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ENCOUNTER

Education for Meaning and Social Justice



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EDUCATION FOR MEANING AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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Synthetic Turf

Across the country, schools, parks, and private sports facilities are installing the “new generation” synthetic turf. It is springier than the old AstroTurf and feels much more like natural grass. It also has appealing advantages over natural grass; it doesn’t get muddy during the rain or torn up by players’ cleats, so it permits teams to fit more games and practices into their schedules.

But as a developmental psychologist, I am concerned about it.

Today’s children largely grow up in synthetic, indoor environments — doing homework, watching TV, playing video games, surfing the Internet. They have little contact with soil, grass, trees, wind, and birdsong. Two nationwide surveys have found that 6- to 12-year-olds spend an average of less than one hour a week in free outdoor play (Hofferth and Sandberg 2001; Juster, Ono & Stafford 2004). When children do get outdoors, they often play organized sports. Until recently, sports at least gave children some experience with nature. But now, with the growing popularity of synthetic turf fields, their experience with nature is becoming less than ever.

Children’s alienation from nature is a serious problem. A growing body of research suggests that children need contact with nature to fully develop their cognitive and emotional capacities.

Nature’s Benefits for Psychological Development

Specifically, contact with nature benefits children in three ways (Crain 1997; 2006): Nature stimulates children’s senses and powers of patient observation; nature stimulates children’s creativity; and natural settings instill a sense of peace and oneness with the larger web of life.

Nature Stimulates Children’s Senses and Powers of Patient Observation

We see this at an early age, as when a toddler at the beach spends hours investigating sand, patting and handling it with intense concentration. When older children are given time to play in parks, weedy va-

cant lots, or woods, they often spend long stretches of time observing birds, plants, stones, and insects.

Childhood attention problems have become widespread, and children’s lack of time in natural settings might be a factor. Children lack the experiences with nature that engage their senses and foster patient observation. Studies by Andrea Taylor and others (Crain 2006) suggest that when children are given time in even sparse natural settings — settings with just a little grass and vegetation — their ability to focus improves.

Nature Stimulates Children’s Creativity

In natural settings, children love to build things such as shelters and hideouts under large bushes and trees. Sitting in their shelters, their imaginations roam. Nature also provides many themes in children’s drawings, such as clouds, grass, trees, birds, and flowers, and nature inspires much of the poetry they create (Crain 2003, Ch. 3, and 2006).

Natural Settings Instill a Sense of Peace And Oneness with the Larger Web of Life

As environmental researcher Louise Chawla (1990) points out, such experiences are prominent in adult autobiographies. The African-American minister Howard Thurman (1979) described his boyhood feelings of unity with nature in Florida. These feelings were especially intense when he walked along the seashore at night. He sometimes felt that “all things, the sand, the sea, the stars, the night, and I were one lung through which all life breathed” (p. 225). Such experiences, Thurman said,

gave me a certain overriding immunity against much of the pain with which I would have to deal in the years ahead when the ocean was only a memory. The sense held: I felt rooted in life, in nature, in existence. (Thurman 1979, 8)

Grass playing fields, of course, only expose children to nature to a limited degree. When it comes to stimulating children’s senses and imaginations,

playing fields don't compare to forests or oceans. But even grass playing fields can be beneficial to children, especially when adults give children time to play in their own ways. After informal games, youngsters often relax on a field, examining blades of grass, weeds, and dirt. They listen to the wind, feel the sun's warmth, and watch birds, insects, and butterflies. Their senses are engaged.

And their imaginations stir. Lying on the grass, children sometimes look up at clouds and sky and ponder questions such as where the universe ends, and what's behind the sky. One girl told me she likes to toss blades of grass into the air and imagine that they are "grass angels." The research of Andrea Taylor and others (Crain 2006) suggests that even sparse greenery stimulates more creative fantasy play among inner-city children than barren environments.

It seems unlikely, of course, that a grass playing field can instill the profound sense of unity with nature that Howard Thurman described. Still, on one bleak November day, I took a walk along a grass field in Manhattan's Riverside Park and had an experience a bit like Thurman's. I stood still for a few minutes, feeling the mud at my feet and the wind coming off the Hudson River. As I looked at the birds walking on the nearby grass and flying in the overcast sky, I had a sense of being part of something vast and mysterious. I doubt this feeling would have occurred on synthetic turf.

Because children benefit from rich contact with nature, I was distressed to learn, in 2004, that the New York City Parks Department planned to destroy four acres of natural soil and grass fields in Riverside Park and install synthetic turf. I asked several local residents to help try to get the Parks Department to change its mind. We wrote letters to it and to many other public officials; we held forums and rallies; and we gathered over 600 signatures on a petition. But we couldn't stop the installation of the artificial turf.

Potentially Hazardous Chemicals

When, early in 2006, I visited Riverside Park's new synthetic fields, I was surprised to see large concentrations of tiny rubber granules on the surface. I knew that the granules are an important component of the new turf, contributing to its resiliency. But I

also knew that the granules typically come from recycled rubber tires and might contain toxic chemicals, and I had assumed the granules would be at the base of the turf, out of the reach of children and athletes. I hadn't imagined they would be so prevalent on the surface. As I picked up a handful, a boy came over and said, "I get them in my shoes and they pour out when I take my shoes off at home."

Today's children largely grow up in synthetic, indoor environments — doing homework, watching TV, playing video games, surfing the Internet. They have little contact with soil, grass, trees, wind, and birdsong.

I therefore asked Junfeng (Jim) Zhang, a professor of environmental and occupational health at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, if he would analyze two samples of the granules for the presence of two kinds of potentially toxic chemicals — polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and heavy metals. Dr. Zhang's lab found that both samples contained six PAHs at levels sufficiently high that the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation would require their removal if they were in contaminated soil sites (Crain and Zhang 2006).

We next analyzed three additional samples from other New York City parks. The lab found three of the same PAHs at elevated levels (Crain and Zhang 2007a). These results were not as dramatic as our initial findings. However, all the PAHs that we detected at elevated levels are likely to be carcinogenic to humans, so they are cause for concern (International Agency for Research on Cancer 2006).

Dr. Zhang's lab also found worrisome concentrations of zinc and lead (Crain and Zhang 2006). Zinc isn't necessarily toxic to humans; in fact, a certain amount of zinc is good for our health. But excessive zinc can cause illnesses (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry 2005).

Lead was only present in relatively modest concentrations, but health scientists generally believe that no lead should be added to the environment because even low amounts can cause neurocognitive problems in children (Canfield et al. 2003).

Other research is consistent with our findings (Plessner & Lund 2004; Mattina et al. 2007; Rochesterians Against the Misuse of Pesticides 2007). But I want to

Children need to develop their senses, creativity, and feelings of being part of the larger web of life.

emphasize that most of the research so far only shows that toxic chemicals are *present* in the rubber granules. We do not yet know if the chemicals can be *absorbed* into the bodies of children and athletes through inhalation, skin contact, or ingestion. Research on this question is only in its initial stages and is needed before we know whether the granules are a serious health hazard (see Crain and Zhang 2007b for a review of the research to date).

In recent months, some public officials have voiced concerns about the toxic chemicals in synthetic turf. The number of such officials is still small, but it shows signs of growing. Some elected representatives, such as New York State Assembly member Steve Englebright, have called for moratoriums on new synthetic turf installations until more research has been conducted on the health risks. Any moratorium would be a positive precautionary step. It would be in the interest of public health.

At the same time, I would like to note that before the findings on toxic chemicals came to light, public officials showed scant interest in the entire issue of synthetic vs. natural grass. I worked hard to describe the psychological benefits of natural soil and grass, but to no avail. Only when the officials heard about potential toxicants did their ears perk up. This is distressing because children need to develop the psychological qualities that nature promotes. They need to develop their senses, creativity, and feelings of being part of the larger web of life.

— William Crain, Editor

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Fulfilling One's Calling

An Interview with Free School Educator Chris Mercogliano

William Crain

Noted educator and writer Chris Mercogliano describes the difficult process by which he found his life mission and discusses the central ideas behind freedom-based education.

WILLIAM CRAIN: Chris, would you tell us where you grew up and what your early life was like?

CHRIS MERCOGLIANO: I was born in Washington D.C. in 1954. When I was a year old, my father — who was an attorney with the Internal Revenue Service — bought a new house out in the suburbs of Washington. But then he died in 1958, and my mother, brother, sister, and I moved back into the city. I went to public school in Washington through junior high school. And then, for high school, I went to a Jesuit prep school in the Maryland suburbs.

CRAIN How did you like the prep school?

MERCOGLIANO: I didn't like it. The priests were fairly abusive, not sexually abusive, just mean. One time I got lifted out of my seat by my hair by my Latin professor, a big, tall 60-or-so-year-old Irish priest. I didn't even know what I'd done. All I could gather was I'd said something. I must've cursed in the hall and he heard me.

The school was also pretty boring, and very cliquish. It wasn't my idea to go there; it was mother and my stepfather's idea. They were anxious for me to go to a prestigious college, and they thought this would put me on the right track. The school had a very good academic reputation.

CRAIN: And after high school?



CHRIS MERCOGLIANO worked for 35 years at the Free School in Albany, NY, as a teacher and administrator. His most recent book is *In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids Inner Wildness* (Beacon 2007), and he is currently at work on a new book, *The Heart in Education*.



WILLIAM CRAIN is a professor of psychology at the City College of New York and the editor of *Encounter*. He is the author of *Reclaiming Childhood: Letting Children be Children in Our Achievement-Oriented Society*, and works on behalf of open access to higher education and the protection of nature and animals.

MERCOGLIANO: I went to Washington and Lee University in Virginia for a year.

CRAIN: How did that go for you?

MERCOGLIANO: It was very exciting intellectually. This was during the early 1970s, a liberal period in educational history, and at Washington and Lee, a small college, we had a lot of free choice. We didn't have to choose a major right away, and we could explore our own interests. So I really liked the school, but a lot of things were going on for me at the same time.

For one thing, I was away from home for the first time. And pretty quickly, I started thinking for myself. Also, the Vietnam War was going on and the whole counter-culture movement was in full swing. Having grown up in a conventional home, I hadn't had much exposure to those events. I started thinking about these things and studying them. A radical sociology professor introduced us to a lot of New Left thinking.

In classes I learned about the massive inequality in America, and I saw it first-hand in my volunteer work for the Big Brother Program. My little brother was a 9- or 10-year-old black boy who lived on the other side of Lexington in a dirt-poor black ghetto. His house was heated with coal and the soot was so thick inside the windows that you could barely see out. This was very upsetting to me. Then I would go back to the dorm where I was among a bunch of elite Southerners who were oblivious to the abject poverty right across town from them.

I was supposed to become a lawyer, like my father. That was partly why I had been sent off to the Jesuit prep school. And I had in fact gone on and gotten into a good college. And Washington and Lee actually had a law school and an undergraduate pre-law program that I was supposed to enroll in.

Then, one day, they had this Open House for the pre-law program, where we could sign up. I went, and I talked to the professors and the students in the program, and lo and behold on that day I decided I didn't want to be a lawyer after all.

That decision started an internal avalanche. I started thinking, "Why was I in college in the first place?" It wasn't my idea. I was just dutifully following my parents' program for me.

My thinking was becoming radicalized. I was coming up for the draft, which prompted me to think deeply about politics and the war. I became convinced that the war was horribly wrong, and I filed as a Conscientious Objector.

By Christmas time, I was a mess. I was changing faster than I could keep up with. Even though I loved school — we could take four classes but I wished I could take 10 — I was feeling this gnawing inside, this deep frustration, this sense of urgency to stop reading about the world and get out there and do something.

I had a 3.5 grade point average, but I decided I would take a leave of absence at the end of the year. Then all hell really broke loose inside me. I didn't know what I wanted to do, and all the uncertainty caused several anxiety attacks. My roommate was going through something similar and he decided to drop out too. We helped each other through our "dark nights of the soul."

Then, my roommate came up with this idea of an Independent Study for the spring semester, so we could do projects off-campus. We found this shack on a dairy farm about 25 miles from the college. The farmer said we could have it for \$25 a month. We were pretty isolated, except for the cows, which came right up to our windows in the morning. We were given cash refunds for our dormitory meals, so we had enough money to eat on and a little left over. It was spring, so we could do without heat. It was very rural. I remember the farmer's wife telling me that she had spent her entire life in the same county. She had never been across the county line.

I decided to do an Independent Study on education. I had also been volunteering as a tutor in an elementary school in Lexington, and I had done some other volunteer teaching, with autistic children and others, while I was in high school. So I knew I liked working with kids and it occurred to me I might want to be a teacher. A professor gave me permission to just read several books on education and keep a journal. I also made arrangements to spend time at the rural elementary school that the farmers' kids attended.

I had to get books to read, so I took some of my cash from the meal-ticket refund and went to the college bookstore. I had no clue what I was looking for.

This was the early 1970s, so there happened to be books on the shelves by Jonathan Kozol, John Dewey, Herb Kohl, and A. S. Neill. The first book that caught my eye was the book with the odd title, *Summerhill*. Since I had so little money, I sat down in a corner of the bookstore and read it right there, cover to cover, and then put it back on the shelf.

I was staggered. It was absolutely what I needed to hear at that time, about a school where children plotted their own course every day and only went to class if they wanted to; and where they worked with the teachers to govern the school. The image of these kids and this school helped me see why I was so frustrated, why I had to get off the path that my parents, in their well-intentioned way, had plotted for me, and get on my own path instead.

I felt a huge relief. Now I didn't feel so crazy anymore.

CRAIN: Did Dewey also resonate with you?

MERCOGLIANO: Definitely. The notion of learning-by-doing made immediate sense and confirmed my urge to leave school and get some real, direct experience for a change.

I devoured the books. It was very exciting! And I was enjoying volunteering at the little school near our shack.

CRAIN: Wasn't it a traditional, teacher-directed school?

MERCOGLIANO: Yes, but I just liked being around the kids. And the principal took me under his wing and shared insights about them with me. It was very interesting. Suddenly I knew I wanted to be a teacher.

But I had put myself in a bit of a bind. You can't become a teacher without getting a degree, and yet I was still adamant about quitting school and getting out into the world.

Then serendipity struck again. One of the books I bought at the bookstore to read at the shack was Jonathan Kozol's *Free Schools*, which was about urban schools started by black people, primarily in the Northeast, who had taken control of their own schools. I had a brilliant flash of inspiration. It occurred to me that because these schools were running on a shoestring, if I offered to work for free it wouldn't matter to them that I was only 19 and had no credentials. This would give me an opportunity to see if I re-

ally wanted to be a teacher and if I was any good at it. And it would satisfy my urge to do something real.

Kozol's book had a list of these storefront schools in the back pages. I wrote handwritten letters to all of them, asking if they would consider me as a volunteer. This was in the mid-spring of my freshman year. After a while, the letters started coming back: "Return to Sender" and "No forwarding address." They had all gone out of business.

I decided I didn't want to be a lawyer after all. That decision started an internal avalanche. I started thinking, "Why was I in college in the first place?" It wasn't my idea. I was just dutifully following my parents' program for me.

Finally I got a letter from Albany, from the Free School. The school's founder, Mary Leue, confirmed that her school had no money, but she said that I "sounded nice and, why don't you visit?" So with that letter in hand, I finished my year at Washington and Lee and returned home to DC.

My girlfriend, Betsy, had also decided to drop out of college, and together we made a plan to drive up to the Adirondack Mountains in the fall. Her sister had built a cabin there and she said we could live in it for free. Meanwhile, that summer we got jobs to save up money for whatever we might wind up doing with ourselves instead of going to college. I took a job in construction and started to pick up carpentry skills. My boss was pleased with my work, and over the course of the summer he promoted me from laborer, to carpenter's helper, to full apprentice. It was a non-union job, but I got on the carpenter's union waiting list for their apprenticeship program, which would've gotten me a carpenter's license that I could take anywhere. I told Betsy I liked working with my hands so much that I wanted to put the idea of her sister's cabin on hold.

Then came what I consider to be a "daimon experience." The concept of the daimon originated with

Plato and has been developed more recently by the Jungian psychologist James Hillman (1996). The central idea is that we are all born with an already fully formed intelligence and character, just like the oak tree is contained within the acorn. You might say it is our calling or our destiny. The daimon is an inner guide whose job is to keep us on track and make sure our destiny unfolds the way it is supposed to.

One day on the job, I wanted to help out a laborer who had to take care of a huge delivery of lumber. It was late in the afternoon, and he would've been there 'til midnight moving the lumber inside one of the houses we were building by hand, and so I decided to borrow a forklift to help him. There were only two things wrong with the idea. I had never operated a forklift before, and I didn't know that the brakes on this particular forklift had a trick to them. And because I didn't ask permission to use it, I didn't learn the trick until after it was too late and the forklift had taken off downhill backwards, very nearly killing me. I had to crash it into a big old Chevy Impala that belonged to one of the masons in order to stop it. Needless to say, I was fired the next day. So the episode literally jolted me off the carpenter path. It was as if my daimon took charge and told me, "Hey, you were supposed to be a teacher, not a carpenter."

It was the end of the summer anyway, and so Betsy finished up her job and we headed up to Betsy's sister's cabin like we had originally planned. Just before Thanksgiving it got really cold and started snowing every day and we didn't know anything about living in the mountains in the winter time. When we decided to head back to our families for Thanksgiving dinner, we realized that Albany was right on the way. So we decided to stop in at the Albany Free School and check it out. Betsy and I met Mary, the director, and she said she was open to us volunteering. We were so fascinated by the school that we came back right after the holiday and moved into an apartment in a school-owned building that was set aside for young teachers and interns.

The interesting thing is that what drew us to the school initially wasn't so much the school's philosophy as it was the opportunity to work with urban children, many of whom were from very poor families. (The Free School charges tuition on a sliding scale, according to families' ability to pay.)

