

# Education in a Prophetic Voice

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**Educators have a special responsibility to ground their policies and programs in a moral vision, a conception of what they believe a good and just society should be.**

It seems to be in the nature of human beings to sort out and attempt to make meaning out of our activities, and it is quite clear that this process has produced enormously diverse accounts, narratives, histories, and interpretations. These narratives are more than just interesting and intriguing, for they also help to shape communal and individual consciousness; they provide us with meaning and hence with direction, purpose, and energy.

This paper is written within the tradition of those particular narratives that speak to the human struggle to create more just, compassionate, and peaceful communities. The story of these efforts cuts across time and space and speaks to what is most sublime and also to what is most demonic in human possibility. It is not very difficult to see humans as “animals,” i.e., being driven by the absolute desire to survive and to satisfy basic needs and gratification. There is ample evidence that humans are capable of doing virtually anything however violent, cruel, and callous in order to satisfy their fundamental needs. What must be remembered, however, is that we live in a culture that has created concepts called “cruelty,” “violence,” and “callousness,” as well as terms like “compassionate,” “caring,” and “justice.” What is extraordinary (if not miraculous) is not that humans like other species are driven towards survival and self-gratification, but unlike other species they also struggle to transcend the limitations of such a consciousness. Although it is problematic to say “all,” we can surely say that most cultures and societies create limits on what is considered acceptable and unacceptable conduct and behavior; i.e., cultures develop an ethos or spirit of community that serves as a mechanism to control, inspire, and guide its members. Durkheim (as quoted in Nisbet 1974, 194-196, 197) has described this process as an integration of the personal and social as being grounded in moral and religious frameworks.

Note: This article is a shortened version of “Holistic Education in a Prophetic Voice,” originally published in *Nurturing Our Wholeness: Perspectives on Spirituality in Education*, edited by John P. (Jack) Miller and Yoshiharu Nakagawa. The book is available on CD-ROM at \$14.95 per copy from Psychology Press, P.O. Box 328, Brandon, VT 05733; <https://great-ideas.org>

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Morality begins with membership of a group.... First, we shall show how society is good and desirable for the individual who cannot exist without it or deny it without denying himself [sic], and how, at the same time, because society suppresses the individual, he cannot desire it without to a certain extent violating his nature as an individual. Secondly, we shall show that society, while being good, constitutes a moral authority.... It is impossible to imagine on the evidence, that morality should serve its unbroken association with religion without ceasing to be itself.... Morality would not longer be morality if it had no elements of religion....

The history of these efforts to build moral communities reflects the incredible paradox, diversity, contributions, and mysteries of the human condition. It is a history of slavery and emancipation; of oppression and democracy; of the invention of napalm and penicillin; the Ku Klux Klan and the Red Cross; and it has produced villains, heroes, demons, and angels. *Hilter and Gandhi* — *Louis XIV and Thomas Paine* — *Mother Teresa and Henrich Himmler* — *Joseph Mengele and Madame Curie* — *the Peace Corps and the Hilter Youth*. It is also clear that the notion of civilization making steady and continuous progress toward the achievement of a more just, peaceful, and loving world is a serious distortion of reality. Although there is much evidence that many societies have made gains and positive changes in consciousness — e.g., slavery has been abolished in most of the world — there is the harsh and profound reality that even these gains may be overshadowed by significant regression in other spheres. There is evidence that over 100 million people have been killed in wars since 1700, 90% of them in the 20th Century. It is estimated that 2 billion people live in extreme poverty, 450 million suffer from hunger and malnutrition, that 2 in 5 children in American live in poverty, and that there are upwards of 1 million homeless in America. It is surely easy enough to be disheartened by such findings and to be discouraged by the attendant cynicism, apathy, and sense of powerlessness. A consciousness of impotence and cynicism of course compounds and aggravates the enormous pain and suffering that is the consequence of a consciousness of greed, oppression, and callousness. We

face catastrophe from the combined forces of evil and apathy, of the dual corruption of power and powerlessness, and from the twin dangers of the affirmation of individual power and the collapse of communal authority.

