonder, divine presence, relationship, identity, and possibility for transformation."

When we allow the natural world to speak on its own terms, can it reveal a divine presence that goes beyond human images and attributes, one that is both self and other? This seems to have been the experience of some of the children in Tobin Hart's (2003) study, prompting a sense of wonder, of awe, of oneness with the natural world. Yet many children today are disconnected from Earth and thus have little opportunity to explore that sense of connectedness. This is particularly true for underprivileged, inner-city children, but it is also true for many children from affluent suburban settings, whose sense of connectedness lies primarily with electronic keyboards and remote control devices.

It is direct, sustained experience with the natural world that seems most likely to support the development of this aspect of children's spirituality. But for children who do not have this sustained access, there is another way to experience connectedness and perhaps quicken a desire for closer connection: through the vicarious experience that literature provides. There are many literary works that evoke a sense of wonder, of place, of the healing powers of nature, of encounter with the divine in things seen and unseen. They provide children the opportunity to see and listen through the eyes of the human, and sometimes other-than-human, protagonist; for at times it seems that the natural world is pursuing us, or at least — in the words of St. Paul, "waiting with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19);

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waiting for us to move beyond isolation to a sense of connection and oneness. In this essay, we will describe some literary works that can stir such feelings in children.

In North America a deep sense of connectedness with Earth predates the present overlay of Western culture. It is a primary aspect of the spirituality of our Native American peoples and a thread that runs through much of their lore. Joseph Bruchac is a leading figure in reclaiming those traditions for children. In Bruchac's picture book, *Between Earth and Sky* (1996) Little Turtle receives teachings from his uncle Old Bear about the many places in North America that are sacred to Native American peoples. As Bruchac says in his introduction,

> Western culture speaks of four directions. Native American cultures throughout the continent recognize seven. They are the cardinal directions of East, South, West, and North, directions that correspond to our life cycle of birth, youth, adulthood, and the time of being an elder, respectively. Then there are the directions of Earth and Sky. These Six Directions are easy to locate. The Seventh Direction, however, is harder to see. It is the direction within us all, the place that helps us see right and wrong and maintain the balance by choosing to live in a good way.

Old Bear shows Little Turtle sacred places of the Wampanoag, the Seneca, the Navajo, the Cherokee, and other peoples; some of these sacred places are related to creation stories; some to sacred ceremonies; some contain universal lessons about human nature. All speak to Little Turtle and to the child reader about respect for the earth and the importance of the sacred places above, below, about, and within us. *Between Earth and Sky* is appropriate for children eight and older.

Perhaps the first children's book in the Western European tradition that explores the healing and restorative power of nature is Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1911). Regarded as a classic, the novel is remarkable in its particularity and universality, in its historical detail and contemporary relevance. The story does not challenge the highly structured British class system of the early 20th century, but presents spirituality as crossing borders of class, culture, gender, time, and space. *The Secret Garden* has been a favorite with children from nine to twelve years of age.

In the story, Mary Lennox, orphaned in far-away India, is sent to her widowed uncle's estate in Yorkshire. Plain, spoiled, sour, and self-centered, Mary continues her unhappy existence until one night she hears the sound of crying in the house. She discovers a crippled, sickly boy who is convinced he is soon to die. It is Colin, Mary's cousin. Querulous and self-pitying, the boy reminds Mary somewhat of herself.

On the grounds of the estate she meets Dickon, a charming and engaging boy whose older sister is a servant in the household. Dickon is joyfully at home on the moorlands; he fascinates Mary because he can communicate with animals.

One day Mary discovers a buried key that opens the door to a secret garden, abandoned for 10 years, ever since Colin's mother died of a fall there. Mary opens the door to discover the first thing that has engaged her interest in all her young life, the first thing that has called her outside her self-preoccupation, to consider the welfare of any other living thing.

> [S]he thought she saw something sticking out of the black earth — some sharp little pale green points…. [S]he knelt down to look at them. She bent very close … and sniffed the fresh scent of the damp earth. She liked it very much.
>
> [A]fter she had gone round [the garden], trying to miss nothing, she had found ever so many more sharp, pale green points....
>
> "It isn't quite a dead garden," she cried out softly to herself. "Even if the roses are dead, there are other things alive."
>
> She did not know anything about gardening, but the grass seemed so thick in some places where the green points were pushing their way through that she thought that they did not seem to have room enough to grow. She searched about until she found a rather sharp piece of wood and knelt down and dug and weeded out the weeds and grass until she made nice little clear spaces around them. (pp. 96-97)

Here, in the garden, Mary learns to care for something other than herself.

Mary and Dickon bring Colin, in his wheel chair, to the garden. It has a similarly transformative effect on Colin. He sees that

> over walls and earth and trees and swinging sprays and tendrils the fair green veil of tender little leaves had crept, and in the grass under the trees and the gray urns in the alcoves and here and there everywhere were touches or splashes of gold and purple and white and the trees were showing pink and snow above his head and there were fluttering of wings and faint sweet pipes and humming and scents and scents. And the sun fell warm upon his face like a hand with a lovely touch. And in wonder Mary and Dickon stood and stared at him. He looked so strange and different because a pink glow of color had actually crept all over him — ivory face and neck and hands and all.
>
> "I shall get well! I shall get well!" he cried out. "Mary! Dickon! I shall get well! And I shall live forever and ever and ever!" (p. 255).

There is a spiritual dimension to the pull of the garden. Every day the children return; they realize that there is a kind of magic there; as Colin says, "Even if it isn't real Magic, we can pretend it is. *Something* is there — *something*!" (p. 282). They invent incantations to invite the Magic. One day Colin looks at his hand holding the trowel, stands up, and realizes he is well. He wants to shout out "something thankful, joyful." At Colin's urging Dickon sings the Doxology, beginning "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." Colin decides that he likes the song:

> Perhaps it means just what I mean when I want to shout out that I am thankful to the Magic…. Perhaps they are both the same thing. How can we know the exact names of everything? Sing it again, Dickon. Let us try, Mary. I want to sing it too. It's my song. How does it begin? "Praise God from whom all blessings flow?" (p. 329).

Cultural historian and theologian Thomas Berry (1997) has written that

> The child awakens to a universe,
> the mind of the child to a world of wonder,
> imagination to the world of beauty,
> emotions to a world of intimacy.
> It takes a universe to make a child
> both in outer form and inner spirit.
> It takes a universe to educate a child,
> a universe to fulfill a child.

As a person who has embraced this belief, Emily, one of the authors of this article, taught religion for several years at a Catholic high school. She found it disheartening when her sophomores, all of whom were male, would report that they did not have encounters with the divine or that, when attending the wake and funeral of a classmate, they turned their sadness into anger because that was a more acceptable emotion. She came to realize that these young men had learned to function emotionally within very narrow parameters. Their spiritual lives, it seemed, were diminished as a result. The wonder and awe that they experienced at the sight of the Grand Canyon, or overlooking the early morning forest from their duck blinds, were not considered by them to be spiritual feelings — nor was grief. Emily came to understand that, according to the notions and images of God with which many of them had been raised, the divine had been defined out of their experiences of life. And, because of religious traditions that had separated matter and spirit, the natural world had been rendered devoid of divine presence; the sacred landscape of their inner terrain was barren.