CRAIN: So it wasn't the Summerhill philosophy that attracted you?

MERCOGLIANO: No. Summerhill made sense, but it wasn't the key to my thinking then. I just wanted to try out teaching. The Free School was actually pretty shocking to me at first, given my conventional upbringing. The place seemed so wild and chaotic. But the teachers were loving, and it gradually began to make sense. The longer I stayed, the less crazy it all seemed. And I began to discover that I truly loved kids and was a pretty good teacher. After two or three years, Mary felt I had enough experience to have my own group of kids — basically first and second graders. I had completely fallen in love with the school by then. And so had Betsy, who became the kindergarten teacher, and later the school nurse. We married after five years at the school, and needless to say, we never left.

And ironically, I got my carpentry training after all. Mary figured out that the way to keep the school going financially was to buy up all the abandoned buildings around the school. Because there wasn't any money, we teachers and parents had to fix them up, so I developed carpentry skills, and masonry and plumbing skills, too.

CRAIN: Do you believe your daimon influenced you in your first year in college?

MERCOGLIANO: Yes, definitely. Those anxiety attacks were necessary to get me to listen inside. I couldn't just go about business as usual, in the socially accepted way in which I had been raised, because of all the inner turmoil I was experiencing. The turmoil was signaling me it was time to get off my parents' path for me and get onto mine.

Socrates said his daimon actually spoke to him. Mine never did, but I knew that something wasn't right — otherwise I wouldn't be feeling what I was feeling.

My colleague Nancy, however, literally heard a voice. She had just had a child and sold the health food store she had been running and was wondering what was next. She was at a real choice-point, and she literally heard a voice say to her out loud, "Go work at the Free School." She listened and eventually became the co-director of the school with me.

CRAIN: Do you feel the daimon or calling is relevant to the education of young people?

MERCOGLIANO: I totally do. It's the philosophical underpinning of freedom-based education. Children are born with a very accurate inner guidance system, an inner wisdom. They know better than anyone else what they need and are perfectly capable of making the right choices. Unless, of course, that inner guidance system has been tampered with and suppressed — unless children have been programmed not to listen to themselves. That is what had happened to me.

This means that education doesn't have to be a scripted, heavily managed process. Children are quite capable of directing the process themselves, based on who they are, what their calling is, and what their innate gifts are. It doesn't mean that children don't need occasional guidance, or role models, or limits. But they are born to be self-determining, autonomous beings. All they need is a little help from their friends.

CRAIN: I'm sure some parents question whether schools can give children so much choice. They might say, "My child chooses to develop her artistic capacities, but in the real world she'll need math. How can we be sure she'll choose to learn the math she needs?"

MERCOGLIANO: Generally, kids, if they haven't been damaged, are open to learning all sorts of things. They want to know. They all have their preferences, of course, but the inner urge to be smart usually takes care of picking up the things they will need in order to be successful.

CRAIN: They don't stick to one small subject?

MERCOGLIANO: Different kids go about learning differently. You might have a 6-year-old boy who just wants to do math all day because that's what he really loves to do. And typically his parents will worry, "What about reading? He'll have to read to succeed in life." So we try to reassure them by telling them that when *he* decides he wants to read, he will learn really fast. And it's always true, unless a child is truly dyslexic, in which case it will take more time and effort and support. I've known plenty of kids who haven't learned to read until they're 9 or 10 years old. And then when they de-

cidated it was time, they learned to read very quickly and without any trouble.

In terms of math, most kids who haven't been force-fed pick up the basic math skills in the course of living anyway, from counting money and playing

***D**ifferent kids go about learning differently.... I've known plenty of kids who haven't learned to read until they're 9 or 10 years old. And then when they decided it was time, they learned to read very quickly and without any trouble.*

games and just paying attention to what's going on around them. And as far as the more conceptual stuff, the kind they need in high school, this is where the inner urge to be smart and successful takes over if they dislike math. At least they will be motivated to pick up the minimum they need to get by.

CRAIN: Does this motivation come from them, or their parents?

MERCOGLIANO: It comes from the kids. In my experience, to the extent that parents are anxious about their kids' learning, the anxiety just gets in the way, and the children have to overcome it. If, instead, parents can just trust that their children have an inner intelligence that needs to unfold, and trust in the child's inner guidance system, the process works very naturally. Parents relax and the kids flourish.

CRAIN: When you recently visited The City College of New York, you told students that formal education is taking up much of children's lives. Could you say a bit more about that?

MERCOGLIANO: Sure. Schooling occupies much more of life now than it used to. Kids have more homework. There's also the issue of before- and after-school programs and extracurricular activities, which are typically designed to build a kid's resume for getting into the best college.

Also, there's very little open time left within the school day. Almost everything is scripted to make sure the kids will perform well on the end-of-the-year standardized tests. There's no time for creative projects. There is no time for kids to experiment with different activities to explore what their gifts are, to find their genius. That's not what the tests are about.

CRAIN: Some people favor more freedom for children, but when they hear about free schools, they wonder if there are any limits. Does the Free School in Albany have rules and a judicial system?

MERCOGLIANO: There are rules, mostly with respect to health and safety and getting along with one another. The kids are active in the process of making them, and also settling disputes. The tool we use is called the Council Meeting System. It's used by all the teachers and the kids from first grade on. (The school teaches children from the age of three up to the 8th grade). Whenever a child or an adult has tried to solve a problem and can't do it alone, he or she can call a council meeting to ask for the community's help. The meeting follows Roberts' Rules of Order, and anyone can make a motion at any time. Then there will be a discussion and a majority-rules vote.

For example, one time, a group of students objected to the school's No Candy rule and so they called a council meeting. Some of the teachers pointed out that candy hurts your teeth and your health, and that some kids eat too much of it, but the kids shot back that several teachers smoked and that is even worse for you. Eventually a motion was passed against both candy and smoking during the school day.

Another time, one of the teachers raised the issue of video games. Some kids, she said, seemed so addicted to them that they weren't interested in anything else. She was distressed that they had stopped coming to her reading class, which she worked hard on making fun and interesting. This kicked off a huge discussion about the pros and cons of video games.

CRAIN: Was it mainly teachers who saw the games as a problem?

MERCOGLIANO: No. Other kids saw them as an addiction, too. They noticed that some of their friends no longer talked with them, or played

kickball, or even ate lunch. They thought it was a problem, too. After two hours of debate we reached a compromise decision to limit video games to the last hour of the school day.

CRAIN: As we near the end of this interview, I would like to ask you about your recent book, *In Defense of Childhood* (2007). Could you say how you came to write it?

MERCOGLIANO: Yes. This time I decided to write about childhood as a whole — not just about education, which has always been my focus until now. I had started seeing that issues around education are becoming so hyped up that they are cornering all our attention. It has reached the point that when we talk about a child, all we talk about is how well he or she is doing in school. Is he or she learning enough? Is he or she going to get into a prestigious school? How is the child's education going to play out in the future? Education, of course, is a really important matter, but if you look at childhood more holistically or ecologically, it's only a piece of the story.

At the same time, when you look at the bigger picture of childhood, you can see there is a thread of control that runs all the way through it. Children today are living totally "domesticated" lives, and childhood is becoming devoid of the unmanaged experiences children need to develop all the gifts they are born with. Take imagination, for instance. If you consider imagination to be fundamental to who we are, to developing our full selves, we are in big trouble. The kinds of experiences that fertilize kids' imaginations are fast disappearing. Children don't play in original ways anymore. They don't spend open-ended time on their own in imaginary play. They don't even go outdoors. They're always watching something, or listening to something, or their play is structured by a parent or a teacher to meet some learning goal.

I see this across the board. Pick any aspect of childhood, and you find the same pattern. School, as we already discussed, has become a complete exercise in control. And so has the birth process, which has been taken over by all kinds of medical and technological management. This management interrupts the natural flow of labor and interferes with the bonding between mother and newborn that triggers the early unfolding of intelligence.

And children don't do meaningful work anymore. They don't help out around the house or find ways to earn their own money — things that are so important to their sense of autonomy and initiative. The only work they do is homework, which is anything but food for creative thinking.

The result is that when the young people get out onto the open range of adulthood, where everything isn't scripted, they are at a loss. They can't improvise. They aren't critical thinkers. They don't know how to learn about their own strengths and weaknesses. The way we're boxing them in when they are young, they are ill-equipped to figure out how to live out their own destiny.

CRAIN: My last question is about your recent retirement, after 35 years at the Free School. What went into the decision to retire?

MERCOGLIANO: I'm not really retired. I'm only 53. I'm just changing what I do. I really feel called to devote myself more to my writing. I was getting increasingly frustrated by only being able to do it in my spare time. Teaching is very demanding, and it doesn't leave you all that much time and energy to do other work. Also, I feel strongly that the next stage of my mission is to take what I've learned all these years and figure out better ways to communicate it, and to do it on a broader platform.

CRAIN: Thank you for this interview.

MERCOGLIANO: Thank you. It has been an honor.

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PRACTICAL GUIDES TO MORE EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

by Mark Kennedy



A teacher writes: "*Lessons from the Hawk* is an optimal blend of theory and practical application for helping students become more successful. Kennedy not only presents a theory of learning and teaching but also provides tools to implement his ideas. The book includes an assessment survey along with outlines for curriculum plans, unit plans, and individual lesson plans...."

A teacher writes: "Mark Kennedy's book *Classroom Management: The Dance of the Dolphin* does for classroom management what his previous book *Lessons from the Hawk* did for students' learning styles in the classroom.... Mr. Kennedy has a fresh and inviting approach to his subject...."

And another: "I have begun using a modified version [of Kennedy's approach to management] in one of my classes, and it has already met with great success. Students are managing themselves and learning more."



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The Brooklyn Free School

Observations and Reflections

Kate McReynolds

The children at a free school are fully engaged in learning and seem to be deeply at peace with themselves.

Free schools, or democratic schools as they are sometimes called, are more ideologically unified than homeschools in that they all share a commitment to participatory democracy and self-directed learning. The most famous and enduring example is the Summerhill School in England, founded by A.S. Neill in 1921. But there are well-established, successful free schools in the United States too, such as the Albany Free School in New York and the Sudbury Valley School in Massachusetts. I should point out that free schools do not simply pay lip service to their philosophies; children have a full voice in decisions about their school, and “self-directed” learning means that there are no compulsory classes, no tests, no grades, and no external pressure to follow a pre-determined educational path.

This philosophy recognizes children’s natural curiosity and adaptive drives. It is grounded in a radical faith that children can be trusted, not just to learn, but to play a vital, intelligent role in their own development. A.S. Neill said that when he and his wife founded Summerhill, “We set out to make a school in which we should allow children freedom to be themselves” (1960, 4). In order to do this, he added, the school had to renounce adult direction, discipline, and training.

Neill was emphatic about the child’s right to play and self-expression. Most education, he said, focuses narrowly on what adults think children should learn, ignoring what children *want* to learn. Truly creative people, he observed, “learn what they want to learn in order to have the tools that their originality and genius demand. We do not know how much creation is killed in the classroom” (1960, 26).

I have found considerable wisdom in the writings of Neill and others who have developed and taught in



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free schools. But my reading did not prepare me for the experience of observing a free school in action.

The Brooklyn Free School

It's lunchtime at the Brooklyn Free School (BFS). Children and adults sit together eating and talking. Some children are looking at books. Two are playing chess. It is a lively, but orderly scene. Not orderly in the way traditional schools are, but in the sense that everyone seems to know what he or she is doing. No one is obviously in charge. No one is telling the children what to do. The youngsters answer my questions but most are too interested in their own conversations to chat with me for long. I suddenly realize that in the public schools that my own children attend, I have never seen adults and children talk together like this.

A high school aged boy tells me he came to the Free School because he was bored with the repetition in public school and frustrated by the lack of intellectual depth. Before joining the BFS, he often stayed home from school to read books that interested him. Now he studies what he wants – economics, philosophy, history and Italian. He has taken classes at a nearby college and is preparing to take the SAT. He says that he is happy with school now, but what strikes me is how relaxed and self-aware he is. I ask him if he is worried about his future, about how he will do in college. Smiling, he says, "No. I have to brush up on my math, but I'm not worried because I know how to learn."

After what seems like a long, leisurely time, the children begin to leave or move on to different activities, apparently without prompting. There is a large chalkboard with a list of activities that children are free to join – economics, law internship, animal studies, production meeting for "The Wiz," SAT preparation, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I join the law interns.

Two teenage boys, the interns, are revising a letter they have drafted to the parole board on behalf of a man convicted of murder 20 years ago. Their teacher is a lawyer. The case is real. The boys have spent previous class time familiarizing themselves with the case, planning their strategy, and gathering evidence. The students analyze every word in the letter, and they revise and review their work. They sort and label exhibits. The teacher, who is also the mother of

two BFS students, listens and contributes her ideas. She answers their questions, but the work and their relationship seem collaborative. There is no prodding or pressure, no discipline or behavior-management. But then I remember that these boys are here because they want to be. When they are satisfied with their work, the class is over. I can't tell if there is an official end-time.

The same parent-teacher has been reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* with a group of children. They have finished the book and were to begin a mock trial, but one boy wants to go to SAT prep. Another is not interested in the mock trial. A third boy is interested in principle, but believes that the outcome is certain. There follows a discussion about mock trials and whether to proceed. A student is sent to find other children who have expressed an interest and ask their opinion. After all the children weigh in it is decided to go on to other things.

Upstairs several younger children are building a fort. Their written work and paintings are displayed on the walls much like in a conventional classroom, but these youngsters, too, are free to choose the activities that interest them. I learn that anyone, a parent, teacher, volunteer, or child can propose a class. (One student wanted to study physics and found a Yale graduate student to be the teacher.)

The children also negotiate the structure of classes—for example whether children can drop in when they want or will commit to regular attendance. But, it's a dynamic process. The reading for *To Kill a Mockingbird* was first conducted in class, but the children soon decided they wanted to progress more quickly and so together agreed on the number of pages per week they would read at home.

But like fort building, much of the learning that goes on at the Brooklyn Free School does not happen in classes. A twelve-year-old girl is sitting on the stairs reading Harry Potter. She pauses to show me a magazine that she and some of her schoolmates published as a fundraiser. The girls had staged a fanciful animal fashion show and the magazine photos include a striking array of animal figurines dressed in whimsical costumes. The project was entirely conceived and executed by the children; the magazine itself is an impressive piece of work. I discovered that the girl who had interrupted her reading to speak with me was

considered a struggling reader when she was in regular school. After attending the Brooklyn Free School for a year, she picked up the first *Harry Potter* book and just six weeks later is reading the fourth book. Her goal is to read all six before July when the 7th and last book is released. She will also play the lead role in the school production of "The Wiz." She and the other children involved will manage every aspect of the production, including the budget.

As I look and listen I become aware of a familiar feeling that I can't quite place. It feels like everything is very quiet, but that can't be right. Children are moving freely through the hallways, in and out of rooms. Adults come and go, stop to talk to one another and to the children. Children are talking and laughing, phones are ringing. A woman calls out that snacks are ready and youngsters run for their share. Then it hits me. It is the same sense of inner quiet I

feel when I walk in the woods or along the beach. Up until now I had only experienced this mysterious deep tranquility in the natural world and had attributed it to feeling connected with the natural order of the universe. I assumed, without question, that I could not have such feelings anywhere but in nature. Yet here I was, inside a building in the middle of Brooklyn, New York, feeling at one with the universe. Can a school be a part of the natural world? Do children, who are free to learn in their own way, at their own pace, in a safe, loving environment, reflect the natural order? Is the inner world of happy children like a blooming garden, as Dickens suggested? I could think of no other explanation.

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Free School and Homework Sophia Bennett Holmes (Age 13)

I go to a democratic free school in Park Slope, Brooklyn. You might not know what a "democratic free school" is. A democratic free school is a school where all of the kids in it can choose their own curriculum. You don't have to take any classes there... but you have no limit to what the classes can be. There are art classes, philosophy classes, reading classes, turtle-feeding classes, baking classes, doll house making classes, girl talk, boy talk, park trips, and basically anything, but the best part about the school... is that there is no homework.

But even though I don't have homework, it still affects me sometimes. Last week, my friend Lua came over to my house and half the time she was over she had to do homework. I probably would have been annoyed at her if I didn't feel so bad for her.

She had to do a timeline, read and answer questions in history, do a long math worksheet, read an entire act of Shakespeare, read a magazine, write a report on a book, make a science poster, write a poem, and make a Spanish poster, too. During the time it took her do her homework, I played piano, made a collage, read, and did other things that I love to do. And while I was doing that, she had to sit at my table writing things that she probably wouldn't even remember the next day.

Actually, right now while I am writing this, Lua is sitting next to me doing her homework about some colony.

Kids suffer in school every day and they shouldn't have to come home and have to work more. School is only 7 hours long for a reason... so that when you come home you can relax.

Since Lua has so much homework, it takes away from what we love to do together, like making our own movies, writing songs, playing, writing, reading, and just hanging out since we don't get to see each other a lot. In my opinion, that is a lot more educational than having to do homework.

The advantages of going to a democratic free school are that I have a lot more time to read, I can have classes in things I love after school, I get to be a lot less stressed out about everything, I have more time to hang out with my friends, and I am not wasting my time.

Even if people don't go to a democratic free school, I think they shouldn't have to do homework.

Children Compose Poems of Spring

A Selection by Richard Lewis

I feel a bit happier
when I see a kingfisher
in the spring-green willows
and the oak-leaved ferns
by the lemon wood trees.

— Clifton Roderick Foster
Age 11, New Zealand

When spring comes
I feel like a
Daisy just opening up into a new life.
I feel like running twenty miles
And taking off my heavy coat
And putting on a pair of sneakers.
I feel like I started a new life
And everything is better
Than it was before.
I get faster
In running and I can go swimming outdoors.
It feels like the smell of new flowers
And the animals
Coming up from their holes,
The birds coming back from their vacations,
I love spring.