There are surely new and extremely important dimensions to our present crises — the most paramount of which are the extremely serious risks to the survival of the planet, though it is certainly not news that the human community faces serious crises from a combination of external threats and the collapse of the moral order. We are, however, not without valuable resources in responding to such calls and indeed it is extremely valuable and helpful in such times to reaffirm our most cherished traditions, hopes, dreams, and convictions. A major element in our tradition can be described as a dialectic between affirmation and criticism or, perhaps to use a less linear image, a continuous spiral of criticism and hope: expectations followed by criticism followed by renewed hope and possibility. We have learned not only to dream beyond the narrow limits of human survival and callousness but also to be wary of sentimentality as well as certainty and to be on guard against the violations of our dreams. In the human exploration of our souls, we have discovered a variety of capacities that complicate the struggle for justice — including those of personal deception, denial, evasion, and rationalization. As an antidote to these tendencies, we have come to accept the absolute necessity for maintaining a critical consciousness, a spirit of skepticism, inquisitiveness, and reflectiveness. Indeed, this critical tradition has become so strong and so integral to our culture that it has developed its own set of problematics. Chief among these is to nurture a position of detachment and distance in which a great deal of energy is applied to the analysis and interpretation of ideas, policies, practices with but little, if any, of that energy directed at affirmation. Such a posture can and has generated not only useful insights and understandings, but it has also produced a high degree of moral relativity, political apathy, and cultural cynicism.

The critical traditions that I wish to affirm are ones in which criticism is set as part of a wider and deeper vision. In such traditions, criticism is not an end in and of itself, but a powerful tool in the service of

larger moral, cultural, and spiritual aspirations. In such traditions, criticisms are rooted in positive and affirmative commitments that indeed provide the very bases of critique. They are logical consequences of affirmation in that they provide a model and the criteria for making judgments, the heart of the critical enterprise. There can be no criticism without judgment, however implicit and guarded, notwithstanding claims of objectivity and neutrality. Unfortunately, our culture has been able to reify and reduce a critical consciousness through such concepts as “critical thinking” and “objective analysis.” This process has the effect of removing (however artificially) technique from judgment and of eliminating the basis and framework within which the critical dimension has been embedded. It is another tragic instance of alienation, in which the meaning-making impulses are actually removed from so-called skills and techniques.

A cornerstone of the larger moral orientation I am discussing is the brilliant Western tradition of critical rationality as reflected in the notion of the Socratic techniques. However, I wish to extend this notion beyond mere technique to its deeper groundings. When I speak of the Socratic tradition, I have particular reference to the Socrates of the *Apology* in which Socrates attempts to describe the meaning of his life and death. In this account we witness the indictment, trial, conviction, and execution of Socrates as well as the justification of his work and his martyrdom. Socrates had been accused of threatening the security of the state by undermining the beliefs of its youth and Socrates indeed admits raising troublesome questions that reveal the shallowness and inadequacies of conventional beliefs. The work is a pivotal part of the narrative of Western Civilization since it speaks so eloquently and poignantly to the human passion for freedom and truth in the face of the forces of conformity and expediency. Socrates is rightfully one of our major heroes, for he not only exemplifies brilliant intellectuality but also enormous wisdom, courage, and dignity. The images of the shrewd, elderly Socrates calmly taking on his tormentors with consummate wisdom and insight energizes us to maintain faith in the power of the mind and the authority of knowledge. The Greek legacy (as embodied in Socrates) includes the enormous power of the inquiring,

incisive, skeptical mind to illumine and extend our vision. It is a legacy that has revolutionized the world and one that, though having its own serious problematics, is surely indispensable.

However, there is an extremely important dimension of Socrates's story as told in the *Apology* that is often neglected if not forgotten. I refer to those passages in which Socrates makes it very clear that he is on a spiritual journey and indeed insists that his intellectual engagement with the citizen of Athens is intimately connected to that journey. Socrates is convinced that his search for greater clarity and understanding is sanctioned and required by the gods and thus his queries, reflections, and debates represent sacred responsibilities and obligations. In fact, he makes no separation between church and state, religious and secular, spiritual and humanistic, since a life of meaning is one in which all these elements are in harmony. Shades of holistic education!