Theologian Douglas Burton-Christie (2000) explains his understanding of the Christian concept of "logos" as grounded in the sense that "God comes to us in some kind of utterance" (p. 318). That this utterance finds expression in the natural world is seen in many works of literature. The river utters the sound of the holy in Herman Hesse's (1999) *Siddhartha.* When it was first published, *Siddhartha* originally attracted an adult audience, but in recent years it has been recognized as suitable for a young adult audience as well. In the story, after years of eventful physical and spiritual wanderings that do not lead to the happiness that he seeks, Siddhartha comes to live beside the river with Vasudeva, a ferryman, and finds himself and, ultimately, the divine in the river. Speaking in many voices, the river mediates the sacred oneness of life. Passing through the seasons of the year, and of the heart, the river is sometimes heard as laughing, at other times lamenting with a

sorrowful voice. In reflecting upon the cycles of the water, from vapor to rain to source to brook to river, Siddhartha comes to terms with his own life cycles in a sacred journey toward the divine.

> He could no longer distinguish the many voices ... everything was one, everything was entwined and entwisted, was interwoven a thousandfold. And all of it together, all voices, all goals, all yearnings, all sufferings, all pleasures, all good and evil — the world was everything together.... He did not bind his soul to any one voice and did not enter them with his ego, but listened to all of them, heard the wholeness, the oneness — then the great song of the thousand voices consisted of a single word which was "om": perfection. (Hesse 1999, 119)

Like Siddhartha, a young girl listens for the wisdom of the natural world in Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnall's *The Other Way to Listen* (1978). In this beautifully illustrated book, an indigenous elder teaches a child to listen to the natural world — to the corn singing, wildflower seeds bursting open, a rock murmuring good things to a lizard — to "everything being right." The elder instructs the girl to get to know one thing as well as you can, starting with something small; that you have to respect whatever you are with, and not be afraid to learn from bugs or sand. This takes a very long time, but eventually, while singing "hello, hello, hello…" to the hills and thinking, "Here I am," she finally hears the hills singing. Baylor and Parnall's tale, written for children ages six to nine, suggests that a child may discover not only a connection, but a reciprocity, when one listens to and learns a place.

As Thomas Berry (1994) has written, "The way to the world of the sacred is through the place of our dwelling." Literature shows us how Earth may be a place of encounter in which spirit and matter, divine and human, self and other, are reintegrated. Coming to know the natural world as sacred text requires that one develop an awareness of and sensitivity to the particularities of one's local setting. This is necessary for cultivating what has become known in cross-disciplinary narratives as a "sense of place." Theologian Douglas Burton-Christie (1999) cites Simone Weil as he affirms the need to be rooted as one that is fundamental to the human soul. To have a sense of place, he maintains, is to "feel oneself at home in the world" (p. 59). It is to belong. Frank Fromherz (1999) expands this idea when he suggests that by contemplating a particular geography, one might recover a capacity to recollect the communities that have shaped human character. Particular places, he asserts, can unlock memories and lessons that may help restore a sense of one's roots, "giving form to the very language of her soul" (p. 243).

There are many literary works that evoke a sense of wonder, of place, of the healing powers of nature, of encounter with the divine in things seen and unseen.

One can see this process unfold in *The Tree of Here* by Chaim Potek (1993), appropriate for ages four to eight. This story depicts a young boy's relationship to a dogwood tree. "This tree makes me feel like I'm growing roots.... It makes me feel like I'm really here," says Jason. When Jason learns that he has to move yet again, he begins to grieve the oncoming loss of this special tree, and it him. After several conversations with the tree, it's time to go, but Mr. Healy, a family friend, has the foresight to give Jason a small dogwood tree in a pot to take with him to his new home. The memories and stories connected with the tree will remind Jason of who he is as he adapts to his new surroundings.

The character of Wil Neuton, in Gary Paulsen's young adult novel *The Island* (1988) similarly demonstrates the human ability to be identified with the natural world in such a way as to come home to oneself spiritually. In this novel, 15-year-old Wil goes off to live alone on an island in the center of a lake in northern Wisconsin. He has discovered the island during a bike ride. Drawn by the island's mysterious pull and a hunger to know everything, he returns to it again and again and eventually moves there. When urged by his family to leave it he responds, "I know that if I leave here, if I go back without learning more, I will somehow lose what I am, and I don't want to do that. I

don't ever want to do that" (p. 116). Driven by a desire for identity and connection, he creates a series of writings and drawings of a loon, a heron, and other forms of life. Reflecting on this process, Wil explains, "I could see the heron in all the things the heron was, without seeing the heron at all, and it changed me, made me look at all things that way, made me see in a new way and, finally, made me look at myself in that new way" (pp. 52-53). In discovering himself, Wil reconnects with the wildness within. As Wil merges sensually and spiritually with the life forms of the island, he comes to profoundly know himself and the world, in all its beauty and violence, and gains a broader wisdom, perspective, and capacity to understand, to love, to forgive, and to laugh at life.

Wil's inner journey becomes a spiritual quest. According to Burton-Christie (1996), this quest, as exemplified in the Christian monastic tradition, is rooted in a complex, rhythmic pattern of withdrawal and engagement. The movement between these two impulses is like the pulse of the ebb and flow of the tides. In *Fire and Silence* Burton-Christie (1996) tells the story of Anthony, a fourth century monk, who emerges from the wild with special healing powers after twenty years of solitary prayer, fasting, meditating on sacred texts, and wrestling with demons. The purpose of monastic life in the wilderness, Burton-Christie explains, is "the awakening to a simple vision of oneself as part of a world that is whole, innocent" (p. 66). Spiritual transformation, in this tradition, does not occur apart from the natural world, but in intersubjectivity with it — "deepening one's capacity to respond to the world … learning to see and celebrate … the traces of spirit arising from the palpable world" (p. 67). Burton-Christie continues:

> It means learning that the pores of the soul can be opened, that we can drink deeply from the verdure of the world, and pour ourselves back with unstinting generosity. It means entering the great dance of the spirit in the world.

Experiencing this transformation, one of the early desert monks, Abba Joseph of Panephysis, declared that "If you will, you can become all flame" (In Burton-Christie 1996, 67).

Nature-based experiences of renewal and transformation, however, need not occur in remote landscapes. In *Seedfolks*, written by Paul Fleischman (1997) for young adults, the author explores a community garden in a poor section of Cleveland as a public space of relationship with the natural world, including its many and diverse human members. Told through the separate but overlapping stories of its multicultural residents, Fleischman's charming and insightful work illustrates how the garden becomes a site of personal and communal transformation.

The garden is initiated with the planting of four bean seeds in a vacant lot by Kim, a young Vietnamese girl whose father died before she was born. Kim plants the seeds so that her father, who was a gardener, might recognize her as his daughter. In another chapter, Nora, a British nurse, is pushing Mr. Myles, a despondent stroke victim, in his wheelchair when he signals her to stop. They discover the garden. She pushes him onward, only to be stopped again. Nora recalls,

> I turned the wheelchair and headed back. I could see his nostrils taking in the smell of the soil. We reached the lot. His arm commanded me to enter. Over the narrow, bumpy path we went, his nose and eyes working. Some remembered scent was pulling him. He was a salmon traveling upstream through his past. (p. 47).

Nora finds a way to enable Mr. Myles to participate in the garden, changing them both.