— Michael Patrick
Age 10, United States

The Dew

Quietly, and softly it came,
And no one saw it.
When it came
It just passed through,
And then Quietly and Softly
It brought the Dew
No one felt it,
No one saw it,
So no one knew why it came.

— Amy Epstein
Age 10, United States

Spring

The breeze, gentle, cool, floats, twisting turning
 leap-frog playing, glides silent except for the rustling of
 leaves in the trees above. The crocuses, heads gone,
 stand, droop, lie on the damp dew-dropped carpet of
 green.

Trees with new clean fresh leaves growing, silent, but
 growing all the while. The rhododendron, flowers of a
 great cluster, single petal, crimson flame, living burning,
 growing till the yellow, golden brown leaf-falling au-
 tumn. The Dandelion clock, time in the tight clamped
 hand. One, three, five or thirteen o'clock. The Daffodil in
 its prime, yellow, bright golden yellow.

— John Downey
 Age 10, Ireland

A Wish

I want to climb the santol tree
 That grows beside my bedroom window
 And get a santol fruit.
 I want to climb the tree at night.
 And get the moon the branches hide.
 Then I shall go to bed, my pockets full,
 One with the fruit, the other with the moon.

— Thomas Santos
 Age 7, The Philippines

"I feel a bit happier," "When spring comes," "The Dew," and "A Wish" are from *Miracles: Poems by Children of the English-speaking World*; collected by Richard Lewis; published by Simon & Schuster, New York. Copyright 1966, 2007 by Richard Lewis.

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On Baroque Angels and the Importance of Going Barefoot

Paulo Périssé

When children can feel the ground under their feet as they run, walk, and play, they develop better physical balance and perhaps better emotional balance as well.

Some time ago, a young mother who was looking to enroll her 2-year-old daughter visited our school. She had initially been attracted by our pedagogical philosophy, but upon seeing our open playground, she became somewhat hesitant. Our school in Brazil, the School of International Education of Bahia, is located on nearly four square kilometers on Salvador's seafront, the biggest part of which consists of natural land with tropical almond and coconut trees. The grounds are uneven, with patches covered by various types of lawn, including Mascarene grass, and even wild grass. The mother, who had expected to encounter a garden, anxiously expressed her reluctance to let her daughter play on what she perceived to be a terrain replete with highs and lows, and so many dangerous obstacles for such a small child. I invited her to put the child down and allow her to walk freely. The child proceeded with difficulty, stumbling and zigzagging here and there. I then asked for a pupil of the same age to be brought to the playground. Upon arriving, the child began to run happily across the field, as she was accustomed to doing every day.

I then asked the mother, "Can you tell the difference? Your daughter only knows how to walk on flat grounds. Her brain is not being adequately stimulated to develop balance."

A personal friend, Friar Betto, used to say that education has traditionally been concerned with the development of children's "heads" without any regard for the rest of the person, as if they were merely angels in baroque churches. Anyone who has ever entered such a church must have noticed that depictions of angels are limited to heads and wings, but do not represent the body. Such a conception of childhood and schooling, regrettably, is still largely prevalent in most national educational systems.



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Alienation from Nature

In the not so distant past, the majority of small children from all urban areas in Brazil lived in houses with gardens with yards and lots of free space to run and play. There were no apartments or playgrounds, and even fewer enclosed play areas in shopping malls. At that time, children could walk barefoot on the soil and enjoy direct contact with nature.

Today, however, there are no more gardens, backyards, or orchards. The Brazilian upper classes live in luxury skyscrapers, and their small children play in the condominium units' artificial playgrounds. The middle class children are stacked in armed concrete buildings, and if they venture on the ground floor at all, they play on concrete yards. The less fortunate classes in Brazilian urban areas, finally, are piled up on steep hill slopes, in houses on top of one another, without any space for trees, orchards, shade, birds, or soft water streams. Instead, the only spaces where children can play are plagued by garbage, raw sewage, and pollution.

In Brazilian schools, children of most social classes are parked in spaces that are equally devoid of nature. Prevalent views of education assume that a sports court, where it exists, is more than sufficient to cater to the children's recreational needs. School environments seem to only offer reinforced concrete. Only a small minority of the schools provide some form of natural environment for children's play. Indeed, when trees and plants are present, they are typically located in garden areas in which children are strictly prohibited. Some schools have windows that are so high that their only purpose is to lighten classrooms. Others cover their windows with cardboard paper or film, thus substituting sunlight with electrical lighting. Some schools, mostly the private ones, offer meager external areas covered by artificial grass; others opt for a sports court on the roof instead of a yard.

It is horrible that in a large country like Brazil, with one of the planet's most luxuriant floras, there are only a handful of schools that offer real soil, a bit of green, or even a single tree in children's play areas; and when they do have gardens, lack any place for walking. The only logical conclusion one can reach is that for the most part, these schools despise nature, or in the most optimistic of hypotheses, do not dedi-

cate to nature its due attention. It would be no exaggeration to say that most Brazilian children live in a schooling regime of apartheid, or segregation from nature. They have no contact with it, and thus no opportunities to manipulate rocks and seeds, to feel the different grass textures, dig in the soil, gather gravel and twigs, smell the different fragrances, walk barefoot in the shade of trees, or feel the organic soil beneath their feet.

It is true that in recent years, much has been said about so-called Environmental Education, but how illusory! It is a chimerical discipline that approaches the subject through books, lectures, DVDs, photographs, and PowerPoint presentations. How absurd! How can one expect a child to understand or respect nature when the child has no intimate connection with it?

Lydia Hortélio (2002), the renowned Brazilian researcher on children's culture and traditional Brazilian music, observes how children's knowledge is transmitted across generations and borders through play and games. This knowledge includes children's bodily knowledge — their infinite varieties of movement — which develops most readily and joyously in natural settings. Hortélio maintains that children cannot be educated, in a full sense, if they are removed from the natural settings in which their play thrives.

Bare Feet, Brain, and Posture

The vast majority of schools of the "Baroque Angel Factory" type only offer flat grounds, and very few of them allow children to remove their shoes. In the context of early childhood education, this is a calamitous state of affairs.

In traditional Asian societies, massages, and most particularly the stimulation of the sole of one's feet, are valued for their therapeutic effects. Without venturing into the merit of the theories behind such practices, techniques such as *Shiatsu* (from the Japanese shi (fingers) and atsu (pressure) and Do In developed in China, attribute to the sole and toe a role of the highest importance. This is understandable if we consider the representation of the foot in the motor and sensory cortex.

In the 1950s, the Canadian neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield (Penfield 1957; Penfield & Jasper 1954; Pen-

field & Rasmussen 1950) stimulated the brain areas of his surgical patients and observed the movements and sensations triggered by the stimuli. The patients' responses were so highly localized that Penfield was able to map the sensory and motor cortex with surprising precision, giving birth to a diagram known as Penfield's Homunculus. The drawing shows that some areas of the human body are more highly represented in the cortex than others. For example, the feet and hands occupy areas comparatively more extended than the chin and knees, because the feet and hands play a greater role in the exploration and perception of the world in childhood than the latter two, from the first moments of life to the last. Evolution entrusted them with larger cortical areas. The feet, to be sure, are not as extensively represented in the cortex as the mouth and hand (especially the thumb), but the feet are prominent. It is interesting to note that the feet are represented more extensively in the sensory cortex than in the motor cortex, which may suggest that their rich nervous endings play an important role as information receptors.

In our school, there are ten different types of grounds in the external area. Walking barefoot over them, alternating from one type to the next, the children's soles are massaged, thus sending to the brain important information that enables better balance. As we know, the synaptic connections of the cortex depend on adequate stimulation (Kandel, Schwartz & Jessel 2000) and rich environments and the freedom to walk barefoot facilitate that stimulation.

Posture and the balance of corporal segments depend on the harmonious interaction between the lower limbs, the pelvic belt, the spine, higher limbs, and the scapular belt. Muscles, ligaments, and articulations act to produce coordinated movements and to inhibit abnormal motor activity. The chief mechanisms for the maintenance of postural tonus at the level of the lumbosacral junction are the reflexes of the neck proprioceptors, the labyrinth, and sight, as long as, at the level of the ankle, the chief mechanism is the presence of stimuli originating from the sole (Carvalho Jorge 2003)

When an individual initiates movement in order to walk, the activity is commanded by higher centers in the cerebral cortex. When walking becomes auto-

matic, the motion command becomes detached from the so-called basal nuclei in the deep sub-cortical structure. It is important not to lose sight of the fact, however, that nothing in the human being functions in isolation. Thus, the arbitrary division into parts, organs, and systems we have imposed on the body is merely didactic. The brain works like a marvelous orchestra, in which all areas act collaboratively, and, like musical instruments, contribute to the production of a symphony.

The development of good posture (and good postural adjustments to environmental changes) has important implications not just for one's physical health but also for one's general well being. It is important for the body to learn how to distribute effort to the structures that are more capable of bearing it, such as the bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments, spine, and intervertebral disks. In this way, the body can control vertical and horizontal pressures, absorb impacts, maintain balance, and minimize energy use. Otherwise, the individual must give excessive attention to awkward body positions and movements, which also can cause distressing pain. In contrast, a person with flexible, balanced posture seems to feel more balanced in life in general.

To learn how to perceive the relationship between the body and its center of gravity, children need to develop a sensory consciousness of balance. Ground diversity and floor unevenness enable rapid postural adaptations, providing children with opportunities to experiment with the movement of their muscles and to develop perceptual skills.

The benefits of walking barefoot on diversified grounds can even be therapeutic. A case in point is a child with a congenital spinal malformation known as *mielomeningocele*, or *espina bifida*, who joined our school at the age of one year and seven months. One symptom of this condition is motor difficulty in the lower limbs. In this case, the child allocated much of her strength to her heels, which left her toes dangling without support. As a result, she couldn't remain motionless with correct foot position for long periods of time. The child therefore required daily use of an orthosis, or orthopedic splint, to correct the position of her feet.

The irregularity of our school's grounds, presenting a sizeable challenge for that child, facilitated ex-

perimentation with feelings of balance and imbalance that proved invaluable for her body maintenance. By facing such challenges, she was able to discover not only her own strength, but also her surprising capacity to devise alternatives to overcome obstacles or accommodate herself to them. In the process, the girl developed degrees of independence and self-esteem that surpassed all medical expectations.

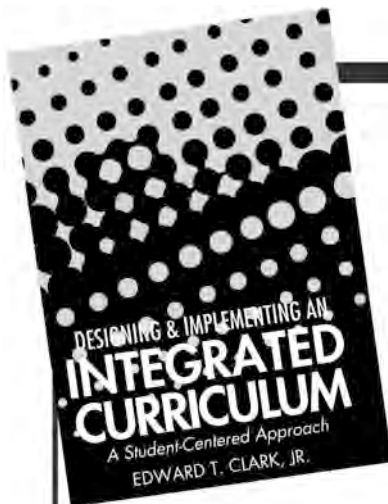
A healthy spine is intrinsically linked to healthy feet, and, in turn, relies on the flexibility of all involved structures to allow for its full range of motion. The complex mechanisms of motion, which involve numerous bones, muscles, ligaments, nerves, and nerve endings, are from early ages restricted by rigid shoe soles that prevent movement and reduce sensory perception of the foot sole. Foot inflexibility, with repercussions to the knees, hips, and spine, can bring about pelvic imbalance. Sensory deprivation also prevents the cortex from receiving stimuli that might affect mood and learning.

If the ground is invariably flat, children are deprived of the opportunity to translate ground stimuli into possibilities of stability. This deprivation begins

with a toddler's first steps and continues throughout childhood, while the ankles are still malleable. With its strong focus on rational learning and cognitive development — on bodiless Baroque Angels — mainstream education overlooks the importance of the ground on which children walk, run, and play.

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Bring in da Noise, Bring in DuBois

Infusing an African-American Educational Ideology into the Urban Education Discourse

kecia hayes

W. E. B DuBois created a powerful theory of African-American and pan-African uplift that has relevance for contemporary schools.

The education of African Americans historically has been defined and structured by those who rule the political and economic spheres of American society rather than by the community itself (Anderson 1988). To facilitate their enslavement and develop its slave-based economy, the United States initially denied African Americans an education. Later, African Americans were minimally educated for the lowest positions in the labor market of the country's emergent industrialized economy. Despite this reality, the African-American community has challenged the dominant culture's imposition of an oppressive educational ideology.

In his 1906 address to the Second Annual Meeting of the Niagara Conference, W. E. B. DuBois articulated a framework for the education of African Americans that defied the conventional wisdom of the ruling elite:

And when we call for education, we mean real education. We believe in work. We ourselves are workers, but work is not necessarily education. Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire. (DuBois 2002, 92)

As American society settles into the twenty-first century and we examine the educational experiences and outcomes of urban youth of color, it is unmistakable that far too many black boys and girls are still

Note: This article is adapted with permission from the author's chapter in Vol. 1 of the *Praeger Handbook of Urban Education*, edited by J. L. Kincheloe, k hayes, K. Rose, and P.M. Anderson (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006).

This essay is dedicated to my parents who first exposed me to a racialized critical ideology of education; and to my brother, Changamire Semakokiro, who provided insightful feedback on earlier drafts. Much love, peace, and thanks to you.



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not being educated to know, to think, and to aspire as intelligent human beings should be. According to *The State of America's Children 2004* report by the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), children of color are far more likely to attend overcrowded schools with larger class sizes and to have teachers with lower academic attainment than students in high-income, low-minority schools. The CDF specifically notes that a black child has a one-in-three chance of attending a school that has a 90% minority enrollment, is 40% more likely to be a student in a class with an out-of-field teacher, and is half as likely as a white student to be placed in gifted and talented classes with advanced, college-track curricula. Despite the promises of numerous educational reform efforts, including the recent No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), to improve the educational outcomes of all children, urban youth of color remain left behind. The consequences have been both distressing and debilitating. In 2000, there were almost 791,600 African-American men in our nation's prisons and only 603,032 enrolled in institutions of higher education (Children's Defense Fund 2004).

Unemployment and underemployment rates for blacks also have been staggering. Blacks are twice as likely as whites to be unemployed, and black males tend to earn 70% of the compensation of their white counterparts (National Urban League 2004). Currently, a black boy has a 1-in-6 chance of receiving a bachelor's degree, a 1-in-9,900 chance of obtaining a Ph.D. in math or computer science, but a 1-in-13 chance of going to prison by the age of twenty (Children's Defense Fund 2004). It would be naïve to ignore the fact that the consistent under-resourcing of urban education significantly contributes to these negative outcomes. However, we would be remiss to not look beyond fiscal constraints to ask ourselves what purposes have we imbued in current educational structures that engage urban youth of color, when the data suggest that black children are being educated simply to be servants and underlings in America's new social order.

There is an opportunity for those engaged in the urban education discourse to reconsider and reconstruct the idea of a sound basic education (Campaign for Fiscal Equity 2004). In this discussion, I want to begin to cultivate a crisis of democracy within the

contemporary urban education discourse by invoking the *noise* of DuBois's rhetoric as a relevant and culturally indigenous framework for providing African Americans with a sound basic education. By "crisis of democracy," I am referring to that moment when the masses attempt to reposition themselves as active, rather than passive, participants within the political, economic, and social arenas, and the ruling elites react to subdue resistance to their authority

DuBois dedicated his scholarship and efforts not only to the documentation of the social condition of African Americans, but also to sociopolitical agitation for a transformation of the community's position in society.

(Chomsky 2000). Urban communities of color must be repositioned as active participants in the educational systems and discourses that structure the lives of their children. DuBois articulated a critical pedagogy to empower racially marginalized people to effectively engage in the social, economic, and political realms of American society without sacrificing their cultured selves. His articulation represents the *noise* needed to constructively interrupt the rhetoric of those who now reign over the policies and practices of our urban schools.

To understand how DuBois's ideology is relevant to our current urban education discourse, it is important to examine the historical context and evolution of his educational philosophy.

DuBois's Background

In many ways, the life of W. E. B. DuBois epitomizes what it means to be a public intellectual as conceptualized by Edward Said. Said believed that "an intellectual's mission in life is to advance human freedom and knowledge. This mission often means standing outside of society and its institutions and actively disturbing the status quo" (Lightman 2007).

DuBois dedicated his scholarship and efforts not only to the documentation of the social condition of African Americans, but also to sociopolitical agitation for a transformation of the community's position in society.

William Edward Burghardt DuBois was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in February 1868. DuBois did not get to know his Haitian-born father, who was apparently ostracized by relatives in the United States, and DuBois was raised by his mother. In his autobiography (1968), DuBois said his family lived on the edge of poverty, and he helped support the family throughout his childhood with afterschool jobs. He also worked hard in school and was recognized for his academic talent by the community.

During his childhood, Great Barrington more closely represented a democratic ideal of civic participation than most other communities across the country. Even so, it did not escape the realities of America's racialized hegemony of the time. While the racism that DuBois experienced in Great Barrington was less overt than other forms of racism prevalent in America, it nevertheless started him thinking about the dissonance between stated democratic ideals and the actual inequalities.

At the age of 16, he graduated from high school as the valedictorian and the only African American in a graduating class of twelve students. He traveled to Tennessee to attend Fisk University. While at Fisk, he gained a deeper knowledge of the poverty, subpar living conditions, ignorance, and prejudice that plagued the lives of many African Americans. At the same time, he acquired a new understanding of the community's desire for social uplift. After receiving his B.A. degree from Fisk in 1888, he won a scholarship to attend Harvard where he studied with Josiah Royce, George Santayana, and William James while working to complete his master's and doctoral degrees. His dissertation was entitled, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade in America*, and it is the first volume in Harvard's Historical Series.