The point is that the so-called Socratic Method is not a method or technique at all; it is not about scoring intellectual triumphs or about making debating points. Socrates was indeed pursuing religious fulfillment by carefully examining conventional religious and social ideas intellectually, analytically, and critically not to debunk and deconstruct them but to enrich and deepen them. In responding to his indictment, Socrates has this to say:

Gentlemen of the jury, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the gods rather than you and as long as I draw breath and am able I shall not cease to practice philosophy.... Be sure this is what the gods order me to do, and I think there is no greater blessing for the city than my service to the god. For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state of your soul....

I confess to not knowing very much about the particular nature of Socrates' spiritual consciousness or of the specifics of the religious beliefs of his contemporaries. What is vital for purposes of this analysis is the paradigmatic power of an orientation in which keen intellectuality is integrally and symbiotically related to a spiritual and moral vision. This relation-

ship has even more particular relevance for us in the discourse of the Biblical prophets, whose narratives contain some of the most central themes of Western morality and spirituality. It is a story with images of slavery and the promise of liberation; of human striving to create communities grounded in a higher law; and of profound commitments to creating a life of piety, justice, compassion, and spiritual salvation.

This paper, to be more precise, therefore is grounded in a particular metaphor of an affirmative, critical tradition, namely in the metaphor of social prophecy. I wish to emphasize that although this concept has deep and vital roots in the Bible, the clear intention is to employ it metaphorically, recognizing that the consciousness and historic dimension of our time and place are extraordinary different from those depicted in the Scriptures. It is also important at the same time to note that in using this metaphor, my intent is to avoid significant distortion of the textual sources but, by the same token, I accept the responsibility to provide (one hopes) a persuasive and creative interpretation.

The point here is not Biblical exegesis but rather to indicate some of the broad but profound influences that some Biblical narratives have had on our consciousness. We can and do interpret great and enduring texts in a variety of ways and indeed it is our human responsibility and destiny to do so. I associate myself with the tradition that sees within the Biblical (as well as other) narratives elements of a profound search for ultimate meaning and a life of justice, peace, and joy. A key part of this narrative is reflected in the accounts described in Exodus in which an enslaved people (the Hebrews) are oppressed both by powerful external and brutal forces (Egypt) and by their own sense of powerlessness and despair. The issue of their liberation is linked to the people's capacity to imagine (and hence make possible) transcending their powerfully palpable limits. The prophetic voice (represented here in the figure of Moses) is one which speaks critically, candidly, and boldly. In this case Moses himself has to struggle to accept the vision and to agree to confront the Hebrews with their refusal to fully acknowledge their slavery, and more importantly to recognize the human misery going on in the midst of luxury and splendor as indefensible and unnecessary. In addi-

tion, the prophetic voice speaks to hope and possibility by invoking higher forces and principles through the development of a higher consciousness. It becomes Moses's task therefore to teach the Hebrews not only that they are oppressed but they need not and must not be. Furthermore, it is his task to exhort them to have faith in the power of the Divine to infuse the people with the material, spiritual, and moral energy required to break the physical and psychological bonds of physical oppression and personal despair.

Moses, like subsequent prophets, commits himself to the extraordinarily complex, difficult, and frustrating task of raising the consciousness of the oppressed, confronting the power of the oppressors, and dealing with self-doubt, fear, divisiveness, and failures. Moses's early reluctance, his own slow awakening, and his inadequacies as a leader reveal the prophet as human, fallible, vulnerable, and believable while the apparent capacity that Moses had to be in touch with the Divine and to experience and witness the transcendent marks prophets as people who have dramatically extended the range of human possibility. The image of Moses (presumably the most evolved of the most evolved people) at the peak of Mount Sinai is a very powerful metaphor for human transcendence — the possibility of humans reaching for the heavens and of an intimate relationship between God and humanity. What Sinai also represents is the extension of liberation as flight from bondage to liberation as the quest for a community grounded in a vision of ultimate meaning — a shift from freedom defined negatively to a more positive conception of freedom. The covenant represents a commitment to deeply affirm a vision of justice, honor, and piety, and to diligently press for its realization.