> What a marvelous sight it was to behold Mr. Myles' furrowed black face inspecting his smooth-skinned young, just arrived in the world he'd shortly leave. His eyes gained back some of their life…. A fact bobbed up from my memory, that the ancient Egyptians prescribed walking through a garden as a cure for the mad. It was a mind-altering drug we took daily. (p. 49)

The story of Maricela, an angry Mexican teenager pregnant with an unwanted child, is perhaps one of the most poignant vignettes of Fleischman's collection. Forced to work in the garden as part of a program for pregnant teens, Maricela, after much resistance, has a breakthrough experience when she comes to realize that her body is part of nature. She ex-

claims, "I was related to bears, to dinosaurs, to plants, to things that were a million years old" (p. 56). She realizes that it is not a disgrace, but an honor to be part of nature. Maricela reflects, "And for just that minute I stopped wishing my baby would die" (p. 57). Such is the spiritual power of the natural world.

Well-chosen works of literature are one way to immerse children in the universe, giving them a sense of place, of mystery, wonder, divine presence, relationship, identity, and possibility for transformation. Such books provide fertile ground for nurturing the spirit. Through the literature of nature we might, in fact, push beyond the limitations and pitfalls that have crept into some religious traditions, dispense with graven images, and cultivate a larger sense of the divine, holding all things sacred.

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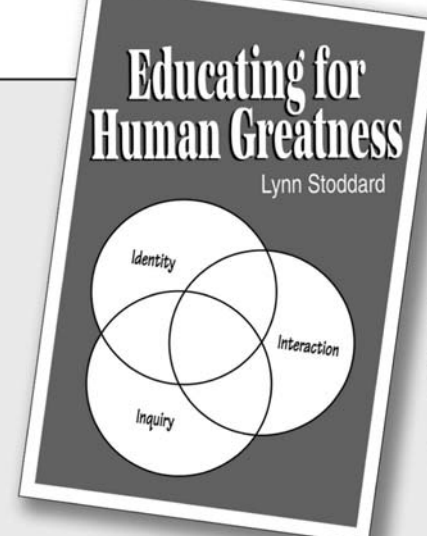

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Educating for Human Greatness

In this wise and perceptive book, veteran public school teacher/administrator Lynn Stoddard surveys the current state of public education in America and concludes that things have gone terribly wrong. His solution is to have parents and educators start by realizing that standardization in education is neither possible or effective. Only then can they focus on creating schools that truly educate for human greatness.

To create such schools Stoddard proposes that parents, teachers, administrators and school board members keep six cardinal principles constantly in mind:

- Value Positive Human Diversity and Cherish Every Student's Uniqueness
- Draw Out and Develop Each Child's Latent Talents
- Respect the Autonomy of the Individual by Restoring Freedom and Responsibility
- Invite Inquiry, Curiosity, and Hunger for Knowledge in the Classroom
- Support Professionalism as Teachers Live by these Principles
- Parents and Teachers Unite to Help Children Grow in Human Greatness

Educating for Human Greatness deserves an honored place on the reading list of every parent who really cares about the future of their children, every teacher and administrator who puts students first in their professional lives, and every school board member who wants schools to be places where student development is a reality, not just a slogan.

Independence as a Goal of Education

Why We Need Less of It

Jeremy Leeds

The call for independence in academia ignores the fact that schools are essentially interdependent institutions.

"It's time for you to be more independent."

"I want more independence."

"Schools should develop a child's independence."

We hear phrases like these from parents, children, and schools. But do they do more harm than good?

We all err when we base our quests for excellence, fulfillment, or happiness on "independence." What we are fundamentally searching for in school and in life is *relatedness* — dependence, not independence — but often of a different kind than that which already exists. In the context of schools and education, "independence" contains a large dose of wishful illusion and fantasy. School is a social, interdependent environment if there ever was one. It is almost too obvious to point out that the most common context of learning in a school is the interaction between a teacher and a class of students. It is impossible to say that the relationship between student and teacher is irrelevant — that's why everyone is there!

As anyone who has ever taught or been taught knows, the student-teacher relationship is based both on the subject itself, and how the teacher conveys it. Remember the classes and school experiences that meant the most to you, either for your academic learning or social experience. The qualities of the teacher, and of the classroom context, virtually always played central roles.

The interdependence extends beyond teacher-student relationships to student relationships with each other and, beyond that, to the school's social environment. Evidence, if it is needed, is everywhere. Just to take one example, a recent *New York Times* article on education highlights the quote "'One new student can change a classroom's entire dynamics,' a teacher complains" (Dillon 2004). It is telling that this is framed as a complaint. It is not only true when it is

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a "disruption." More important than the disruptions to such interpersonal dynamics is the simple fact that there are such dynamics — and they are central to education.

The independent behaviors that adults seek to encourage in school usually come down to "doing your own work." Don't cheat or copy, and don't ask for too much assistance. But do the adults actually want independence? For example, when teachers ask for references in a paper, they are actually requesting that students acknowledge their *dependence* on other, more experienced thinkers. Plagiarism is in fact a duplicitous attempt to claim independence, to avoid calling attention to a necessary, and productive, dependence.

Moreover, teachers have all kinds of rules and authority relationships to make sure students are *not* independent of them. Students can't cut classes. They need to behave in certain ways. They must do the assignments the teachers provide. If we look beyond these rules to their potential meanings, we can see that they are there to encourage interdependence. Teachers are trying to assist students — through the social process called teaching — to develop toward more and greater competence.

During school hours, student behavior is tightly regulated. Outside the school confines, students' dependence would appear to end. But does it? Educators worry about the influence that friends, parents, and even tutors have on them. There is discontinuity and tension between the time that is in the control of the school and that which is not.

On the surface, educators often seem to be advising students to be independent outside school — to turn their backs on negative influences and to work on their own. But perhaps educators' emphasis on independence is (at least partially) a way to say, "Pay attention to us, even when we are not in sight." Perhaps even, "We are protective of our relationship with you, and sometimes even jealous of those you have with others." To verbalize these sentiments would make clear the aspiration to interconnectedness and influence. Educators are really talking about their own influence, what they want it to be, and how it relates to other influences in the students' lives. The educators' intentions are not bad, but they are skewed by an emphasis on independence as the governing concept. Educators are — or should be — talking about a world of inevitable interrelatedness, and helping students think about the kinds and qualities of the relationships they want to engage in.

Despite the ever-present warnings to young people about peer pressure and the emphasis on individual decision making, most significant social choices are made in collaborative, thus dependent, contexts. Competence in normal dependencies, such as how to assert one's needs in a friendship, is about learning how to choose one's social contexts and how to manage within them, not how to float above them. It takes some basic competence and wisdom to have relationships that are *on balance* fulfilling and not destructive. I stress "on balance" to avoid the overly simplistic view often promoted by "social skills" programs that we can all learn to have happy, conflict-free, healthy relationships all the time — and if we don't, we are doing something wrong. We all know how difficult and how up-and-down relationships are, especially close ones. Is there a relationship any of us have in which they do not feel they could have done something different, acted better — in the last several days? In fact, the closer the relationship, the more such instances. Perfection — and independence — just are not options. This is where real education can make a significant difference in people's lives as they struggle toward a realistic and nuanced understanding of the importance, and difficulty, of all kinds of relationships.

Let's not confuse independence with competence and individual mastery. We all want to be competent, whatever the goal, and this usually entails some level of mastery of tasks and concepts. But mastery is a much more complex concept than independence. For one thing, many tasks in which we take pride of mastery are not individual. Take parenthood, or friendship, or collaborative work, as examples. Even when tasks are more individual, mastery is usually in a larger, dependent context. Think even of hitting a baseball. Unless your goal in life is perfection in an arcade batting cage with a mechanical pitcher, how many people are implied in your quest for competence?