While engaged in his graduate studies, DuBois traveled to Europe in 1892 to attend the Friedrich-Wilhelm III Universität in Berlin, with financial support from the Slater Fund for the Education of Negroes. While at the Universität, he studied under the tutelage of Gustav Schmoller, Heinrich von

Treitschke, Adolf Wagner, and Max Weber. While very impressed with the lectures of Max Weber, DuBois was most profoundly influenced by Schmoller and Wagner. During his time in Europe, DuBois was exposed to the social, political, and economic dynamics of the racial hegemony that persisted across the globe. DuBois, an evolving pragmatist, began to conceptualize a more comprehensive and politicized strategy on how to best address the race problem of the United States. Increasingly, he saw that he would have to understand the political and economic dimensions of racism if he was going to play any role in changing the conditions under which African Americans were made to live. David Lewis (1993, 226) says,

It was not enough to determine truth scientifically; it had to be implemented politically. His mission to mobilize truth in order to alter behavior took on sudden urgency in the spring and summer of 1899.

After completing his graduate studies, DuBois joined the faculty of Wilberforce in Ohio, but after only two years he accepted a fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania to research Philadelphia's seventh ward. This was DuBois's first opportunity to use social science to bring about change in the social condition of African Americans. His research resulted in the publication of *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996), which is contemporarily revered as a seminal text not only in race relations but also in urban sociology. After completing the study, DuBois joined the sociology faculty of Atlanta University and remained there for thirteen years where he continued his research on the social conditions of African Americans. But his teaching apparently pricked the status quo, and as Joy James (1997, 21) observes, "as well as pioneering conferences at Atlanta University, he was eventually encouraged to leave the university."

In 1897, DuBois, along with Alexander Crummell, Francis Grimké, William Croghan, William Scarborough, and John Cromwell founded the American Negro Academy (ANA) which was the nation's first major learned society of African Americans. The Academy's mission was to "publish, dis-

seminate information on the harsh conditions of African-American life, build a black intellectual community, encourage the intellectual development of black youth, and issue the truth about black life in America" (Shujaa 2001, 8). DuBois and other members of the ANA adopted the "Talented Tenth" rhetoric that was first articulated by Henry L. Morehouse in 1896 (Anderson 1988). Interestingly, this paradigm of focusing on the development of an intellectual elite was similar to the liberatory frameworks postulated by Schmoller and Wagner who, unlike Marx, "were elitists who expected the cream of the Prussian bureaucracy, much of it trained by them, to guide the guardian state scientifically as it intervened between the citizen and the market place" (Lewis 1993, 142). Eventually, DuBois would express deep frustration with the African-American middle class or the Talented Tenth and articulate a new direction.

In 1903, DuBois published *The Souls of Black Folk* (1986). The text is well known for its articulation of DuBois's conceptualization of "double consciousness."

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (DuBois 1986, 8)

It also reflected DuBois's intense philosophical conflict with Booker T. Washington, who believed that African Americans had to forfeit the social uplift goals related to political power and higher education. Instead, Washington believed, African Americans had to accept immersion into an industrial education program that largely was designed by wealthy white Northerners. For DuBois, higher education was the fundamental site of resistance and democratic hope for African Americans and the United States.

Forever an activist intellectual, DuBois in 1906 helped to establish the Niagara Movement, an organization dedicated to civil justice and the abolishment of caste discrimination in America. The majority of those involved in the Niagara Movement joined with a group of white liberals in 1909 to create the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. DuBois served as Director of Publi-

cations and Research, and launched the publication of *Crisis* magazine. He autocratically served as its editor-in-chief for more than twenty years. While on assignment at a peace conference in France in 1919, DuBois decided to organize a Pan-African conference, which would illuminate the sociopolitical and economic struggles of the African diaspora. This would help to solidify the characterization of him as a Pan-Africanist. The more DuBois traveled the globe and became increasingly exposed to racial and economic hegemonic dynamics, the more critical he became of efforts towards integration.

During the late 1950s, the U.S. Department of Justice ordered DuBois to register as an agent of a "foreign principal" in retaliation to his critical comments about the unjust practices of the American government. His refusal to do so resulted in an indictment under the Foreign Agents Registration Act but he was later acquitted. Towards the end of the decade, DuBois moved to Ghana where he was embraced by President Nkruma who asked him to direct the government-sponsored *Encyclopedia Africana*. Eventually, DuBois became a citizen of Ghana, and an official member of the Communist party. He died in August 1963 in Accra, Ghana.

DuBois and Booker T. Washington

The controversy between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker Taliaferro Washington reflects the dichotomy among African Americans as they grappled with the historically quintessential question about their education: Should black people be educated to *challenge* or to *accommodate* the oppressive Southern political economy (Anderson 1988). Although both men saw the purpose of education as a means to achieve social uplift for their socially marginalized community, they significantly differed in how to define social uplift and how to conceptualize an appropriate educational process to achieve it.

Washington was mentored by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, creator of the Hampton model of industrial education and one of the major white architects of black education. In 1868, Armstrong established Hampton Institute, a coed industrial education school, where black students "learned such basic trade skills as laundry work and domestic service for the girls and proper farming techniques for the

boys" (Moore 2003, 22). The Hampton model dominated the educational landscape, and its proliferation was facilitated by funding from Northern philanthropists like William H. Baldwin, who believed that blacks were economic capital to be appropriately refitted for the nation's new industrial order. The problem with the Hampton model rested not in its specific focus on farming, but rather in its sole reliance on teaching the technique of farming as opposed to the science of agriculture and the technique of domestic service as opposed to the business of the hospitality industry. Blacks were being schooled to exclusively be laborers and not owners within the new economic order. According to Watkins (2001, 43),

The Hampton idea was about much more than education. It was about nation building. It was about carefully situating the newly freed Black in a new sociopolitical and economic order. It was about (re)shaping delicate race relations. Finally and most important, it was about forging a social order rooted in apartheid, economic exploitation, oppression, and inequality.

Washington, the founder and principal of Tuskegee Institute, embraced the Hampton model and advocated the idea that African Americans were fundamentally responsible for pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps. He believed that blacks, by reaching a compromise with white labor and capital, would realize economic mobility within America's hegemonic social order, and that eventually they would be granted uncontested political enfranchisement. Within his framework, vocational and agricultural training programs were the means by which economic mobility would be achieved. Washington's concept of social uplift had at its foundation the idea of socioeconomic mobility, even if such mobility lacked parity with whites and if there wasn't simultaneous sociopolitical mobility. For Washington, the purpose of education for the black community was more about accommodating the existing social order with the hope that eventually sociopolitical change would occur rather than cultivating a direct challenge and resistance to the racial status quo.

DuBois understood that the framework endorsed by Washington disregarded the prerogative of indi-

vidual African Americans to decide for themselves how they would participate in the labor force of America's new industrial order, and strangled their ability to realize sustainable mobility across all social spectra. DuBois believed that Washington's program would enhance

the economic status of the Negro, but on the other hand, and just as surely, it did not show a way out because it fastened the chains of exploitation on Negro labor and increased labor antagonism in the laboring classes. This was particularly shown in the new development in the South where white labor used its political and social influence to replace black labor and eliminate the so-called Negro jobs. (Lester 1971)

The dominant culture steadfastly remained the gatekeepers of black socioeconomic mobility, which was counterproductive to the community's efforts towards social uplift. DuBois's opposition to industrial education should not be interpreted as an abandonment of the idea that blacks needed vocational training. For him, vocational training was necessary but not sufficient for social uplift.

In *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996), DuBois clearly expressed his understanding and support of the idea that economic survival was essential for freedmen, and he advocated vocational training. However, in *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* (1992) and in subsequent works, his analysis placed him in more stark contrast to Washington. DuBois stressed the idea that social uplift had to incorporate not only the socioeconomic mobility that can result from vocational training, but also at the same time incorporate efforts toward sociopolitical advancement.

Beyond Income and Consumerism

For DuBois, social uplift must allow marginalized people not only to advance their status within the American hegemony, but to criticize the hegemonic structures themselves. Such criticism is especially relevant today, when we need to move beyond the idea that we are simply educating urban youth for employment in a globalized economy. Urban youth of color, in particular, need a sound basic education that empowers them to exercise the full extent of their civic agency across the economic, political, and

social domains. Income is not a sufficient condition for uplift, especially since it can also be attained through participation in illegal economies, which ultimately are destructive to the self and the community. Furthermore, when it occurs in the absence of an understanding and control of the sociopolitical dynamics of wealth accumulation, socioeconomic mobility can be incredibly transient.

Through their industrial education programs, schools such as Hampton and Tuskegee effectively prepared blacks to be laborers in America's new industrial order. However, their failure to educate blacks about the sociopolitical contexts of labor in the new industrial order stymied their potential to socially advance in any substantive and sustainable way. DuBois leveled this critique not only against the industrial schools, but also against the Negro colleges and universities because they, too, failed to provide students with any understanding of how to engage the political economy of an industrialized and hegemonically racialized America. DuBois (1973, 67) said:

Acquiring as we do in college no guidance to a broad economic comprehension and a sure industrial foundation, and simultaneously a tendency to live beyond our means, and spend for show, we are graduating young men and women with an intense and overwhelming appetite for wealth and no reasonable way of gratifying it, no philosophy for counteracting it.

African Americans were not sufficiently aware of the power relationships and interconnectivities among labor, capitalists, and consumers to be able to avoid their own exploitation as laborers and consumers. African Americans need to study the nation's industrial history and labor movements in the white and black communities. In this way, they can gain insight into the sociopolitical dynamics of their economic oppression within a racialized American capitalist system, and resist such oppression. Without this knowledge, they cannot deal with the sociopolitical conditions underlying the nation's economic structure.

Today, we continue to graduate young men and women of color who have an overwhelming appetite for immediate wealth, no reasonable way of gratify-

ing it, and no understanding of how to counteract it. The contemporary educational policies and practices of schools provide no pedagogical focus on the development of economic capital. African-American students lack the ability to critically assess the local social impact of today's global political economy on their lives, including the fact that black workers in urban areas are more likely than their white counterparts to be isolated from employment opportunities.

Urban youth of color need to be able to expand their considerations to a global context and critically examine the many ways in which the world's economic elites oppress others through organized structures, such as the International Monetary Fund that controls the global political economy. Within a DuBoisian framework, urban youth of color would be educated to critically comprehend the functions of the global and local political economies. They would understand how they and other marginalized peoples across the globe are connected in their situatedness within the political economy — as labor, as capitalists, and as consumers — and begin to participate strategically and deliberately within it.

A case in point is hip-hop and rap music. Within this context, urban youth of color are alienated workers — in a Marxist sense — and naïve consumers who are easily victimized by a corporatism that exploits their cultural art forms for enormous profits that filter down to neither the artist nor the community. As Bynoe (2004, 158) says, "Black Americans, while still driving the artistic engine of rap music, are not necessarily the chief beneficiaries of hip-hop's economic boom." Urban youth of color not only passively produce and consume the commodity of popularized hip-hop and rap, but fail to grasp how export of this commodity exponentially increases the industry's profit and mediates how the world negatively imagines and engages them. The ways in which urban youth of color participate in the commodification and commercialization of the musical forms suggest that they are not critically aware of their multifaceted exploitation by the entertainment industry. Despite the wealth that they have created for an industry and those who control it, they are powerless to use that accumulated wealth and economic capital to transform the hegemonic realities of

the local and global political economies that challenge racialized communities at home and abroad. An education that develops a DuBoisian sense of economic capital makes young people aware of the dynamics of the political economy so that they can critically engage it as they seek social uplift.

Cultural Capital

DuBois also advocated the acquisition of cultural capital. Like economic capital, represented by monetary and property holdings, cultural capital can be leveraged for wealth accumulation and social mobility. It is best understood as a set of cultural competencies around language, customs, traditions, and beliefs. Just as the government validates economic capital, institutions of education and the arts validate cultural capital. By virtue of their control over such institutions, the ruling elite ultimately structures the legitimization of economic and cultural capital.

In *The Philadelphia Negro*, DuBois (1996, 388) outlined five axiomatic propositions including “the duty of the Negro to raise himself by every effort to the standards of modern civilization and not to lower those standards in any degree.” Immersion in classical curricula would move the African American toward those standards where the culture and knowledges of Western civilization were privileged. DuBois was pragmatic about his insistence on the value of a classical education. In his response to a principal of a state school who was forced to stop teaching Latin to black students, he noted (1920, 120) that “as long as the leading Northern colleges require Latin in their entrance examinations our schools must meet that requirement or our children will be refused admission.”

DuBois understood that the classical curriculum represented the imposition of arbitrary knowledge. The problem with such an imposition, in terms of the development of appropriate cultural capital, was not its inclusion of Western knowledges, but its intentional exclusion and subjugation of other knowledges, particularly those indigenous to marginalized communities. A pedagogy that privileges Western knowledge “otherizes” students who are culturally different. The knowledge and the process by which it is disseminated and measured in schools reflects the culture of those who dominate the sys-

tem. It is their power, not any objective criteria, that justifies their ability to inculcate others with the knowledges emanating from their cultural perspectives. As R. Jones (2001) says,

Through decisions on which knowledge is acceptable, desirable, and respected, teachers (as the guardians and pawns) of educational structures regulate how the world enters into students as well as how students enter the world. Logically, dominant group educational structures are not overly concerned with empowering the dominated.

Despite these consequences, the pragmatic DuBois was resolute in his belief that African Americans had to successfully acquire knowledges propagandized by the dominant culture through its educational institutions.

The Talented Tenth

Most often, DuBois’s rhetoric about the development of cultural capital is most often discussed and critiqued in terms of the racialized elitism of *The Talented Tenth*. A. Reed, Jr. (1997, 53) says, “It is generally known that DuBois — at least in his early years — embraced an elitist program for Afro-American racial strategy.” The *Talented Tenth*, an idea that is often incorrectly credited to DuBois, would be highly educated black elites who would transform society by leading the liberation of the African-American community. The concept originated in 1896 among Northern white liberals of the American Baptist Home Missionary Society, which established Southern black colleges to educate Negro elites. Henry Morehouse coined the phrase *Talented Tenth* to distinguish his liberal arts education programs and students from the vocational education programs and students associated with Booker T. Washington (James 1997). It is important to remember that during the late 1800s, many in the newly freed African-American community were intensely focused on the creation of a cadre of African-American leaders who would guide the community toward uplift through societal agitation. They embraced the *Talented Tenth* framework as a means to leverage the community’s greatest intellectual assets to generate African-American leadership and ensure that the struggle for

collective uplift would not be defined or co-opted by white leaders whose agenda may not benefit the community.

DuBois readily conceded that his conceptualization of a leadership vehicle for African Americans limited the democratic process within the community, but he believed that the sacrifice was required. Ultimately, though, he became disillusioned with the *Talented Tenth* advocates because they failed to construct and implement an agenda for empowerment that was directly connected to the needs of the masses. Their immersion in the classical curricula and dominant culture facilitated their deradicalization. "In their haste to become Americans, their desire not to be peculiar or segregated in mind or body, they try to escape their cultural heritage and the body of experience which they themselves have built-up" (DuBois 1973, 144).

In his 1948 address at Wilberforce State University, DuBois expressed deep frustration with this unintended consequence and articulated a directive for a *New Tenth*. In its place, he argued for the development of a New Tenth which must remain connected to the people. The New Tenth would not just mirror the power structure and become a new version of the American elite (James 1997,24).

Double Consciousness

DuBois developed a well-known insight into the mental life of African Americans: *double consciousness*. The Negro, he said, is born into an American world

which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness — an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois 1986, 8)

DuBois believed African Americans had to be trained to balance the ontological tension within their sociocultural identity. It is only through man-

agement of the tension, as opposed to its eradication, that the community can gain the cultural capital to transform — not accommodate to — the hegemonic society. Eradication of the socially subjugated component of one's double consciousness might seem appealing, but it would conceal the nature of the oppression with which one must struggle. African Americans must grapple with the tension between the dominant culture, and its view of them, and their own indigenous experience. The African American's duality of existence cannot be denied.

Exclusive curricular focus on Western knowledges, at the exclusion of culturally indigenous knowledges, is currently pervasive in our schools, and has negatively impacted urban students of color. Academic success within prevailing school structures is equated with the loss or appropriation of one's cultural self by the dominant culture. Academic achievement is viewed as becoming the *other*, or achieving racelessness. Fordham (1996, 283) notes,

Most of these students view success in school as embodying the construction of Otherness, and they associate such success with an inevitable degree of Self-alienation.

Because successful engagement with school has covert implications for one's authentic cultural self, youth of color must devise strategies to "survive" schooling. They must reconcile the conflict between conformity and resistance to the curricula and pedagogy that *otherize* one's cultured self.

Conclusion

Urban youth of color need to understand the political context that structures their lives, the need for an egalitarian redistribution of power, and how to build local as well as global coalitions to transform social, economic, and political hindrances. They must be nurtured for consistent engagement in the political process (Shugurensky 2000). Education is the means by which this can happen. With appropriately designed education, urban youth of color could be prepared to exercise their agency to advocate for equal funding for their schools, to join the struggle against felon disenfranchisement, and to address a host of other sociopolitical issues.

DuBois's educational framework would necessarily include a Pan-Africanist perspective. Youth need to understand the common results of their colonialization and oppression. It is essential that urban youth of color acquire this Pan-Africanist knowledge, which can push them outside the particularities of their oppression in America and connect them with oppressed youth around the world. As they understand their sociopolitical positioning within the diaspora of oppressed people, as well as the political machinery of American society and of the global ruling elites, urban youth of color can help create strategies to transform such ills as the ethnic genocides in Rwanda and the Sudan and the AIDS epidemic in Africa, rather than being sociopolitically complicit in the occurrence of these phenomena because of ignorance or apathy.

DuBois (1973, 9) noted that

unless we develop our full capabilities, we cannot survive. If we are to be trained grudgingly and suspiciously; trained not with reference to what we can be, but with sole reference to what somebody wants us to be; if instead of following the methods pointed out by the accumulated wisdom of the world for the development of full human power, we simply are trying to follow the line of least resistance and teach black men only such things and by such methods as are momentarily popular, then my fellow teachers, we are going to fail and fail ignominiously in our attempt to raise the black race to its full humanity and with that failure falls the fairest and fullest dream of a great united humanity.

DuBois's educational ideology is critical to our contemporary discourse on urban education because he advocated for the development of economic, cultural, and political knowledges and skills as a means to empower one of our most marginalized communities without negating their culturally indigenous knowledges and skills. This perspective needs to enter our contemporary urban education discourse because far too few urban youth of color are being uplifted, much less empowered.

Our conceptualization of a sound basic education must be informed by the idea that

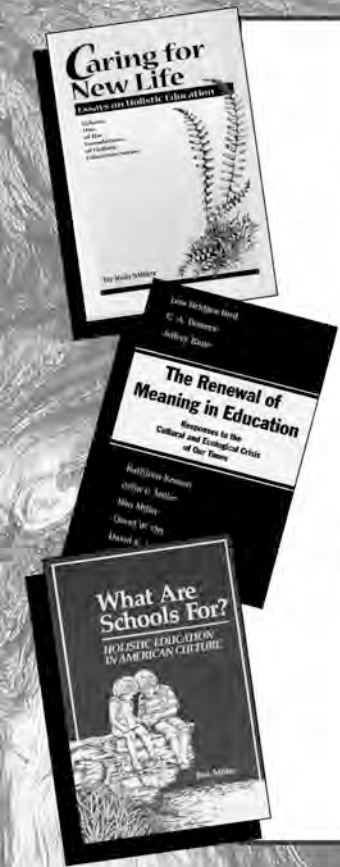
there is no such thing as a *neutral* educational process. Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate the integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes "the practice of freedom," the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (Shaull 1996, 16)

DuBois's educational ideology was fundamentally about the practice of freedom. Freedom equips individuals with the skills to critically read and strategically challenge the economic, cultural, and political realities of our hegemonic society. Our efforts to provide a sound basic education to urban students of color must be guided by more than a unilateral quest for culturally arbitrary standards or prescribed employability in a student's future. We must design education that is fundamentally grounded in a culturally relevant critical educational ideology that empowers urban youth to understand and change the dominant social order.

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On the Road

Chris Mercogliano

I considered giving this column a title that would convey the almost unimaginable grandeur of this country, perhaps a line from "America the Beautiful" or a Woody Guthrie song that speaks of the majesty of our land. But "On the Road" won out when I stopped the car to give a dollar to a roadside panhandler on the outskirts of Boulder, Colorado. By way of thanking me, he began to recite a poem from Jack Kerouac's iconic fifties' novel about his travels and travails across America. It was an extremely auspicious moment. Then, ten days later I made the acquaintance of one Diamond Dave, a beatnik, turned hippy, turned seventy-something college student who once hung out with Kerouac and the rest of the dharma bums on the West Coast. Still true to his roots, Diamond Dave is now the resident elder of what he calls SPAZ (Semi-Permanent Autonomous Zone), a rambling compound of abandoned warehouse space and veggie oil school buses that is home to a wild assortment of young activists and musicians on a raw edge of San Francisco. I was completely out of free fuel for my Jetta diesel wagon by that point, and they generously allowed me to fill up my veggie oil tank and the three spare five-gallon containers I use to get me through the long, dry stretches of highway.

Actually, I am off the road at the moment, as I write this journal entry. Miraculously, my car's alternator waited to seize until just after I had finished crossing the vast Mohave Desert on Interstate 40, with its spotty cell phone service and exits more than fifty miles apart. I am comfortably and generously being housed in the guest house at Prescott College

in central Arizona, where last night I led a wide-ranging discussion on nontraditional education with a diverse group of students, faculty, and members of the surrounding community. Today, because of the local unavailability of VW parts, I have unexpected time to reflect on some of my experiences during the seven-week, 7,000-mile book tour that I described in the last issue of *Encounter*.

The tour began inauspiciously enough with a stop at the State University of New York's northernmost outpost in Potsdam, located just a few miles south of the Canadian border. The group of fifty or so Masters Degree students trickled into the education department library somewhat reluctantly, having been promised extra credit by their professors if they would attend my five o'clock talk. After they had filled in the rear rows of seats and began distractedly eyeing their cell phones, I countered with a request to rearrange the chairs into a large circle. Once we were reconfigured I asked the group if they could feel the difference in the energy. A few heads nodded suspiciously. Clearly I wasn't preaching to the convinced.

But then they all laughed when I promised not to make them hold hands or sing Kumbaya. "You see, in the little school in inner-city Albany where I just concluded a 35-year teaching career, I never stood in front of groups children seated in rows, with all of the attention focused on me because I supposedly have all the answers." I explained that instead we sat in circles, or around tables of various shapes — often circular ones — so that we could work collaboratively, and everyone could be the center of his or own experience.

"Besides, if you decide you would like to hear more about my new book *In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness*, which I am setting out across the U.S. and Canada to promote, then it's you who are the real experts because you are so much



After 35 years as a teacher and administrator at the Albany Free School, CHRIS MERCUGLIANO is now devoting his time exclusively to writing and lecturing. His most recent book is *In Defense of Childhood: Protecting Kids' Inner Wildness* (Beacon Press 2007).

closer to your childhoods than I am to mine." A few more heads nodded this time, thankfully with a little more conviction.

By the end of our 90-minute session the dialogue had become quite lively, with a number of students echoing that they see a direct connection between the large numbers of their peers who are struggling to manage their time wisely and avoid out-of-control behaviors like binge drinking, and having led heavily managed and scripted childhoods. Six or eight students lingered for another half-hour or so in order to learn more about how children as young as age two are highly capable of directing their own learning and solving their own problems. We all agreed that this kind of early practice in self-regulation prepares kids for post-adolescent life far better than the conventional carrot-and-stick education model with its constant surveillance, imposed curricula, and relentless emphasis on academic performance.

Next stop: Yellow Springs, Ohio and a guest appearance at the progressive Antioch University Graduate Education Program, where I noted immediately that the students were sitting with the professor around a set of tables prearranged in a rectangle. Here I would definitely be addressing the choir, so to speak, and the students were eager to hear about a school where children steer their own learning and actively participate in governing themselves and resolving their own conflicts. The steady flow of excellent questions and comments more than adequately provided the structure for the discussion.

The following evening I conducted a parent forum at the Antioch Children's School, founded in the 1920s by then Antioch College president Arthur Morgan. Here the parents and faculty seemed reassured by the fact that I was speaking from three and a half decades of experience spent much nearer to the edge of the education spectrum than their school, and I could confidently state that I have seen hundreds of my Albany Free School graduates go on to lead satisfying, original, and successful adult lives.

Next it was on to Bloomington, Indiana and the Harmony School, a private, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade alternative founded in the seventies by Steve Bonchek. The Harmony School has become something of a nationwide model for

public school reform. Then I traveled across the rest of the Midwest to Boulder, Colorado; and then north and west through the Rockies to Evergreen State College, another highly nontraditional school. The majority of the students in the class with whom I met there are not headed toward careers in education, and so I asked them for feedback on their child-

Early practice in self-regulation prepares kids for post-adolescent life far better than the conventional carrot-and-stick education.

hoods. The ensuing ninety-minute conversation was electric, filled with student insights which absolutely confirm my observation that the domestication of childhood is intensifying at an alarming rate.

One young woman described the marked difference she has been noticing between her childhood and that of a sibling who is only six years younger. She said that her little sister rarely goes outdoors and is constantly interacting with one kind of electronic media or another, and that the communication between her sister and her friends tends to lack the intimacy she shares with her friends.

Here I was pleased to model for the professors of this team-taught course how much energy is released when the teacher steps out of the center and turns it over to the students. One of the profs remarked to me afterward that she had never seen such a high level of participation in her class.

Then across the border to Vancouver, where I guest-taught several education classes at the University of British Columbia and led a forum at the Windsor House, which until an education ministry crack-down three years ago had been one of the only publicly funded, truly freedom-based schools in North America. Here a pattern became apparent that has repeated itself throughout my engagements on the tour: the dialogue seems to flow easily at children's schools that allow the kids to be self-directing, whereas a palpable tension hangs in the air at schools that don't. Turnouts for my talks at non-coercive schools have also been consistently higher.

After numerous stops at small unconventional schools, colleges, and bookstores down the Pacific coast, I reached the oldest free school in the United States. Founded in 1949 by Phyllis Fleischman, Play Mountain Place combines the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers, with whom Phyllis studied for a time, and the educational philosophy of A. S. Neill. Somewhat surprisingly, even here I found that parents were eager for me to remind them that children do indeed have highly accurate inner guidance systems and can be trusted to intuit their own learning needs and how best to meet them. We talked at length about how much fear and anxiety pollute the water in which we are all swimming today, which nudges even the most relaxed and trusting parents and teachers toward the control stick.

* * * *

Now I'm sitting in the beautiful home of Kristan Morrison, thanks to a much needed — and this time scheduled — day off. Kristan, who also writes for *Encounter* on occasion, is a professor of education at Radford University in southern Virginia. She was able to convince three different organizations to sponsor my visit, thus providing a major source of funding for the tour, and yesterday evening we gave a provocative joint presentation to over 150 students and faculty from her department.

Before I describe last night's event, I would like to interject a word on the ordeal of getting here from Arizona. The car difficulties I had in Arizona didn't let up. Although I didn't speak in every state, I had so much automotive trouble that it seemed as though I was destined to know a variety of mechanics in each locale.

Luckily, I arrived at Kristan's in time for us to prepare for our two-and-a-half-hour session with her students and colleagues. I count Kristan among my heroes because of the way she is able to operate within the conventional educational system and still stand true to her beliefs about children and the learning process, a dance she describes so eloquently in her recent book, *Free School Teaching: A Journey into Radical Progressive Education* (State University of New York Press, 2007). The quintessential infiltrator, she is equally comfortable in traditional and nontraditional education worlds, and her ability to fluently

speak the language of each enables her to slip in and out without being noticed.

Kristan gave a perfect demonstration of this valuable skill last night when one student asked me about the Albany Free School's curriculum and I answered that we don't really have one. Kristan rushed forward from the back of the auditorium and said with sudden passion, "Pardon me for interrupting, but I really don't think that's true. The school actually has a very complex curriculum; it just looks different from the kind we find in conventional schools."

Kristan went on to explain that my former school, where in 2003 she conducted a three-month field study for her PhD dissertation, in fact has three curricula. There is an academic curriculum whereby students learn the skills and information that meet the conventional idea of academics, but all within the context of real tasks in which the kids have intrinsic interest. There is also a social/emotional curriculum that enables students to be in community with one another by teaching them how to deal with their own personal issues and conflicts as well as those of others. And finally there is what she calls a "libratory" curriculum, meaning that the kids learn how to negotiate the world as-is through direct experience, instead of secondhand through sources like textbooks and videos. They also discover that they can surmount life's obstacles, as well as the socially unjust situations that they observe in the world around them.

The evening was highly successful, again with many participants staying to talk and ask questions well beyond the allotted time. And it was wonderful to have the opportunity to work alongside Kristan again.

As I write in my notebook in Virginia, it's five weeks down and two to go. Up ahead are two more stops in this state on my way north to Washington, DC, and an appearance at the prestigious independent bookstore Politics and Prose and then to the old, sixties' free school Upattinas, so called because in the days leading up to the formation of the school that's where the children in the area could always be found — *up at Tina's* house. Then it will be on to a bookstore in Philadelphia, followed by five busy days in New York City at a variety of bookstores, schools, and colleges—and finally home to Albany.

I can't wait.

Educating for Peace

Joan Almon

A child advocate recommends ten steps that will help children work toward a more peaceful world.

American children, fed a nonstop toxic diet of electronic-media images, are increasingly fearful about the threats of war, terrorism, crime, and other forms of violence. The threats, in some cases, are real. In other ways, they are greatly exaggerated by our preoccupation with violence and gore, which inundates children daily on television, movie, and video-game screens.

Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks — and amid ubiquitous talk of war — many new toys and games that glorify violence have appeared in stores. “War toys may fulfill a need for adults to feel patriotic or support U.S. troops,” says Diane Levin (2002), a professor of education at Wheelock College and the author of *Teaching Young Children in Violent Times*. “But they often channel children into narrowly scripted play and convey a message that violent play is OK and exciting.”

In the past few years, the United States has changed from a confident nation to one plagued by fear. In times of fear we tend either to seek safety and hide or to rush forward and attack. But those are not the only options. Many parents and teachers are asking how we can help children face the world with courage and equanimity. How can we educate them for a life of caring and compassion when the news is so full of stories of hatred, revenge, and cruelty? How can we prepare them to work through conflicts in creative ways?

The answers rest on a personal and national commitment to peace education. Teaching about peace can take place in all the areas of children’s lives — in the home and at school, in places of worship and in after-school activities, in both local and global communities.

It is easy to teach children about war. It is much more challenging to teach them how to create peace. In war, we draw lines and barricade ourselves against the enemy. Educating for peace means build-

This essay was originally written shortly after 9/11 and is adapted from a version originally published in *Stop the Next War Now: Effective Responses to Violence and Terrorism*, Maui, Hawaii: Inner Ocean Publishing, 2005.



JOAN ALMON is the U.S. coordinator of the Alliance for Childhood, a nonprofit partnership of educators, health professionals, and other advocates for children who are concerned about the decline in children’s play, health, and well-being <allianceforchildhood.org>.

ing bridges between people across every divide, including ethnic, racial, religious, and national lines.

Living with peace begins in the home, but schools have also become effective venues for teaching the practices of peace. Research shows that well-designed violence-prevention and conflict-resolution programs can have a significant positive impact on students. For example, independent evaluations (Brown et al. 2004) of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, an initiative of Educators for Social Responsibility, found that the program successfully teaches young people the skills of negotiation, mediation, and peacemaking. The program is offered in approximately 400 schools around the country. In those schools, educators were better prepared for the events of 9/11, says Linda Lantieri, cofounder of the program. "The children in our programs have learned the healing power of love and respect and understanding," Lantieri (2002) says. "They see the connection between the way they treat one another and the way they will treat the world when they are in charge."

My colleagues and I at the Alliance for Childhood, a nonprofit children's advocacy group, have outlined ten concrete steps for peace education in homes, schools, religious centers, scout groups, and elsewhere.

Ten Steps for Peace Education

Make Room for Peace at Home

Outer peace begins with inner peace. Children and adults need special places that give them a sense of privacy and peace, and that can serve as a quiet refuge for times when hurt or angry feelings might lead to violent words or actions. It could be a room or just a corner, decorated simply and lovingly, where any family member can go for quiet reflection or prayer, or to work through turbulent feelings. Put art and writing materials there to help express what lies within.

Find Peace in Nature

Go outside. Take children for a walk or let them explore nature in their own way. The beauty of nature is a great balm to the soul. Children often seek out their own secret outdoor spaces, even if it's only a corner of the backyard. Respect children's need for the pri-

vate exploration and inner reflection that nature inspires.

Make Time for Creative Play

Children need plenty of time for unstructured, creative play. Make-believe social play reduces aggression and increases empathy in children. Children use play to work through feelings of fear and sadness, to find comfort, and to explore the world and develop relationships. Choose children's toys carefully, avoiding those that encourage or glorify violence. Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment <www.truceteachers.org> prepares an annual guide to help parents make wise choices about toys.

Engage Children's Hands and Hearts

Children need a direct experience of giving. They love to make things, small and large — their own cards, tree ornaments, cookies, or bread — for neighbors, family, friends, or those in need. They can also learn to enjoy sorting through their own things and giving away some treasured possessions to others in need.

Establish a "Family Foundation"

Create a homemade bank for donations — a miniature family foundation. Family and friends can put money in the bank. Children can be introduced to tithing when they receive gifts, earnings, or allowance. Choose a charity together — one that has personal meaning for the children especially — to give to. Charities like the Heifer Project <www.heifer.org> are much loved by children who relate to the practical deed of giving livestock to needy families. When there is news of a flood, fire, or other disaster, the family can respond with a donation from the bank. As the children mature, talk to them more frankly about the needs of the world and ways to help.

Support Peace Education at School

Urge your school to establish or strengthen peace-education and conflict-resolution programs. Contact Educators for Social Responsibility <www.esrnational.org> or the National Peace Foundation <www.nationalpeace.org> for ideas, like how to create "peace places" in schools, where students can go

to resolve disputes nonviolently. Older students can study a conflict-torn area of the world, looking at it from two or more perspectives. Resources for this kind of study can be found through the Karuna Center for Peacebuilding <www.karunacenter.org>; Facing History and Ourselves <www.facinghistory.org>; and the Public Conversations Project <www.publicconversations.org>.

Face Local Needs

Help children become comfortable with the people in your community who need help — the elderly, the disabled, and the poor. Starting in middle school, students benefit enormously from working in hospitals, soup kitchens, animal shelters, and the like. Make sure there is someone there to mentor the young person when such experiences become emotionally painful or confusing. Community service can be especially effective for young people who are growing up in socially and economically stressed neighborhoods where they feel undervalued.

Make a Difference in the World

Help young people find active ways to collaborate with other children globally, through organizations like Jane Goodall's Roots and Shoots <www.janegoodall.org>, Craig Kielburger's Free the Children <www.freethechildren.org>, or Peace Jam, in which students work directly with Nobel Peace laureates <www.peacejam.org>.