Do not forget that the independence of mastery and autonomy is not always individual: families, even countries, look for it as well. But for now, let's

assume that we are talking about an individual, and the issue is something like a later curfew, or starting a relationship, or the ability to solve a complex calculus problem without help. In these matters, individual competence, initiative, and choice are decisive, but they are most meaningful as paths to more fulfilling social relations. It is hard — maybe impossible — to separate the individual fulfillment or success from the approval one gets from others, or from the chance to do more things with other people. Sure, "I can do it myself" is a popular mantra of children. But who *really* wants to? Most of us prefer a little assistance and company for most things. Ultimately, our sense of competence give us a chance for a more fulfilling place in a web of relationships, not an exit from them. We should be mindful of this, and educate toward it.

The direct educational consequences of not enough connection between people are obvious and well known. A major problem in education is the lack of parental and other outside supportive involvement. True, too much assistance in the form of inappropriate tutoring or parental involvement can lead to a student not developing the desired competence, but too little assistance is even worse. This is a much more widespread and pernicious problem than the occasional over-involved parent, but the latter is the much more noticeable and personally difficult for a teacher to handle.

The importance of relationships in all education is illustrated by an anecdote. I start many workshops on education with an exercise: I ask the participants to draw a graph. The Y axis is labeled from 0 to 10, and the X axis from 9 to 12. The instructions for the exercise are, "If 0 is the absolute lowest, and 10 is Nirvana, please assign a number to each of the high school years on the X axis. You can use whatever criterion you would like in doing so." Almost without fail, all participants, whether teachers, parents, or graduate students, will assign the number based on a relational issue: a teacher took an interest in me; my family moved; I finally felt like part of a group of friends; a parent was ill, etc. Almost never will any participant credit an academic reason for their response. In fact, when I ask parents or teachers to remember one essay question from a high school test, they are almost unanimously unable to do so. What is the message here? Certainly not that the curriculum and academics are unimportant; rather, it is that learning always takes place in a context, and that context is always relational.

Explanations

With all of the reasons for abandoning it, why do we fall back on independence as a catchword for so many necessary and desirable achievements, when other rationales would be so much more accurate and helpful? If schools are so obviously dependent situations, why is it so easy to miss this? Something of interest in the psychological sense must be going on.

I think an overemphasis on independence feels so comfortable to us, in my school and across the country, for many reasons. One is the pull of the culture. It is a cliché by now that individualism is highly valued in the United States. Recent social and political trends have if anything been toward more and more of an emphasis on the solitary individual. Let's take some examples.

In the political arena, the past 25 years has seen the denigration of public institutions and the help and care they provide. Public institutions — including hospitals and schools — have been fiscally starved. The concept that private sector is superior to public (e.g., Meier 2004, 8) is not only untrue, it leads to hidden hopelessness about public life, and a retreat to independence.

The negative side of a cultural emphasis on the isolated individual is the sense that being taken care of is contingent, not absolute; it is not a given. In one current and critical example, tens of millions of Americans are independent — read "abandoned" — when they seek health care insurance. That shouldn't be.

Another consequence of the emphasis on independence, also known well to psychologists, is the creation of a personality marked by hardness and grandiosity that both compensates for, and hides, the longing for connections. Teachers often notice and criticize such qualities in students. Psychologists tend to attribute them to developmental issues, specifically adolescence. Is it perhaps, at least in part, also a response to the alienated contexts in which our students find themselves?

One key ideological pillar that supports this state of affairs is the pervasive belief in the weakness of dependency, and the need to go it alone. If independence is often valued, dependence has a bad name. In a recent book on autonomy and dependency, Martha Fineman (2004, 34) observes,

> Dependency is a particularly unappealing and stigmatized term in American political and popular consciousness. The specter of dependency is incompatible with our beliefs and myths. We venerate the autonomous, independent, and self-sufficient individual as our ideal. We assume that anyone can cultivate these characteristics, consistent with our belief in the inherent equality of all members of our society, and we stigmatize those who do not.

People are dependent on alcohol, drugs and welfare. Peers are not to be trusted; their influence is pressure, one shouldn't be dependent on them. There is some truth to some of these assertions. There are kinds of dependency and interrelatedness that are problems for anyone involved. Drug addictions and abusive relationships come readily to mind. More often though, there are qualities of normal and healthy dependencies that can become problems when they are distorted or taken too far. Friends, for example, are not a bad thing to have, but you shouldn't follow them off a cliff, as my generation used to hear from our parents. This is far different from the "peer pressure" propaganda that often makes it seem like no one around you can be trusted.

Unfortunately, schools often emphasize the connected, relational aspects of learning and living when possible dangers are the subject: health/values/sexuality education, for example. These classes are organized as discussion groups more often than are the typical academic subjects, so students end up associating such class structures with these topics. The issues are disproportionately slanted to frightening aspects of socializing: sexually transmitted diseases and decision making (often meaning resisting peer pressure to use illicit drugs). In the end, the classes most directly about our interrelatedness carry the burden of being perceived as soft, not serious, and frightening to boot. The unintended but unmistakable message, that relating is dangerous, obscures the centrality of fulfilling relationships in a life well-lived.

Most of the collaborative aspects of everyday learning in schools turn out to be dangerous. I often ask classes, only half joking, what the most common synonym for collaborative learning is in American education is? (The answer is cheating). In fact, as I have discussed above, collaborative learning is what school is about. We manage to hide this by making the most common indicators of learning — tests and grades — so individualized. We place students on their own, to take tests and do individual assignments, to see if they have "mastered the material" that has been taught in the predominantly social context. Individual mastery is, to be sure, one important objective of education. And understanding what each individual is getting from a group process is essential, too. But why suddenly assess students as if they were predominantly — and preferably — isolated individuals?

The answer is not simply that we value independence. The more central reason is that sorting and ranking, for further education or vocational objectives, is a major component of the educational system. It exists along with, and indeed is inextricably bound with, individual mastery. Schools rank students — as individuals — as part of the systems of sorting them for college, jobs, and status.

Schools are a temporary, and preparatory, environment. The goal — or rather one goal — is to leave. Where one goes after is at least ideologically supposed to be an individual matter. In high-pressured academic environments, enormous value continues to be placed on college admission as an ultimate judgment of student capability and worth. In job applications or further academic pursuits, a light is shone on individual qualities and achievements up to that point in life. But to accomplish the sorting and preparation for independence, schools create wrenching discontinuities between their communal focus and the individual, competitive evaluation process.

Can this individual ranking system be changed? I hope so. A rethinking of emphasis on the values we are promoting in schools cannot directly change the reality of the world students enter after their formal education is complete. But the defeatist deference to

the "real world" makes all of our lives in the present that much less fulfilling.

Another explanation of the confusion and tension around independence and interdependence is the question of authority. The relationships between student and teacher, while unavoidable, are not equal. School is inherently coercive, both legally and philosophically. The agents of this coercion are the adults. Students have to be there, both in actual fact and because of the consequences of not attending. The authority aspect of this relationship is both unavoidable and troubling to all participants. It is the vehicle for learning and teaching, and it puts a strong stamp on the specific qualities of the interdependence in education.

Alternatives

Up to this point, I have focused on our overemphasis on independence, but I have not said much about dependence and interconnectedness as goals in their own right. Now I would like to propose we consider the concept of "mature interdependence," as used by Martha Nussbaum (2001, 224).

Nussbaum is a philosopher, and currently a Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago Law School. Her book *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* is a treatise on the role of emotions in the broad range of human experience. Her concept of mature interdependence expands on the psychoanalyst W. R. D. Fairbairn's (1952) work. Mature interdependence, in brief, is the recognition of need and connection with others, along with an understanding, and even protection, of their separateness.

While Nussbaum uses psychoanalysis as an important reference point, she goes well beyond the traditional psychoanalytic focus on the family as the shaper and educator of emotional life. She emphasizes the importance of institutions:

> People cultivate emotions in larger social and political groupings, and they need to learn the types of imagination and empathy suitable to those interactions. (Nussbaum 2001, 225-226)

This is both a good, provocative definition of education, and a call for a broader understanding of where ongoing interdependence fits in young people's growth.

Can we use this paradigm as a standard for schools in general and educational techniques in particular? Learning the types of imagination and empathy suitable to all kinds of social interactions should in fact be a central goal of education. Nussbaum raises the question: What features should environments have to create the conditions for healthy emotional growth? This is exactly the question that schools must reflect on as they design their curriculum and structure. Schools and education are pivotal environments for the early development — or lack of development — of a healthy emotional life.

On one point, Nussbaum (2001, 228) is particularly relevant to our concerns here: "They [institutions] can express the idea that need is a sign of shameful failure, or they can express the idea that need is a normal part of being human." Which do we create when we structure educational experiences around aloneness and "independence?"

Based on this framework, I have several suggestions for our current and future practice and research.

Develop Mature Interdependence

Education should create contexts for students to develop toward mature interdependence — in their intellectual development, their personal lives, and in their recognition of their place in society. They need to "do their own work" — to develop more and greater competence — in this realm. We teach the connections between people in the curriculum. We should live them in our school environment.

Schools need to find ways to place less emphasis on the coercive, sorting, and competitive aspects of what we do, which, as I said earlier, provide the underlying impetus to an ethos of independence. One way to pursue this is to look at alternatives to grading, and alternatives to testing as a means of assessing performance. Competence can be demonstrated in many different ways. An individual (not necessarily independent) piece of work — under our tutelage — is only one. Looking for competence in interdependence would be an interesting exercise and a shift in perspective for many schools. This might involve group projects. It might also involve ongoing collaborations with teachers, and other students, toward broad goals of understanding. Most work —

even class work — is like this, most of the time. Interdependent people work together to pursue projects and goals and judge their success in a variety of ways, both along the way and at the project's end.

Study Interdependence

Educators and educational researchers need to study the various specific aspects of our interdependence. Among the most important is *authority.* It is important for teachers to acknowledge the power of their influence on students, and vice versa, and to recognize that it is a key component of interdependence in schools. We are used to acknowledging the influence of a particular teacher on one student: the times many of us remember when our own lives were changed by a teacher's care and interest. But even deeper in the very fabric of education, is the process of influence that is the basis of transmission of knowledge and competencies from one person to others.

Harold Bloom (1973) wrote a book with an evocative title, to which I oftenreturn: *The Anxiety of Influence.* The title captures how difficult, unavoidable, and central is our influence on others, and that it cannot help but provoke anxiety to think about it and indeed to participate in it. The study of influence, then, shouldn't be limited to its cognitive and curricular aspects. If we are to be consistent in looking at the big picture of interdependence, its emotional component is indispensable. Back to Nussbaum: We are talking about how we learn, and how we live, in broad social groupings.

Another important component needing research is the development of the specific qualities of interdependence through the educational lifecycle. Interdependence looks different in earlier grades, at earlier ages, than it does with adolescents in high school classrooms. I suggest that, as interdependence becomes more and more internalized, what we learn first from the outside becomes part of our own competence, allowing more and different aspects of interdependence to surface, while others are present but less evident. This is something of a restatement of the Vygotskian view (Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch 1985). One advantage of seeing things this way is that even individual activity is based on an internalization of social competencies and norms; what we have called "independence" is still evidence of interdependence.

Focus on the Present

The focus on the future in education has played an inevitable, but often pernicious role, making it easy to ignore things that aren't related to often ill-defined future goals. That means the process of interdependence in schools can be ignored because it doesn't appear to be related to the student's future. It was Dewey (1974) who advocated for a present-based approach to education. I will add the observation that interdependence is a present-based phenomenon; it is the process of education, minute to minute, day to day. But it is also what frames and supports our memories of our education. It shapes our self-concepts, especially in reference to peer and authority relationships. Therefore, we should reshape our idea of school as preparatory to the future, to include its role in preparing us for being with, working with, and caring for others (e.g., Noddings 2002). One prepares for this future by living in, and paying attention to, the present.

Remember that Schools are Interdependent Institutions

Schools must devote more attention to their role as *interdependent institutions*. This extends from the school-family-student nexus, to the idea of school as a community institution (e.g., Harkavy and Puckett 1994). The tensions and conflicts around these roles should be seen not as distractions, but as integral to the school mission.

Morality, Ethics, Behavioral Standards as Ongoing Relationships

Mature interdependence points to a perspective on morality, ethics and behavioral standards that is based on ongoing relationships rather than discrete "virtues" to be instilled. This is very much in line with Noddings's ethic of care. For Noddings (2002, 20), students should work together, not just for the sake of the product, but to develop "competence in caring." Education in ethics and morality becomes much more seamless with this as a foundation.

Interdependence and Creativity

The relationship of interdependence to creativity, originality, and nonconformity should be explored and nurtured. Mature independence should be the springboard for a fulfilled, flourishing life which in-

volves the capacity for each of these qualities. "To confirm others is to bring out the best in them" (Noddings 2002, 20). But defining an interdependent community as a fertile context for creativity is essential to differentiating it from groupthink, on the one hand, and creativity as a product of aloneness, on the other. Each of these has a place in a school and in life in general. But they should not be what a school chooses to nurture.

Interdependence as a Value Statement

The emphasis on interdependence is more than a statement of fact. It is a value statement. A classroom based on mature interdependence, even as measured in traditional terms of achievement, can be every bit as good and effective as the more individualistic model. But its justification is not to be found in what works best by any external standard, and certainly not in what best prepares young people for the competition and alienation that are at least a part of all of our adult lives. Rather than focusing on what *works* best, we should be guided by what "is best, by what contributes to our most audacious conception of creating good people and a good life. Other educational goals should be secondary.

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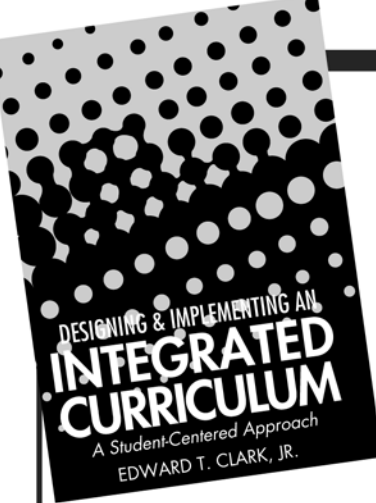

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Book Reviews

Teaching Toward Freedom: Moral Commitment and Ethical Action in the Classroom

by William Ayers

Published by Beacon Press (Boston, 2004)

Reviewed by Arthur T. Maloney

For the past several years, I have had the opportunity to closely observe the continuing struggle of the New York City public school system. Working with scripted curricula and forced to teach to tests, the teachers are often demoralized, and schools of education continue to be targeted for failing to prepare effective teachers for under-resourced communities. In response, both teachers and the institutions that prepare them appear timid and defensive. They don't know how to confront the rising chorus of those who would marginalize and diminish the substance of the teaching profession.