Celebrate Peace

Link children with others around the world through U.N. celebrations of Peace Day, September 21 <<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/peaceday/2004/index.asp>>. The World Peace Prayer Society <www.worldpeace.org> encourages children and communities to plant a peace pole or host a ceremony of flags from countries around the world. Encourage children to create their own peace prayers, poems, and works of art. Make every day a peace day.

Share Inspiring Words of Peace from Different Cultures

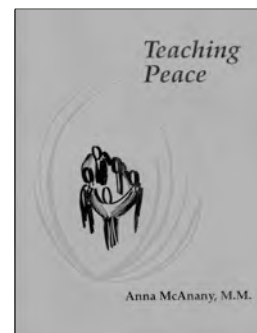
Children love to hear aloud the inspiring words of Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and other champions of peace, justice, and nonviolence. Teach children the Golden Rule, common to most religions and philosophies. "Do unto others as you would have them

do unto you" is the basis of social respect and cooperation (see <www.teachingvalues.com/goldenrule.html>). Also see PeaceCenter at <www.salsa.net/peace/prayer14.html> for a list of 12 peace prayers from different world religions, or <www.worldprayers.org> for prayers by individuals.

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It's Okay To Be Different, As Long As You're Not

Richard J. Prystowsky

Education should address our prejudices, some of which we might not even be aware of.

Recently, members of our college's Diversity Committee were discussing the extent to which participants in a campus climate survey might have been reluctant to identify themselves with their ethnic group. During the course of the discussion, a faculty member on the committee commented to me, "Some of the faculty feel that you are too much in our face about your being Jewish."

Stunned, I considered the ironies. This comment was made at a meeting of the Diversity Committee, which supposedly embraces differences. Moreover, the meeting was being held during the Christmas season, when the college was heavily decorated with Christmas symbols. All around us, members of the dominant culture were prominently celebrating *their* cultural identity. Did they know that they were doing this? Did they even think about the implicit and explicit messages that they were conveying by their attitudes and actions?

Not surprisingly, on the survey itself, most survey participants reported our campus to be respectful and welcoming of diversity. Many members of the dominant culture do not perceive — literally, do not see — the ways in which their community creates an atmosphere of exclusion of or insensitivity to persons or groups who are not part of the dominant culture.

I am reminded of a class discussion that occurred at another college, in which many of my white students expressed, quite sincerely, that they didn't see racism as they went about their daily activities; further, these students either implied or stated that, in their view, racism didn't exist in their community. The discussion began to take a different turn, however, when the only African-American student in the class began talking about her being followed by store

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personnel when she would enter local department stores (the same ones that a number of the students frequented) and about other examples of her having been subjected to racial profiling.

Why didn't my white students see these problems that this African-American student experienced routinely? Perhaps in part because they themselves didn't have her experiences and, it seems, didn't know

Members of dominant groups are often unaware of, if not blind to, the ways in which their actions, attitudes, and assumptions help set the norm for everyone to follow.

of anyone else who had had them. Whatever the reasons, many of us who are members of a dominant group (in terms of our sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and the like) do not see the hostility towards non-dominant-group difference that occurs in our midst and, even more troubling, engage in self-deception with respect to this hostility more often than we would be comfortable knowing or admitting.

When I told my son (who is a senior in college) about the comment made to me during the Diversity Committee meeting, he remarked with especially trenchant perspicacity on the antisemitism in the comment:

What does it mean for someone or for something to be "in someone else's face"? That makes sense only if the thing itself is a problem. People don't say, "You're in my face about my being a great friend, colleague, and leader." It sounds as if your colleague is saying that, in the minds of some faculty, your being Jewish is a problem. It's not a matter of your being *too* Jewish. For antisemites, your being Jewish at all is a problem.

I don't know whether or not members of our faculty are antisemitic. However, I do know how difficult, if not impossible, it is for all of us to escape fully

from problematic teachings and attitudes to which we have been exposed. As a white heterosexual male, for example, I would be naïve to believe that I am or ever could be completely free of the influences on me from dominant-culture teachings and attitudes that I have learned about skin color, sexual orientation, and sex. In all likelihood, my colleagues face the same difficulty with respect to problematic cultural teachings and attitudes that they have learned about religion.

Be that as it may, what I heard in my colleague's comment was that, in at least some faculty members' minds, I have not been acting the role of the model "different" person. How should I respond to this ontological conundrum? How much of myself do I hide from others in order to fit in with them? But should I have to — or can I really — hide parts of myself that make me who I am? Is acceptance by members of a dominant group really worth the price of self-negation? Members of dominant groups are often unaware of, if not blind to, the ways in which their actions, attitudes, and assumptions help set the norm for everyone to follow. How many of us from dominant groups consciously think about, for example, the limited list of titles on forms (Mr., Mrs, and so on), or about the closing of schools and other governmental entities for Christmas, or about the use of the words "bachelor" and "master" to indicate college degree levels? This lack of self-awareness causes difficulties for many persons from non-dominant groups who work or otherwise associate with members of the dominant group and who all too often are reminded that one has permission to be different from the norm as long as one doesn't call attention to one's differences.

Sadly, my colleague's comment to me was neither the first nor the most problematic of its kind that I've encountered. Indeed, my experiences have led me to wonder how open to and accepting of difference many of us educators truly are and how committed to diversity our institutions really are. To help us answer this question, I would like to suggest that we all undertake a thorough inventory of our campus' diversity-related accomplishments, as well as an honest appraisal of our own attitudes and actions.

On our campuses, how successful have we been, for example, in honoring our commitments to in-

creasing the diversity of our faculty? Do our courses interweave diversity themes seamlessly and thoroughly? Do we celebrate a people's history and culture in other than the people's "recognition month"? Here is another way to frame these questions: Are our campuses so open and welcoming to everyone that there is no longer a need for our institutions even to have a diversity committee?

On an individual level, we might ask ourselves about the extent to which we *actively* welcome, include, and engage all of the "outsiders" in our midst. On this point, I remember a comment made to me a number of years ago by one of my older relatives, who had lived his entire life in the deep South. When I asked him how he had dealt with the antisemitism and exclusion that he had experienced, he thought for a moment and then replied, "Well, it wasn't that you were ever excluded. It's just that you were never invited."

Many of us undoubtedly feel that we are in fact quite open to and accepting of difference. And none of us wants to believe that we self-deceive. Neverthe-

less, we need to ask ourselves pertinent and tough questions about our attitudes and actions if we are to be strong, successful agents of positive social change. How comfortable do we really feel around others who are different from us — including those who, demonstrably displaying their differences, are not afraid to be and show who they are? How accepting of them are we when their displays of otherness especially challenge or otherwise trouble us? Persons who are different from us and who demonstrate their differences openly around us can discern our blatant or tacit acceptance or rejection of them.

Ultimately, if we are to be the change that we want to see enacted in the world, then we must be willing continually to challenge our beliefs and actions in good faith. For, it is not enough for us to espouse views of respect for and acceptance of others or merely to proclaim that we accept and celebrate difference. We must be willing to create an institutional community in which everyone is truly respected—a healthy, accepting community in which everyone feels genuinely invited.



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Of Books and Barbecues

Bruce A. Marlowe

The tyranny of standardized testing is making a mockery of teaching and learning.

Late last fall, students across Rhode Island took the New England Common Assessment Program, or NECAP (pronounced the way a loan shark would). My 16-year-old daughter was among them. Before the exam, she was required to attend an assembly — a kind of pep rally — where students were told that they faced a solemn responsibility. Then, after the stick (“You will not graduate without participating”), came the carrots. Students were told if they do well they could earn prizes, including points added to their grades and a barbecue in the school’s courtyard. Indeed, the PowerPoint presentation used by the principal during the assembly featured a slide of a giant barbecue on an elevated stage. The next slide displayed the neighboring town’s recent scores. “You can beat these scores,” the principal proclaimed. “You’re better than this.”

How did schooling become reduced to a kind of game show, where the entire enterprise is about performing for rewards and beating the other guy? Is this zero-sum approach supposed to encourage the hope that the kids in the neighboring town will learn less? In recent articles, Alfie Kohn (2006; 2007) examines this question in depth. Kohn (2006) quotes Janet Swenson at Michigan State University: “We’ll all benefit from the best education we can provide to every child on the face of this planet. Do you care if it’s a child in Africa who finds a cure for cancer rather than a child in your country?” But as Kohn says, today’s emphasis is on victory rather than universal learning.

The notion that ranking tells us something about the nature, depth, or value of learning is as false as it is insidious. As Bracey has pointed out (2000), not only does rank order information tell us nothing useful about *what* was accomplished, or about the *quality* of what was learned, it also obscures performance. Bracey notes that “when they run the hun-



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dred meter dash in the Olympics, someone must rank last. He is still the eighth fastest human being on the planet ... probably not known to the other runners as 'Pokey.'"

My daughter's pep rally is only the most recent example of how state-wide standardized testing has

How did schooling become reduced to a kind of game show, where the entire enterprise is about performing for rewards and beating the other guy?

corrupted learning. In Massachusetts, finding a course called "MCAS English" — where one learns how to fill in exam bubbles — is easier than finding one in the American Short Story, Modern British Fiction or Shakespeare. In Rhode Island there are now districts where kindergarten teachers are required to measure and sort their students so obsessively that even finger painting is assessed on a 5-point scale. Meanwhile, subjects like Social Studies and Art are disappearing from the curriculum because they are not formally tested.

Publicly questioning the value of the standards movement may seem a little like maintaining that the earth is flat. After all, how can anyone question the importance of increasing student achievement? Standards help us to eliminate curriculum redundancy, clarify what we mean by high expectations, and assess student learning in relation to clear benchmarks. But the movement rests on questionable assumptions. Must we require all children to learn the same things at the same time? Must we insist that children master complex material at increasingly younger ages?

By relentlessly emphasizing achievement, we undermine student interest in learning beyond what is required for the test, the grade, or the barbecue on the quad. Over 40 years ago, John Holt (1967, 151) pointed out that children feel intense anxiety over being constantly tested. "Their fear of failure, punishment, and disgrace severely reduces their ability both to perceive and to remember, and drives them away from the material being studied."

A substantial body of research has supported Holt. It indicates that as students pay increasing attention to *how well* they are doing, they become de-creasingly concerned with *what* they are doing. It also demonstrates that providing external rewards for performance actually results in poorer performance and weaker motivation for learning. As early as 1962 Glucksberg discovered that compared to subjects who were simply given task directions, those who were offered monetary rewards were less creative in their approach and took significantly longer to complete novel problem-solving tasks. And, in a wide variety of experimental settings, Deci and Ryan (1985; 2000), have very convincingly demonstrated that the introduction of incentives causes a sharp decline in intrinsic motivation. (See also Deci and Ryan's website on Self-Determination Theory at <www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/index.html>.) Finally, in a series of well-known experiments, Dweck (1986; 1999) discovered that students whose attention was directed towards how well they were doing very quickly developed maladaptive, self-protective styles of motivation. Compared to students who were told "You must have worked really hard," those who were praised for being smart quickly became anxious in the face of new problems and demonstrated challenge-avoidance behaviors. Most dramatically,

By relentlessly emphasizing achievement, we undermine student interest in learning beyond what is required for the test.

Dweck found that 40% of the students who were praised for their intelligence also lied about their performance to an anonymous peer group they would never meet.

For teachers, statewide testing has created an atmosphere that is intimidating and mundane. Intimidating because it has been presented as a fait accompli — teacher opinion is discouraged and often prohibited — and mundane because teachers who once

considered themselves excellent, now feel compelled to comply with rigid mandates from above, whether or not they make pedagogical sense (Marlowe & Page 2000; see also *Collateral Damage* 2007).

Research has established that authentic assessments provide the richest, most accurate gauge of student learning (Wiggins 1989). To make judgments about students, teachers, or school districts on the basis of one-shot, summative evaluations administered to children who are typically anxious, bored, hostile — or “all of the above” — is foolhardy. Instead of innovative teaching, we have curricula driven by the tyranny of statewide tests.

But, the barbecue promises to be tasty.

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Children's Happiness

Kate McReynolds

Contemporary standards-based education is causing children considerable misery — a fact that adults commonly fail to acknowledge.

I believe that every human being has an innate desire for happiness and does not want to suffer.

I also believe that the very purpose of life is to experience this happiness.

The Dalai Lama (2001)

I first began thinking about children's happiness many years ago when I worked at a residential treatment center for emotionally disturbed children. Many of the 24 youngsters who lived at the center had been physically or sexually abused. Some had been neglected. Still others had lived in unimaginably shocking conditions. I was baffled and deeply troubled by the harm that parents could inflict on their children. But I was also deeply touched by the children's capacity for happiness. They were resilient and when cared for, they often flourished. It was these children, whose names and faces I still remember, who led me to choose a career in child clinical psychology.

Many years and textbooks later, the numbers of abused, traumatized, and mistreated children with whom I have worked no longer surprise me. Nor am I puzzled anymore by the fact that parents could harm their own children. Most of the mothers and fathers with whom I have worked have been victims of child abuse when they were young. Many were struggling with extreme poverty, poor education, and other difficulties that made it possible to feel compassion for them, without which the work was impossible.

Of course, not every child that comes to a clinic has suffered abuse or trauma; in fact, some do not have any mental disorder whatsoever. I have been asked, for example, to evaluate youngsters who were showing signs of emotional disturbance, but whom I determined were merely unhappy. I say "merely" to emphasize the distinction between the psychologically healthy but unhappy child, and those children who have a genuine illness or disorder. In my early years as a child psychologist I was pleased when I



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could report to parents and to teachers that a child, though unhappy, was not ill. Promoting happiness, after all, seemed easier than treating mental illness or helping a child recover from trauma. But promoting children's happiness has turned out to be quite difficult, a fact that has proven even more puzzling to me than child abuse.

Hard to Face

Early in my clinical work I noticed that many people, even experienced child psychologists, have trouble looking squarely at the unhappiness of children. By that I mean pondering it fully, until the deepest understanding of what a child is experiencing is achieved. I first became aware of the difficulty when I was a graduate student. As part of a seminar in child assessment I was assigned the task of evaluating a 5-year-old boy whose foster parents were worried because he liked to dress in girls' clothing and play with dolls. I learned that when this boy was three years old, he witnessed his mother's murder. For a year he lived with his grandmother and aunt. During this time his grandmother's legs were amputated due to complications from diabetes, and his aunt, a drug addict, regularly took him to crack houses where he witnessed her exchange sex for drugs. Prior to entering foster care, he escaped a fire in his apartment and stood on the street watching his building burn, knowing that some people inside had burned to death. He had been physically abused and there was a strong suspicion of sexual abuse as well.

I was surprised when, at the case conference, my fellow trainees and our supervisor discussed only the gender-related aspects of the case. I tried, again and again, to direct attention to the horrific traumas this child had endured, to bring his unthinkable suffering to light. I told my colleagues that I had come to understand how much this boy missed his mother, how painfully he longed for a loving and tender connection with a trustworthy mother figure. In the end, my supervisor overturned my recommendation that treatment focus on helping the child work through his traumatic losses and abuse. He was diagnosed with gender identity disorder, and treatment was to be geared toward helping him learn appropriate gen-

der behavior. It seemed this boy's suffering was, in fact, unthinkable.

For a while, I thought that the difficulty some people have looking at children's unhappiness was limited to *extreme unhappiness* of the sort I just described. It takes real fortitude to listen, week after week, without shutting down or detaching, as a child describes the moment his mother's throat was cut, or recalls with terror watching her father kill rats in the apartment by impaling them on a board hammered through with a nail. But eventually I saw that carefully considering even the ordinary unhappiness of children is difficult for many people.

By *ordinary unhappiness*, I mean the kind of misery that well-loved, well-cared-for children sometimes feel. In other words, it is not triggered by trauma, abuse, or neglect. When a child's ordinary unhappiness becomes chronic and pervasive, he or she is often referred to the clinic. Happiness can be restored, especially in young children, depending on the willingness of those concerned to do what is needed to help. But left untreated, both extreme and ordinary unhappiness can solidify into entrenched emotional disturbance.

School-Related Unhappiness

A recent (2007) United Nations survey of 21 industrialized nations asked young people if they like school. Seventy-eight percent of U.S. children said they do not. What's more, a recent Associated Press/MTV survey (Noveck & Thompson 2007a) reports that school is the most common source of stress among 12- to 17-year-olds. These findings correspond to my own professional experience. By far, the common cause of ordinary unhappiness among all the children I have treated has been school. I have found this to be true outside the clinic as well. In my own work with students at an urban college, as a consultant to educators in the New York City school system, and as the mother of two school-age children. Because school-related unhappiness is so much less dramatic than the experience of violent trauma, it took me a long time to understand the serious nature of the problem, a problem that seems to be viewed as a necessary by-product of modern life.

The first time I had the pleasure of reporting to parents that the only problem their child had was

that he had started kindergarten too early, my own children were just finishing elementary school at a child-centered program. I had little experience, therefore, with the mandate that children must be prepared to take their places in the competitive global economy. The parents, with the support of the school, kept their son in kindergarten and paid me to meet with him weekly, despite my insistence that he did not need therapy — only more time to play! As the months wore on, his unhappiness grew and his behavior deteriorated. He became aggressive at school and started stealing. He developed nightmares and stomach aches.

At the end of the school year, I attended a conference with his parents, his teachers, the school principal, and the guidance counselor. I painstakingly repeated that although this child was very bright, he was being pushed beyond the limits of his abilities; he simply wasn't developmentally ready to sit still for long stretches and focus on academic tasks. This explanation had no effect, so I spoke at length about his unhappiness. I recounted his nightmares and stress-related illnesses, his faltering confidence and emerging fearfulness. I told them he was suffering and that if he advanced to first grade he would suffer more. In the end his parents, with the school's support, decided to advance him. What stunned me though was that no one in the room responded to this young boy's unhappiness.