It is into this morass that William Ayers descends, and he demands that we "release the birds of prey" (p. ix) so that educators can regain our standing as central figures in the struggle. His fundamental message is a clarion call in the face of relentless opposition to reclaim our voices and rediscover the passions and fundamentals that brought us to teaching in the first place. The message is that only though vigilance and a sophisticated appreciation of the forces of coercion and domination can we hope to engage the goals of freedom, humanity, and enlightenment, which he believes should define the teaching profession. His purpose is to encourage an expansion of our thinking beyond our own parochial settings so that we engage the larger issues of absolutism and commercialism, which threaten to erode our fundamental commitments to all children. *Teaching Toward Freedom* rallies our spirits in a continuing search for the ethical in teaching and particularly for a set of moral commitments that might act as a sextant and rudder in our own endless commitment to advocacy for children and the cause of humanity (pp. 137-138).

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Despite the pressures for teachers to retreat from voicing their opinions on the moral questions of the day, Ayers reminds us that "education is always for something and against something else" (p. 10). To regain our footing, *Teaching Toward Freedom* seeks a return to the Socratic tradition of posing a constant array of important moral and ethical questions, not only for our disengaged students, but for what Barth (2001, 21) calls our increasing ranks of "at risk educators." Struggling with our own dilemmas will provoke imaginative insights into how students learn and invest themselves in true understanding. We must remain focused and committed to the requirement that we question everything.

> What does it mean to be a human being? What does it mean to be educated? What does it mean to take responsibility for ourselves and others? (p. 85)

Change is possible and through activism and ethical behavior, we can inspire students to look in new directions and reach beyond their grasp to change the world. Ayers defines activism as thrusting each of us into the world of moral choice.

> Everything depends on the truth of the state of affairs exposed, described, opposed —- Does the action resist unjust hurt, unnecessary suffering, avoidable pain? Did it educate others? Did the action inform, illuminate, alter or expand our collective consciousness? Did it educate both participants and witnesses? Did it build a broader community? (p. 111)

A step toward change is returning educational responsibility for learning to students through provoc-

ative questioning, timely facilitation, active listening, and most importantly through modeling the behaviors at the core of our beliefs. In short, becoming "students of our students," and more importantly, actively taking up their causes (p. 66). Public education, the last best hope of those not born to privilege, is under attack from the relentless forces of market fundamentalism under the guise of choice and freedom (p. 119). Teachers can help students break social constraints and envision a world based on moral and ethical virtue by developing in students the art of questioning and grappling with ambiguity and inculcating a desire to understand deeply so that the "republic of many voices" orchestrates a world of real choices and abundant possibilities (p. 105).

This book should be seen as the primer for examining our essential purposes as teachers, leaders, and citizens of conscience. Do our personal and professional platitudes mean anything? How are conceptual frameworks that are built on social justice, reflective practice, and beliefs about children manifested in our policies and dispositions? Ayers maintains his revolutionary roots, compelling us to embrace new visions that require a capacity to look at the world as if it could be otherwise, as well as a spirit of activism combined with skepticism, urgency, and patience (p. 158).

Teaching Toward Freedom should be required reading for those who can see the bankruptcy in current government efforts at reform and, by default, have honored the "contract of mutual indifference" (p. 128). It should be required reading for teachers at all levels and prospective teachers who aspire to the nobility and challenge of the moral, ethical, and intellectual commitment that is required of true professionals. Kolberg understood the paradox between school and education. He wrote, "to learn, to understand and to feel justice, students have to be both treated justly and called upon to act justly, if we are to create environments built around great virtues"(Power, Higgins, and Kohlberg 1989, 25).

Given the sad state of urban education and the "blame the victim" rhetoric of both the left and right, are we not ready to end the hopelessness? Ayers answers yes and asks us to imagine a different way. We must take up the cause of children through new visions of moral and ethical teaching, and create the structures to make them reality.

> We encourage our students to name the world, to identify obstacles, to join with others to link their consciousness to their conduct and we act. It is here that the dialogue begins around … a radical shift in consciousness and a rejection of both the conservative mainstream and the liberal reformers in favor of more fundamental structural and personal transformation. (p. 158)

I continue to hear the voices of those who would "fix" the persistent scandal of urban public education, and I am struck by the fact that there always seems to be a host of answers but few questions. If awareness and choice are the territory of the ethical, we seem to be moving further down the road to fewer choices, less accountability to our parents and students and the depersonalization of our children. Ayers offers a "pedagogy of hope" (p. 105) by inspiring us, challenging us, and reminding us why we became teachers in the first place. He provides another way to look at education and reform by moving pointedly away from the path that appears to promise yet another generation of lost children, more decisive sorting of winners and losers, and the reduction of teaching to prescribed formulas and scripted programs. You come away from *Teaching Toward Freedom* reminded that teaching is fundamentally about changing the world.

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Regarding Children's Words: Teacher Research on Language and Literacy

Brookline Teacher Researcher Seminar, edited by Cynthia Ballenger

Teachers College Press (New York, 2004)

Reviewed by Sally Smith

Can teachers and researchers disseminate new insights into learning, hear each other, and also be heard by policymakers (Michaels 2004)? This edited volume of writings by members of the Brookline Teacher Researcher Seminar takes up these tasks with considerable success.

The book provides narratives that are a breath of fresh air in the contemporary educational context of scripted lessons and one-size-fits-all curricula. The narratives illuminate how teachers *can* bridge the pleasurable, enthusiastic, and personally meaningful engagement in literature, oral stories, and writing described here. They also provide an understanding of and appreciation for the conventions of writing and other literature. These are conventions all children will need, particularly children who do not come to school knowing the language of power and the literacies that go with it (Delpit 1988; 1995). If a fundamental purpose of schooling in the United States is to prepare students to participate actively and effectively in a democracy, then "teachers need to bring into classrooms robust understandings about content, pedagogy, and children through engaging students in … imagining the impossible" (Schultz 2003, 2). These narratives reveal both children and teachers moving way beyond minimum standards and mandated performance objectives to critical and imaginative thinking and doing.

In this collection of narratives, we also see children and teenagers taking stories and writing as invitations to have loud and lively conversations about issues of concern to them. These conversations invited a thoughtful group of teacher-researchers to reflect on their own teaching and attitudes toward literacy and the imagination. In her introduction, literacy researcher Sarah Michaels lists questions frequently raised about teacher research, among them, "How does one do it, and what kind of knowledge does it produce?" (p. vii) She describes the uniqueness of this particular group of teacher-researchers in its ability to maintain two visions in its work, the "concrete particulars of classroom life and the abstract generalizations about children, teaching and learning " (p. viii).

The Brookline Teacher Researchers are a changing group of practitioners who have been meeting and working together for fourteen years to look at literacy as talk and in writing. As this book demonstrates, the teachers focused on what they found confusing or inadequate in their teaching and on the children they felt they were not reaching, or whose learning approaches mystified them. Their process was to share raw data with colleagues, ponder the data, and make suggestions for further work and observation. The conversations and data collection were always connected to improving teaching practices through listening to children's written and spoken words. A unique aspect of their practice, which is vividly manifested in the children's writing, was their own openness and vulnerability in sharing what they learned. The teachers' insights into their students' literacy purposes became the key to understanding those students' multiple strengths and how to work with them.

In this book teachers share with us their insights and the curriculum that followed in narratives that draw the reader into their classrooms and their students' minds. In the first chapter, Ann Phillips sets a frame for the chapters that follow by using the metaphor of turns in a conversation. Expanding upon McDonald's (1986, 7) concept of voice as" highlight[ing] the uttering of the voice, the very power to utter…," she uses the concept of voices in conversation, inviting others to speak fully (p. 13). She describes how, searching for a methodology for examining language in the classroom, the teachers learned about ethnography and sociolinguistics so that "children's voices are lifted out of the rush of classroom events and brought in as a focal point of attention among this group of teachers and researchers" (p. 19). Each

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chapter in the book is a "turn" in the conversation about children's words.

These turns become provocative prompts for teachers and teacher-educators to examine their own practices. Turn-takers in this volume include Steve Griffin, who explores his own discoveries about literacy through the "teaching" of a gifted second-grade storyteller, who transforms sharing time and students' literacy engagement in "I Need People." Cynthia Ballenger's valuable work in early literacy is represented through a chapter from her book *Teaching Other People's Children* that focuses on her Haitian-American students' engagement with a picture book. Thoughtful and challenging examinations of the literacy of "special" teenagers occur in Cindy Beseler's "Students Talking and Writing their Way into 'Functional' Worlds"; Roxanne Pappeneimer's "What's Real about Imagination?" and "Mainstreaming: Entering Another Classroom's Culture" by Susan Black-Donellan. Each of these chapters challenges mainstream thinking about the place of the Individual Education Plan and functional literacy in the education of special needs students. Jim Swain describes his growth as a teacher by regarding children's words in peer-editing processes in "In Search of an Honest Response." Karen Gallas's valuable chapter, "Look, Karen, I'm Running like Jello: Imagination as a Question, a Topic, a Tool for Literacy Research and Learning," is a complex and creative rumination on the role of imagination in learning and her own understanding of the conditions under which it can take place.

The teachers and researchers who speak though this text provide a model for attending to and responding with deep understanding of the students we teach. For teachers and those who help to educate them, these chapters provide insights into a wide range of culturally centered literacy, from kindergarten to high school. The ethnographic data embedded in each teacher-researcher's narrative or turn in the conversation highlights the recognition of the rich resources children and young adults bring to their learning. They also model teacher introspection and practice. Contributors found themselves challenged in areas that were at the heart of their teaching and were moved to examine their own values and biases toward literacy and the role of imagination and cultural practices in education. They discussed the students' manipulation of the structure and content of their literacy lessons to their own needs, which focus on personal and shared ownership of reading and writing.

This volume also has relevance for educational policy. These narratives exemplify the literacy research that needs to be included in teaching and learning guidelines. They provide outstanding evidence of what quality literacy looks like. Many of the teachers began the investigations of their classrooms thinking that students were lacking in experience. The teachers assumed that they would have to remediate the deficits, probably by means of district, state, and federally mandated guidelines for reading and writing. In each case, this deficit model was overturned as teacher-researchers watched their students create their own meaning about print.

In response to the current political frame of reference, which concentrates on high stakes testing and narrow expectations, the practices and dispositions in this volume provide important evidence that reflective observations, supported by thoughtful, creative teaching that incorporates children's own knowledge, do work. Yet this is precisely the type of qualitative and ethnographic research that will not be considered to be "scientifically based" by policy makers. It is not likely to be included in new state and national policy.

How might the important data in this volume receive wider audiences? In the early days of the Brookline Teacher Researcher Seminar university-based literacy researchers identified foundations that fostered this ethnographic, teacher-based research. The well-regarded researchers and writers represented in this volume would do well to renew these efforts, locating foundations or other platforms that will disseminate this case-by-case research to those in policymaking positions. This reviewer and all of us who attend national literacy conferences have come to recognize the importance of organizing our constituencies to become advocates for what we know works.

The vivid narratives in *Regarding Children's Words* reveal classrooms where children "reached into the resources of their culture" (Ballenger 1999) to make sense of literacy and of story — classrooms as public

spaces where exciting and meaningful literary experiences are produced, shared, and revised. The explicit and implicit strategies for teaching a broad range of literacies, from skills to critical thinking and personal connections, provide a model blueprint for teachers who do not have the support and resources of a teacher research group, as well as a vision for U.S. educational policy.

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Race-ing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice

Edited by Vanessa Siddle Walker and John R. Snarey

Published by Teachers College Press (New York, 2004)

Reviewed by Patricia M. Cooper

Race-ing Moral Formation promises nothing less than a "new understanding of moral formation" in African Americans. In doing so, it delivers a bold and original challenge to the two reigning paradigms in moral education: Lawrence Kohlberg's ethic of justice and Carol Gilligan's well-known response to Kohlberg, her ethic of care. The book is original because it fronts race, and the African American experience in particular, as making a substantive contribution to our knowledge of moral psychology and education. It goes without saying that with few exceptions a white European perspective has been the default mode to date. The book is bold because a focus on African Americans in any discussion of human development opens the door for what Janie Ward in the book's Foreword called the "less than" view of full development. Editors and authors Vanessa Siddle Walker and John Snarey, both of Emory University, deftly close the door on this possibility. They theorize that because the moral formation of African Americans is shaped by their outsider and historically oppressed status, their moral orientation is at once more complex and more practical than either an ethic of justice or an ethic of care can provide.

Significantly, the authors do not reject a justice or care orientation, but merge them in what they call an "African American voice of care-*and*-justice" (italics mine). As several of the contributors in this volume attest, the merger follows naturally from W. E. Dubois's theory of the "double consciousness" that African Americans are forced to develop in order to maintain a healthy sense of self and community in a society that seeks to deny them both.

Siddle Walker and Snarey embed their care-and-justice ethic in a set of five African American justice and care basic values:

- Race is not subordinate to gender.
- Resistance is not subordinate to accommodation.
- Religion is not subordinate to ethics.
- Agency is not subordinate to legacy.
- Community is not subordinate to the individual..

A key characteristic of these values, in keeping with Dubois's "double consciousness," is obviously their dualistic nature. What makes them distinctive is the insubordination of race, resistance, religion, and community to the prevailing emphasis on gender, accommodation, ethics, legacy, and the individual in moral development.

The authors are careful not to claim these values as inclusive of all African Americans or exclusive of non-African Americans. Still, they are African-American-based. Siddle Walker and Snarey see them as, first, a "useful rubric for enlarging our understandings of care and justice and in providing a foundation that will help reshape the moral discussion." Second, they suggest that African Americans' unifi-

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cation of a justice-and-care orientation "represents the potential inherent in the African American contribution" to our understanding of moral psychology and education (p. 12). Siddle Walker and Snarey conceptualize these values developmentally, beginning with race and gender and moving on towards community and individualism. Further, as depicted in the "Matrix of Care and Justice Primary Values: Five Developing Virtues," the dualistic nature of these values ultimately results in the individual's acquisition of a new virtue or "ethical attitude." Race and gender produce liberation. Resistance and accommodation lead to pluralism. Religion and ethics yield hope. Empowerment is the sum of agency and legacy, and uplift is the culmination of community and the individual.