Since then, I have attended 32 parent-teacher conferences, two per year, for each of my own two children. Between conferences I've had countless additional meetings with teachers and principals to address various issues. I have discovered that very few educators have taken my children's state of happiness seriously. Recently, for example, a student in my daughter's high school, her friend and classmate since middle school, committed suicide. The principal sent a beautifully written letter to the families of the students expressing the importance of taking time to be with our children as they struggled to understand this tragedy, and the importance of giving youngsters time to grieve. But the night of the funeral my exhausted, grief stricken daughter came home to three hours of homework — work I could not persuade her to leave for another day. When I suggested to the principal that his letter

would be more meaningful if he suspended homework for a few days, he was nonplused. He seemed unable to fathom that taking time to grieve means taking time *out* from everyday activities and responsibilities. The principal cautioned me that suspending homework might jeopardize the students' future. I described my daughter's present grief, her tears, and how she had wanted to talk with me but felt too pressured by homework demands to do so. I pointed out that she was one of many grieving students who needed more than a letter to work through their unhappiness.

In the end, as so often happens, it was suggested that maybe my daughter was unusual. Maybe she didn't know how to plan her time well. Maybe she didn't make good use of the counseling assembly held in the school auditorium. Furthermore, as I had often heard, I was the only parent complaining. I didn't think this was true, but I wondered how widespread the problem really was. So I decided to do a little research.

Mental Health Statistics

How happy or unhappy are children in general today? As far as I know, there are no studies that directly address this question, but some research sheds light on it indirectly. According to the United States Surgeon General (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services 1999, Chapter 3), 21% of our nation's children between the ages of 9 and 17 have emotional or behavioral disorders. The number of children who take antidepressant medication has increased dramatically; for example, between 1997 and 2002 its use among adolescents doubled (Varley et al. 2006). In 2002, the number of children taking stimulant medication for attention deficit disorder reached 2.2 million. (Zuvekas et al. 2006). Suicide is the leading cause of death among youth and young adults (Center for Disease Control 2007). In 2003, 8.4% of U.S. high school students attempted suicide and 16.9% seriously considered suicide (Shaffer, Gould & Hicks 2007).

These statistics don't tell us how many children had "true" psychiatric problems, where unhappiness is entrenched in the personality and is difficult to alleviate by altering social conditions. Many children who are given medications or are labeled with "atten-

tion disorders" — or even contemplate suicide — may experience ordinary unhappiness. I suspect that ordinary unhappiness is buried in these statistics.

Improving Schools

If, as seems likely, school is a major source of children's ordinary unhappiness, how might school be improved? In 2005, the Horatio Alger Association asked students, for the first time in its history, how school could be improved. Ninety-five percent of American high school students responded that school would be better if there were more opportunities for real-world learning through internships, service learning, and other opportunities to make the classroom work more relevant (p. 52). The survey also asked students their one wish to make life better. A combined 53% of students wished for more time with their families and more time for spiritual pursuits. No other choices combined ranked as high, including the wish for more money to buy material goods or the wish for a bigger house (p. 4).

These results are consistent with a recent nationwide survey of 1,280 young people from the age of 13 through 24, conducted by the Associated Press and MTV (Noveck & Thompson 2007b). Young people most often said that the "one thing in life" that makes them most happy was family and friends. Religion received a moderately high ranking. Almost no one said "money." (The low ranking of money, incidentally, is consistent with survey research with adults [Carey 2004; McMahan 2006; Ricard 2006].)

If one valued student happiness, then, school improvement would focus on more relevant learning experiences and more time with family and friends. In today's educational system, such changes are unlikely. Academic (test-measured) achievement trumps real-life learning, and homework deprives students of time with family and friends (Bennett & Kalish 2006; Kohn 2006).

Qualitative Reports

Surveys, while informative, don't give us much of a feel for children's unhappiness. More descriptive accounts of school-related misery, that often appear in newspapers and books, reveal the painful quality of children's unhappiness today. One report (Shapiro 2005), for example, described 3rd graders weeping in

the nurse's office for fear of failing standardized tests. Another told the story of a first grader who, when pushed to complete excessive homework, falls apart — kicking, screaming and crying (Winerip 1999). A fifth grade boy cries about school every night and has to take Pepto-Bismol for his upset stomach (Bennett & Kalish 2006). Bennett and Kalish also report one of the more disturbing accounts of unhappy school children that I have read. In one school district, where a standardized test determines who will advance to the next grade, 20 children per day vomit on their test booklet. The director of testing and accountability for the district describes the pressure of this sort of high-stakes testing on the elementary and middle school children, saying, "They cry. They have to be removed. The stress is so much that they can't handle it. As the tests start, they literally fall apart. It would break your heart" (Bennett & Kalish 2006, 112). I would only add, if we let it.

Another limitation of surveys is that, no matter how well-constructed they may be, they can never capture the complexity of the lived experience of happiness (or unhappiness, as the case may be). Happiness is not a category, which surveys can assess fairly well. It is more like a multifaceted and sensitive eco-system, flourishing or dying, depending on the delicate balance of all its elements.

Other Reasons for Unhappiness

I have so far discussed one major reason for ordinary unhappiness in children — schooling. But happiness is part of a bigger set of factors. The UNICEF study (2007) evaluated a broader set of factors that I believe give a better picture of children's happiness. It did not directly ask U.S. children about happiness, but it assessed material comfort, education, health, relationships, spirituality, and safety in 21 industrialized nations. The United States ranked 20th, second to last, in the overall well-being of its children. This poor showing was not the result of a low score on one factor bringing down the average; the United States fell in the bottom third for 5 of the 6 factors reviewed. Great Britain, whose school children are tested even more than ours, came in last for the well-being of its children.

Research conducted by U.S. institutions has yielded similarly pessimistic findings. The Founda-

tion for Child Development (2007), for example, estimated that in 2005 the health, social relationships, and emotional and spiritual well-being of America's children was below 1975 baseline levels.

Why the Denial?

Earlier I discussed my impression that adults, even mental health professionals, have difficulty seeing when children are simply unhappy. Why is this so? Part of the reason, at least among parents and educators, is that adults' eyes are focused elsewhere. The unhappy child is the non-achieving child, but it's the lack of achievement that is visible to the adult. We see the test score, not the child.

Another reason for our inability to perceive children's unhappiness became apparent to me in a personal episode. When my son was attending middle school, I discovered that one of his teachers routinely humiliated him in class. Up until then, I thought his unhappiness with school was the result of the unremitting pressure to tackle assignments far too advanced for even the brightest seventh grader. I had addressed the developmental appropriateness of the work at every turn, but this was something different.

I set up an appointment with the teacher to try to explain how my son felt humiliated, and I approached our meeting with the hope that she and I could find common ground in our mutual respect for children. When I arrived, however, things didn't start well. The teacher made me wait as she busied herself with trivial tasks. When she sat with me at last, I didn't feel she was prepared to hear me. I spoke to her about how unhappy my son was in her class, how her remarks hurt and humiliated him, but she minimized the issue and focused on my son's lack of organizational skills and attention span. I brought the focus back to his unhappiness. She intimated that if I pursued the issue my son's grade would suffer.

After 30 minutes I had made no headway in helping this teacher see my child's unhappiness. I decided to try again. I spoke of my love for him. I told her that I was sure that she, an experienced and devoted teacher, had not meant to be hurtful. I described one last time how discouraged and unhappy my son felt when he left her class room each day. I asked her, "Is this what you want? Is this how you want your students to feel?"

Tears welled up in her eyes and began to stream down her face. She wept in earnest. We sat together as deep sobs overcame her. Finally, an altogether different woman said, "No." She told me then about her own unhappiness — caused by the death of her husband and her subsequent unbearable loneliness. She said she had not even realized how cruel her grief had made her, that she was not herself. She deeply regretted my son's unhappiness.

After this meeting my son was happier. His teacher finished the school year and then took a leave of absence. I do not know if she is happier now, but I will never forget her — the teacher, who in acknowledging her own unhappiness was able to see a child's.

Very often, good and decent people, such as my son's teacher, fail to appreciate children's unhappiness because to do so brings them too close to their own. If adults were unhappy as youngsters it might mean their parents failed them; it might mean their happiness was unimportant. Wanting to avoid such thoughts is natural, but by doing so we foreclose the opportunity for reflective change and make it harder to feel for our children.

Concluding Thoughts

Happiness is closely related to the development of the whole person. Fostering a child's full development and thereby promoting her happiness takes time. A little boy who begins kindergarten too early needs more time to mature. Students who lose someone need time to grieve.

However, our culture's emphasis on the single-minded pursuit of material wealth leaves little time for anything but getting and spending. Time spent with nature, hanging out with friends, spiritual practices, or just lazing about — such leisurely activities are at odds with today's culture of goal-direct, efficient, wealth-producing effort.

Childhood activities that bring pleasure, including play, are lived in the present. But as Crain (2003) emphasizes, in the United States the present isn't valued nearly as much as the future. When adults consider children's activities, they want to know how the activities will bring success in terms of college admissions or the future workplace. Even the child's current suffering is lost in the concern for the future.

Consider, for example, child poverty from the point of view of the nation's largest charitable hunger relief program:

The problem of child hunger is not simply a moral issue. Scientific evidence suggests that hungry children are less likely to become productive citizens. A child who is unequipped to learn because of hunger and poverty is more likely to be poor as an adult. As such, the existence of childhood hunger in the United States threatens future American prosperity. (America's Second Harvest 2007)

Consumerism itself masks our sensitivity to children's feelings. Capitalism focuses on people's economic well-being, not their emotional well-being. Our schools are, more than ever, the means to the end of global economic supremacy. For a child to prosper within such an environment, she need only become a cog in the economic machine. Subjects and activities that lack obvious economic value can be eliminated. Happiness, and the fullest development of the child, need not be considered.

If we were to look squarely at the ordinary unhappiness of just one child — that is, if we pondered it until we had achieved the deepest understanding of his or her experience — what would happen? I believe that, like my son's middle school teacher, we might be brought to tears. We might recognize the forces behind our own unhappiness, how we ourselves have suffered from unremitting pressure to make the grade and the subsequent narrowing of all that was meaningful to us. If we then let compassion overtake us, we might do something remarkable. We might, for example, take a leave of absence to give ourselves more time to live in the present. We might adopt a more modest lifestyle that balances work with devotion to our deepest values. We might, in other words, decide that the happiness children naturally seek is the most important thing in life — for them and for ourselves as well.

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End Note

On rare occasions, researchers have asked elementary and secondary students to rate their schools (Portland School District 2000; Horatio Alger Association 2005). These ratings, however, do not evaluate the extent to which children themselves are happy in school.

Book and Film Reviews

It's STILL Elementary: The Movie and the Movement

Produced by GroundSpark, Debra Chasnoff, and Sue Chen

Reviewed by Alexandra Miletta

Over a decade ago, filmmakers Debra Chasnoff and Helen Cohen filled a much-needed gap in documentary films with *It's Elementary – Talking About Gay Issues in School* by showing educators, parents, and kids that it was not only possible to talk openly about gays and lesbians in classrooms, but necessary. The public's willingness to address the subject in schools has come a long way in ten years, and to celebrate the film's accomplishments, its producer, GroundSpark, has released a follow-up entitled *It's STILL Elementary: The Movie and the Movement*. In addition to capturing some of the events related to the controversy surrounding the first film, the filmmakers tracked down six of the children featured in *It's Elementary* to ask about their memories of being in the film, and to find out how those conversations in their classrooms had shaped their beliefs about diversity, homophobia, and sexual orientation.

Parts of *It's STILL Elementary* are dedicated to refreshing our memories about the original film, so it's not necessary to have seen it to get an idea of its power. Even before the credits and title come on screen, we revisit Emily Rosen-King, whose Mother's Day essay about her two lesbian mothers won a contest in a local bakery. As we watch and listen to Emily reminiscing about that time with her mothers while they sift through elementary school photos, it's hard not to get hooked. Despite the degree to which you find the material covered in the first film controversial, it's human nature to be curi-

ous about the effect of those shockingly frank conversations with young children. Early on, the film's editor, Shirley Thompson, comments about how the brilliance of the filmmakers was to let the children do most of the talking. One of the most memorable remarks was made by a very young Robbie Tate-Brickle, who wondered aloud why someone would get beat up for being gay. "That's how their life is, so what?" The grown up Robbie remembers having a lot to say about the subject, and being excited about the opportunity to talk about it with his peers and his teacher. Robbie's memories help the filmmakers further their cause, which is to get people talking, engaging in civic dialogue, and moving past their personal beliefs to acknowledge a societal problem with unfounded discrimination, hate crimes, and untrue propaganda. Knowing that most people believe the last thing kids and adults feel comfortable talking together about is sex, both films have taken pains to show how it is possible to confront these issues and educate young people without straying into inappropriate and explicit territory.

The film's adversaries — from Pat Buchanan and Bible-waving protesters to administrators reluctant to grant permission for filming in their schools — seem to fear that by opening up the Pandora's Box of sexual orientation, children will be brainwashed, converted, or curious about homosexuality. The truth, at least as the filmmakers present it, is that children are bombarded with negative messages about gays and lesbians from a very early age, and those who wonder about their own differences from others considered "normal" live in fear and shame, burdened by their doubts and questions. Not unsurprisingly, one of those children, Brandon Rice, turns out to be gay. As he is shown sharing the fact that he is teased for being feminine, we learn that at the time he was miserable, thinking "this may be who I am." By the time he came out in middle school, however, he described how soothing it was to hear teachers tell him it was okay, and that lifted a burden. In inter-

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views Brandon has said that being able to be open about his homosexuality prevented further bullying, gained him respect, and that “keeping it in” generated more negativity from peers. Other students interviewed as adults describe the benefits of having a forum for their questions about gays and lesbians, a refreshing lack of awkwardness in the discussions, and the gift of tools and vocabulary to address related issues. For example, Samira Abdul-Karim started a gay-straight alliance on campus with her close friend who came out to her in college.

If *It's STILL Elementary* has a flaw, it's that it may be perceived as little more than advertising to boost distribution of the original documentary. In trying to do many things at once, it lost the core of the original concept, namely to let the children do the talking. The power of *It's Elementary* is largely pedagogical; it shows parents and educators *how* to talk with kids, and how kids can be expected to talk about these issues. *It's STILL Elementary* is showing *why* it's important to do so, and in many respects is making the case for why there's still a lot of work to be done despite some progress. Surprisingly, the strongest evidence is shared at the end of the film, where we are given some statistics from then and now. Gay-straight alliances grew from 2 in 1990 to 3,200 in 2007, while the percent of school districts doing training on these issues is up from 1% to 29%. The number of states with laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation has spread from one to ten states.

Nevertheless, the film tells us that the average student hears anti-gay slurs in school 26 times a day, or once every 14 minutes. It is also sobering to learn that fully 90% of recent school shootings have been committed by boys who were called anti-gay names. Imagine being able to listen in on a classroom where students are discussing that gruesome fact, and figuring out what they can do about it.

Note

A new DVD release of *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School*, as well as a new 80-page curriculum guide, come with the new film, *It's STILL Elementary*. For online information about the producer GroundSpark, see <www.groundspark.org> and <www.respectforall.org>.

When School Reform Goes Wrong

by Nel Noddings

Published by Teachers College Press, 2007

Reviewed by Susan A. Fine

Nel Noddings, in her slim new volume, *When School Reform Goes Wrong*, covers the well-traveled territory of NCLB critique. This is understandable given the well-documented challenges and unintended (perhaps) consequences that have arisen in its wake. Noddings also provides an alternative vision for post-NCLB school reform, centered on a return to tracking in high schools for college or non-college bound students — with the fresh twist of allowing students to choose their track through strong middle school guidance. While Noddings's criticisms of NCLB are clearly described, her remedies are not grounded in enough detail to leave the reader with any sense of real feasibility.

Noddings's contributions to the education community are profound and well-respected. Her writings about the importance of care and trust in schools are pivotal underpinnings to our understanding of creating supportive and rigorous learning environments. And her perspective on teaching and learning informs her reform path. The list of ten suggestions at the end of the book include recognizing that education is broader than schooling, interagency cooperation, studying the preparation of teachers, discouraging states and districts to use test results as the sole marker for retention policies, and restoring respect for all occupations. These ideas are sound. The question that this book does not answer is how to get from our today to her tomorrow.

Noddings lays out a clear premise for the book right at the outset: “I want to invite readers to think critically about the ideas underlying NCLB, the reform movement that shaped it, and the processes it has put into play” (p. 1). She notes that the purpose of NCLB (p. 2) was the

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(1) elimination or reduction of the achievement gap between White students and Black/Hispanic students, and (2) establishment of solid evidence that federal monies are well spent in U.S. schools.

Noddings continues:

What questions would you want to ask before endorsing these goals? I will suggest some questions, and they will provide the structure of analysis for the chapters in this book.

Returning explicitly to these questions might have strengthened the remaining chapters.

The first chapter provides a brief description of the progressive era as a vehicle for discussing the genesis of tracking in high schools, and the resulting class- and race-based schooling. Noddings writes, though, that tracking should not be abandoned, since she believes it successfully addressed the concern that not all children are college-bound. She suggests that the contention that education be driven from the goal of "college for all" is creating more harm than good. Fixing these past ills requires, according to Noddings, strong guidance, choice as a part of a democratic education, and well-taught classes. She continues in Chapter 1 to describe the reforms spurred by the influential federal report, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), in order to illuminate the finding that there was a drop in the highest levels of scores on the SAT's. This supports her notion of a return to differentiating schooling according to "aptitudes and interests" (p. 14).

Noddings ends the book with a summary (p. 79) of her position:

The comprehensive high school — an astounding success in many ways — has been deeply flawed by its coercive and morally repugnant practice of assigning kids (disproportionately minority) to non-academic tracks and providing poor courses to those in the "lower" tracks. I've argued that the main flaw can be removed by allowing choice, providing continuous guidance, and creating rich and relevant courses.