Despite Siddle Walker and Snarey's use of the justice and ethics of care in their conceptualization of the African American experience, their reach here is as significant, if not more, than Gilligan's introduction of the female perspective in moral psychology a generation earlier. They are claiming that, in general (all caveats accepted), African Americans lead different lives than their white counterparts. Thus, their moral formation is different. They are asking readers to believe that in substantive ways mothering, teaching, and other fundamental social acts do not look the same in the African American community as in the mainstream. The evidence suggests they are right. Concepts such as "diasporan ethics," "dualistic basic values relative to subordination," "othermothering," are not claimed by White Americans. To approach this volume with an open mind is to accept this starting point.

Siddle Walker and Snarey's introduction and conclusion bookend the six chapters, divided into two parts. The chapters stand alone as research on African American development and education, though each is amplified by the editors' theoretical framework. That is, as explicated in Appendix B, each is also illustrative of the duality, reflective of the five basic values that bespeak the African American consciousness across the lifespan in response to and in spite of racism.

Part I focuses on the moral formation of African Americans during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Chapter 1, by Audrey Thompson, "Caring and Colortalk: Childhood Innocence in White and Black," disavows the traditional sentimental view of childhood as both innocent and colorblind. Thompson writes that a colorblind approach is tantamount to racism as it simultaneously denies the reality of black children and their families as it perpetuates more of the same. By contrast, "colortalk," through which adults and educators expose inherent racism, is seen as a caring response that helps young black children cope with an unjust world. Thompson provides an unexpected example of colortalk in her discussion of a black parenting style, often ridiculed by whites, that "demands unquestioning obedience" from young children. What black parents know, and what whites do not fathom by virtue of their colorblindness, is that noncompliance could put children in serious danger in a racist world.

Garret Duncan in Chapter 2, "The Play of Voices: Black Adolescent Constituting the Self and Morality," writes of adolescents "bicultural moral voices" and "diasporan and ethnic voices." Biculturalism once again affirms the dualistic or double consciousness lens through which African Americans — in this case, adolescents — adapt to and resist a racist society. His description of black adolescents' use of "diasporan African voices" illuminates black youth's use of language and narrative that is represented by the mainstream media. Interviews with 22 black adolescents reveal "three conjunctive sets of diasporan African voices within a framework that expresses perspectives that affirm black life and culture: subordinate-subjugated voices, unofficial-underground voices, and transgressive-profane voices" (p. 43). Garnett argues that caring and just teachers enable black youth to cultivate these voices appropriate to their ethical development and participation in a "culturally democratic and socially just society" (p. 54).

In Chapter 3, "In a Different Room: Toward an African American Woman's Ethic of Care and Justice," Andrea Green acknowledges ties to Gilligan's ethic of care (p. 60), but moves away from it at the same time, metaphorically relocating black women's moral development to a "different room," a new "place," where "black womanist ethics" can thrive. Womanist ethics depend heavily on "narrative art" central to black folk culture and transmit-

ted from generation to generation. Embedded in narrative are the "womanist values" of improvization, unction, suspicion of assimilation, interconnectedness, and spirituality, all of which aid the dualistic nature of African American female experience. Interestingly, while Green claims the right to a different room where universality of experience is denied and black women's ethics are affirmed, she concludes by making room for all women who "understand moral agency in similar ways" (p. 71). She acknowledges that this may require not a room, but many rooms in one household where the occupants are free to wander about, and are known by all. More than a gesture of openness, Green's concluding metaphor reveals a fundamental truth of black womanist ethics: the quest for both freedom and recognition.

Part 2 focuses on African American classroom practices in light of the one-size-fits-all attempts at moral education that have long held sway over the curriculum. In Chapter 4, "Caring in the Past: The Case of a Southern Segregated African American School," Siddle Walker and Renarta Tompkins look to the literature on segregated schools to describe institutional caring that is in stark contrast to current norms in schools that serve African American children. The research suggests these schools were marked by a range of desirable characteristics, from teacher proficiency to parental involvement, all of which were embedded in "the belief that caring was the very foundation of the education that occurred" (p. 78). Institutional caring was embodied in teachers and principals who acted as counselors, encouragers, benefactors, and racial cheerleaders. Institutional support of caring came in the form of extracurricular and assembly programs, a rigorous curriculum, and a homeroom plan which allowed teachers to follow a class for four years. Siddle Walker and Tompkins call on educators and community leaders to utilize the research of segregated schools to construct modern institutions of learning in which caring plays a central role.

Edward St. John and Joseph Cadray's Chapter 5, "Justice and Care in Postdesegregation Urban Schools: Rethinking the Role of Teacher Education Programs," presents a view of the caring practices in the segregated school that is similar to that of Siddle Walker and Tompkins in the previous chapter. Turning their attention to desegregated schools, they call for a revival of these caring practices. "The ethic of care that was once central to African American schooling, but was almost lost as a result of desegregation, should be intentionally revived and nurtured within contemporary school contexts" (p. 98). They describe a successful intervention study in which teacher educators were helped to expand their frames of teacher preparation, shaped by a justice orientation, to include the African American teaching tradition rooted in care. The authors direct teacher education institutions to formalize their support for the African American teaching tradition, as embodied in an ethic of care.

The last chapter, "Crime and Punishment: Moral Dilemmas in the Inner-City Classroom," by Jennifer Obidah, Marquita Jackson-Minot, Carla R. Monroe, and Brian Williams, examines the tender balance between an ethic of care and an ethic of justice through a teacher's moral dilemma when faced with a nonviolent child attempting to do the right thing in possession of a gun. The authors present a compelling case for why teacher educators must prepare teachers who can temper justice with care and vice versa. The authors embed a review of the literature on educational theories related to care to argue for the triumph of humane learning environments over ideological imperatives.

Race-ing Moral Formation is an important book in that it successfully challenges the exclusion of the African American experience from moral psychology and education theory. In various and compelling ways, the authors document the dualistic nature of the African American value system, from childhood to adulthood, as so substantially different from white men or women that it cannot be subsumed under other moral frameworks. *Race-ing Moral Formation* is also a most necessary book. We live and teach in a time in which the majority of African American students are receiving neither a just nor a caring education. The authors present convincing arguments for the study and inclusion of African American teaching practices all but lost, or at least devalued, in teacher education programs.

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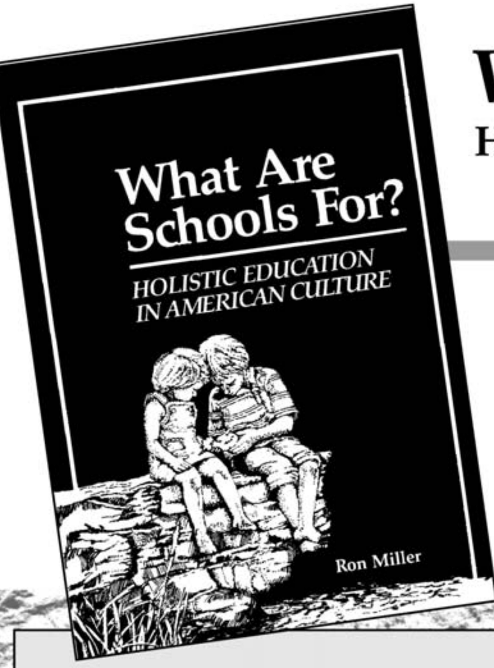

What Are Schools For?

Holistic Education in American Culture

by Ron Miller, Ph.D.

What Are Schools For? is a powerful exposition and critique of the historical context and cultural/philosophical foundations of contemporary mainstream American education. It focuses on the diverse group of person-centered educators of the past two centuries and explores their current relevance to the new challenges facing education in the post-industrial age.

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