From the vantage point of New York City, where hundreds of small schools are being created from the

ashes of failed large comprehensive high schools, her praise of these large high schools is surprising.

The heart of the book, Chapters 3 through 7, centers on the big themes of our day: equality, accountability, standards, testing, and choice. Across these chapters, we can find Noddings's arguments for successful college and non-college bound tracking through the use of strong middle school guidance, revamped course instruction, and student choice.

Noddings writes that not all students have the capacity or interest in going to college. NCLB, therefore, is harming students and schools by their insistence on testing all students under the guise of "equal opportunity." Instead, she believes we should be helping students understand and identify their own academic paths. Noddings concedes,

It is true that, in general, over a lifetime, college graduates earn more than those with vocational training, but there are many exceptions, and in the past too many graduates of vocational programs fell into those programs by default, not by choice.... The key seems to be thorough, patient, and respectful guidance (pp. 33-35).

Here Noddings makes the enormous assumption that guidance in middle schools will provide a safety net to ensure that non-academic tracks are populated with children who want to be there, or do not have the capacity to go to college — itself a worrisome label to place on children at such a young age. I would be more convinced if Noddings had laid out a plan for the changes that would be required for guidance and teacher education programs. The implications are profound. Noddings's only suggestion to reform teacher education (there is none about school guidance) is to "study it carefully" (p. 81). This is simply inadequate as a response. She puts middle school guidance at the center of her reform, without any real plan for achieving it. What types of training would current teachers and guidance counselors need? How do we ensure that the decisions do not result in a return to class and race-based decisions? Given the tragic history of tracking for minority and poor children — which Noddings acknowledges — the risks are far too great for such flimsy specificity.

Noddings suggests that an enriching curriculum, in both the college and non-college bound courses, will protect this system from falling into the traps of history. She recommends reorienting the curriculum away from content standards and centering the work in all classes around real learning. As Noddings writes, "there is no reason why a good vocational course cannot encourage students to engage in problem solving, critical thinking, the study and practice of citizenship, and aesthetic appreciation. These matters are not inherently and exclusively found in traditional academic courses" (p. 60). To support this idea, Noddings provides an example of how literacy can be taught in vocational classes. In theory, the idea of placing problem solving or critical thinking at the center of a schools' curriculum is appealing.

But many questions remain. What would need to be put in place to ensure that the vocational teachers are prepared to teach in this way? This task is complex enough already, where educators are trying to help teachers develop greater inquiry-based perspectives. Noddings suggests that teachers shouldn't simply ask, "Has Johnny learned x?" but "What has Johnny learned" (p. 44). This line of questioning continues in a chapter on testing, where Noddings suggests that teachers need to move from "What are the angles of a 3-4-5 triangle?" to "How would you find or approximate the angles of a 3-4-5 triangle? Describe various ways you might approach this problem" (pp. 67-68). Moving teachers in this direction would be terrific, but it is already proving difficult. Unfortunately, we have thousands of teachers currently working in schools who are becoming nimble test-prep practitioners. I agree with Noddings that this is the result of pressure from NCLB, but what will it take to completely reorient our current assessment systems? How will we support the teachers in making this switch? I fully support this direction; but the complexity of this overhaul is underrepresented in this volume.

If we go along with the premise that we can put strong guidance programs in place and that the instruction can become dynamic and rigorous across all tracks, there remains Noddings's suggestion that this reform will be successful because the decision about which track to embark on will be left to the stu-

dents. I am a full proponent of incorporating student voice in their learning. Students need to feel ownership in their schooling. I agree with Noddings that a democratic education is healthy for our young citizens. However, this issue, too, needs further explanation in the book. Noddings takes on the first question that comes to mind: What happens if a student changes his mind but has not taken the required preparatory courses? She responds that "he should switch programs and be supported in doing so. Perhaps he will need an extra year of preparation, maybe even two" (p. 77). That's it. She provides no discussion about the implications of delaying graduation for students up to two years.

Noddings also seems to overlook the extent to which parents will pressure their middle school age children to join the college-bound track, irrespective of the students' intellectual interests or true choices. Noddings notes that "to make such choice a reality, schools will have to become flexible in their organization, time requirements, and evaluation procedures" (p. 78). I believe this statement is true. But, how? Are her ideas grounded in any experiments where this, or some variation, is being attempted? Without any true vision of what this might look like, there is little for the reader to hold onto other than ephemeral hopes, most of which I share.

The early-college movement might be a place to start looking. In these high schools, students often decide in their sophomore year whether they will take college or high school courses in their final two years of high school. This is often done with the kind of strong guidance that Noddings advocates. The question remains whether this could, or should, be brought down to the middle school grades.

I appreciate Noddings's attempt to propose an alternative to NCLB, rather than simply providing a critique. As an educational community, we need every thoughtful idea to be put on the table. Noddings reminds us of the importance of ensuring that all of our students have their individual needs met, and that this may not include a college education. However, this book does not provide me with enough details to convince me that this return to tracking will prevent a return to race- and class-based tracks in high schools. I look forward to the supplementary volume.

The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism

by Naomi Klein

Published by Metropolitan Books (New York), 2007

Reviewed by Alan Singer

I jumped at the chance to read and review this book for two reasons. As a parent, teacher, citizen, and human being, I am really worried about the impact of unrestrained, capitalism-fueled globalization on the future. I worry for my children, grandchildren, and students, for the national economy, democratic government in the United States, and conditions of people living in the misdeveloped and exploited "Third World." (Samir Amin, former director of the United Nations African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, calls this combination "maldevelopment.") I also worry for the planet Earth. I do not know about you, but I think there is a lot to be concerned about here — record-breaking human migration, frightening new weather patterns, imperialist war, and the fact that nothing is manufactured in the United States any more.

I also was eager to read this book because as a historian I am attracted to broad theoretical explanations that potentially explain events on both micro and macro scales. At a time when few academics are willing to admit it, I still consider myself a Marxist, which means that when examining events, I focus on underlying material conditions (how societies produce and distribute the things people need for survival) and how conflicts between groups, classes, and nations over the control of resources generate technological, cultural, and historical change.

Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine* interested me because it purports to explain the underlying dynamic of globalization and to offer a theoretical perspective worth considering. After reading the book, and looking at a lot of other reviews, I am still not sure what I think.

Klein presents her basic conclusion in a quotation from George Orwell's *Nineteen Eight Four* at the start

of part one of the book (Klein 2007, 3). "We shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves." Klein believes that 1984 has finally arrived and that both as individuals and as a global economy we are being squeezed and remade by a ruthless, even diabolical, variant of capitalism she calls "disaster capitalism" and the "shock doctrine."

Klein does not include the rest of the quotation from *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1990), but it is ominous and worth noting. Winston, who had been employed at the so-called "Ministry of Truth," was being interrogated and tortured for writing statements in his journal critical of "Big Brother." He is told by O'Brien, his interrogator, "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face — for ever (Orwell 1990, 267)" and "Do not imagine that you will save yourself.... No one who has once gone astray is ever spared (Orwell 1990, 256)." Klein, a journalist and activist who writes an internationally syndicated column for *The Nation*, is our Winston. She will not accept Big Brother's distorted logic and slogans, "War is Peace," "Freedom is Slavery," and "Ignorance is Strength." But she also goes beyond Winston. While his protests were intended to be secret and personal, Klein writes about and speaks out on what she sees as the truth about the regime in power, an international capitalist cabal with tentacles creeping into every corner of the earth.

Klein's main thesis is that the official story — that the seeming triumph of deregulated capitalism in the contemporary world is a product of freedom — is false. This "triumph" is actually identified with brutal coercion and its history is written in shocks (Klein 2007, 19). According to Klein, since World War II American psychologists and economists, with the support of the C.I.A. and rightwing politicians, have promoted systemic shock therapy as a cure for everything from "Keynesian" governmental policies to individual mental difficulties to leftwing political movements pledged to economic redistribution. While calls for shock therapy in these fields originally were independent, since the 1970s a free market school of economists centered around Nobel-prize winner Milton Friedman and the University of Chicago, a group Klein calls the "Chicago Boys," have initiated a program for destroying, and then rebuilding, personalities, communities, societies, and

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economic systems. Its intellectual wing is ideologically driven, abstract, divorced from social reality, and committed to what it perceives as a pure, mathematical model of economic development. It believes it has discovered the economic laws of the universe and figured out corrective policies that will restore balance to the system. When results do not follow their prescriptions, they decide that either the facts are wrong or their solutions were improperly administered. The movement's mantra is privatization, government deregulation, and deep cuts in social spending — no matter what the cost. Klein accuses its practitioners of capitalizing on human misery or even promoting it in order to extend their political influence across the globe and maximize unfettered corporate profits.

The book details the development of disaster capitalism and the shock doctrine and its implementation in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and even democratic countries such as the United States and Great Britain, where its proponents have used war and fear to manipulate voters into supporting domestic economic policies that go counter to their own interests.

The main evil-doer in the book is Milton Friedman. Klein systematically documents his villainy. Friedman was a Nobel-prize winning economist from the University of Chicago, and before he died in 2006 was a confidante of bankers, presidents, and dictators — guru of unfettered capitalism and chief spokesperson for applying shock therapy to troubled economies and societies. According to Klein, Friedman was a virtual religious fundamentalist who dreamed of returning to a state of pure capitalism cleansed of all government interruptions, supposedly the way nature or God intended it (p. 50). For Friedman and his allies, Keynesians like John K. Galbraith, who promoted New Deal-type government management of economies, rather than Marxists, are the true enemy because they have polluted what once was sacred.

Friedman's economic philosophy and his strategy for implementing it are epitomized by his response to the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina. In a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece written in December 2005, Friedman recognized the destruction of large parts of New Orleans as a tragedy, but also an "op-

portunity" for privatization and business expansion into new markets. He proposed taking advantage of the dislocation and shock caused by the hurricane to dismantle the city's public school system and replace it with private-for-profit "McSchools" supported by government vouchers — an idea that, as Klein observes, was implemented by the Bush administration (pp. 5-6).

Reviews of *The Shock Doctrine* have generally reflected the ideological leanings of the reviewers. Among liberal-leftists, John Le Carré describes it as "impassioned, hugely informative, wonderfully controversial, and scary as hell" (Klein 2007 book jacket), and Arundhati Roy calls it a "secret history of what we call the 'free market'" that should be compulsory reading (Klein book jacket).

Towards the middle of the economic spectrum, Joseph E. Stiglitz (2007), a Nobel-prize winning economist and author of *Making Globalization Work*, sees merit in the book but is wary that it presents a conspiratorial view of recent history, a view that Klein disavows. In *National Review On-Line* (2007), David Frum dismisses Klein as an apologist for failed Soviet style command-and-control economic systems and accuses her of sympathy for violent Islamists and Latin authoritarians.

What all of these reviewers leave out, however, is that while an important resource, as a book it is largely unreadable. It has some of the same qualities as Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago* (1997). There are just so many accounts of torture that a reader can absorb without their skin crawling; soon you start to skim pages hoping to discover something else to look at in the book. *The Shock Doctrine* certainly merits a place on my reference shelf, but I would never have finished reading it if I had not promised to write this review.

A big part of the problem is that Klein herself is an intellectual practitioner of an aspect of the shock doctrine. She feels the need to start again from the beginning and construct everything anew. On the Marxist left, Alexander Cockburn (2007), in a review of the book, reminds readers, "Capitalism, after all, has always been a shock doctrine of selfish predation, as one can discover from Hobbes and Locke, Marx and Weber, none of them saluted by Klein." I would add to this list Lenin and contemporary

Marxist writers such as Samir Amin (2001), who argues that "imperialism is not a stage, not even the highest stage, of capitalism: from the beginning, it is inherent in capitalism's expansion." Cockburn points out that what Klein discovers about capitalism, namely that it causes and then feeds on disaster, is not new and did not begin with Milton Friedman and the "Chicago Boys" in the era after World War II. The rape of the New World, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the abandonment of the Irish to starvation during the nineteenth century potato famine, the European division of Africa, as well as World War I and II, either caused or were caused by catastrophic events and were all carried out in the name of profit and the spread of civilization.

Whatever my reservations about Klein's work, there are definitely important insights into contemporary economic and political affairs scattered throughout the book. Unfortunately, they are hard to find, buried in impressive, and oppressive, amounts of detail.

At the core of Klein's narrative is the impact of disaster capitalism and free market ideologues, backed by American military and economic muscle, on Latin America. For example, the new Chilean regime under Augusto Pinochet brought in Friedman and the "Chicago Boys" as consultants and became the model for other economic make-overs. The military, with the support of the good economic doctors, administered three distinct "shocks": it overthrew the civilian government; it imprisoned, tortured, murdered or drove into exile any potential opposition; and it rapidly revamped the economy based on free market principles. To revamp the economy, it privatized 500 government-owned corporations, cut back on social services, eliminated the regulation of companies, and ended trade barriers. Within three years, annual inflation had reached 375%, the highest rate in world at the time; the country was flooded with cheap foreign imports; and connected financial privateers were making fortunes. By 1982, over 170,000 industrial jobs had disappeared and the economy had crashed. While it has since recovered and the country is once again a democracy, Chile remains one of the most unequal societies in the world, ranked 116 out of 123 countries on an equality scale used by the United Nations.

For people puzzled by the logic of American involvement in Iraq, Klein presents a very plausible explanation. While the war was sold to the American public as a response to terror and an effort to seize weapons of mass destruction held by a dangerous dictator, Klein feels it was actually an effort to employ the shock doctrine (remember "Shock and Awe"). The Bush Administration's plan was to uproot the foundations of Iraqi civil society and replace them with an imposed free-market democracy integrated into the American political and economic sphere that would serve as a western outpost in the Middle East and as a counter-weight to both Islamic populism (Iran) and state-controlled capitalism (Saudi Arabia).

Too often in the book, Klein blames individual malfeasance, maliciousness, or avarice for social developments; however, she does offer an excellent materialist explanation of the continued failure of Middle East peace talks to bring about a settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. Her account emphasizes the way the influx of Russian immigrants driven out of Russia by post-Soviet economic development ended the need for Palestinian workers and shifted the dynamics. For readers interested in exploring the Middle East disasters, I recommend Klein's treatment.

While she does not discuss it in this book, I found Klein's thesis helpful in explaining the path of recent New York City school reform disasters. Traditionally, control over education in the city had been divided between branches of government and between central and local authority. While it made it hard to get some things done, it ensured that diverse constituencies would have their voices heard as politicians and educators tried to build consensus. In the last decade, three forces have "shocked" the system, leading to radical changes but little educational improvement. The events of September 11, 2001, the demands for NCLB "accountability" defined by test scores, and racial and ethnic divisions have fed demands by business interests and white voters for mayoral control over the schools and the dismantling of local school boards. The current mayor has flip-flopped between centralized, district-based, and decentralized administrative paradigms. The only consistency in his approach has been his commitment to a business model

for operating the schools. In practice this means corporate partners now have greater access to the system, the teachers' union is largely emasculated, and supervisors are middle managers with little or no educational experience. The supervisors' main commitment is to higher test scores and their own personal advancement. Overwhelmed by the "shocks" and without local school boards to rally around, parents have acquiesced while schools in working-class, poor, and minority communities have abandoned teaching and become test prep academies.

Thus, Klein's book is often illuminating and stimulating. In the last analysis, however, Klein catalogues problems but avoids theory, particularly Marxist economic theory, and does not effectively explain the underlying causes of the problems or the functioning of capitalism in the global era.

After 450 pages of horror, Naomi Klein offers readers 16 pages of hope. She cites the 2006 Democratic Party congressional victory, revitalized socialist movements in Latin America, and some European discomfort with American willfulness and dogmatism. It is not enough. Each of these new paths has been very tentative, and the Democratic Party in the United States has demonstrated neither backbone

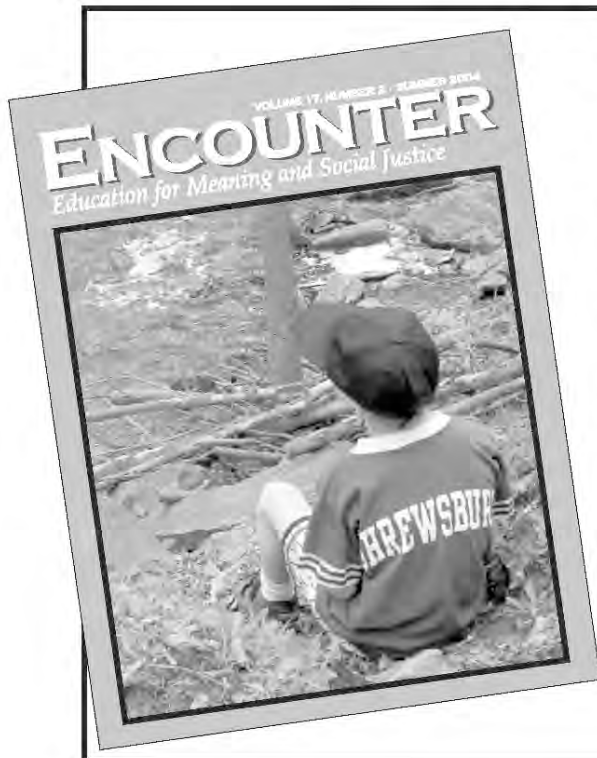
nor commitment. Its vaunted national health care proposals all call for government subsidy of private contractors and leave major holes in coverage. Klein's book suffers from the same dilemma Al Gore faced in *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). They both want to believe reform is possible. But if Gore and Klein are correct about the magnitude of the problems we face, their proposals for change are grossly inadequate. I hope we can do more than spit into the wind.

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Endnote

A short film by Alfonso Cuarón and Naomi Klein, directed by Jonás Cuarón is available online at <www.naomiklein.org/shock-doctrine/short-film>.



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