This basic pattern of critique, outrage, exhortation, hope, possibility, and vision (what has been called the prophetic voice) recurs not only in other religious narratives but in other social texts as well as in historical events across time and space. In the more literal sense Biblical prophets are clearly identified within the text (e.g., Hosea, Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah) and each take on the role of alert, inquiring, outraged social critic offering both condemnation of violation of the Covenant and the possibility of re-

demption through the community's reaffirmation of its commitments. This is very much the configuration of the life of Jesus who severely castigates the community for not only violating the spirit of the Covenant but also for profaning it. Beyond his outrage and indignation he provides a message of renewed hope for transcendence through a consciousness of love, humility, and reaffirmation.

This is not to say Judaism and Christianity are to be equated with the prophetic tradition but only to note that the prophetic tradition remains a vital and powerful force for those committed to a world of justice and peace. This tradition also helps us consider the role of religion in social criticism. Robert Ackerman (1985, ix, 24) has argued that the critical function is the very essence of religion, i.e., that it is the responsibility of religion to be alert to the society's reluctance and failure to meet its deepest commitments and to become a voice of protest (e.g., as in *Protestantism*) and renewal.

Religion ... always retains the potential of developing a pungent social critique, no matter how accommodating a form they have assumed.... Critique does not exhaust religion, but religion that cannot critique is already dead.... What is being suggested here is that the core of religion is potentially critical rather than functional or accommodating.

It is important to add a note of caution at this point in regard to the problematics and limitations of the metaphor of "prophetic voice." For instance, there is the danger of becoming captured by particular interpretations, as it must be recognized that there have been and continue to be serious controversies regarding biblical interpretation, including those concerning the role and function of the prophets. Furthermore, even if there were a consensus on this, it is also clear that it is dangerous to make direct parallels between and among the social and cultural milieus involved. That was then and this is now, notwithstanding the reality that the "now" contains important dimension of the "then." We certainly have the right to be selective about which traditions to reaffirm and which to reject but we also have to accept responsibility for making choices rather than justifying them on the basis that we are only reminding our-

selves of universal and/or eternal truths. Furthermore, although I find the tradition of spirituality and morally grounded social criticism to be extraordinarily resonant with our current cultural and political crises, I do not choose to support other phenomena associated with biblical narratives, e.g., animal sacrifices, slavery, conquest, patriarchy.

Moreover, we cannot ignore the very important sub-category of "false prophet," which of course raises the basic question of the validity of prophetic voices. One can be outraged, critical, and indignant and be "wrong," i.e., criticality by itself does not guarantee wisdom or rightness. Ultimately, we search for criteria that validate and generate critical dimensions and whether we do or should do this inductively or deductively is not particularly relevant here. Put another way and more crudely, some prophets are "better" than others and this is not necessarily because their analytical capacities are different but rather because their underlying vision is more or less acceptable. The Grand Inquisitor, Martin Luther King, Cotton Mather, Ayotallah Khomeini, and Mohandas Gandhi can all be called prophets in that they integrated their political and social movements with deeply felt religious commitments. One person's passion can indeed become another person's zealotry. Therefore, we will not want to attend to *the* prophetic voice but to prophetic voices and to search for those that are most resonant with our vision of a just, peaceful, and joyous world.

The prophetic tradition has strong roots and resonance in the American experience, perhaps most clearly seen in our Puritan origins. Indeed, the impact of Puritan culture and society on our present consciousness represents our ambivalence toward a morally and religiously grounded orientation. At best the Puritans contributed the values of the authority of individual consciousness and of a morally based community and at worst left a residue of intolerance, rigidity, and self-righteousness. They apparently were not able to conduct their quest for a more just and equitable society without the certainty that they were God's appointed and chosen agents. Their experience (in one of the great ironies and oddities of American history) actually helped to foster a quite contrary religious tradition, namely that of tolerance, diversity, pluralism, and the separation of

church and state. The collapse of the Puritan dream, however, did not mean the end but only the elaboration of an American moral and religious consciousness. To this day, for better or worse, American culture often reflects an explicit moral and/or religious orientation in a whole array of areas — from popular culture to foreign policy and from family life to the arts. Some of this is clearly vulgar and self-righteous as in “God Bless America” and the portrayal of certain nations as evil empires but much of this is grounded in the impulse to create a world of meaning, justice, freedom, and joy.

This impulse is eloquently and powerfully reflected in perhaps our country’s most sacred text, the Declaration of Independence. Central to this paradigmatic statement is the notion that “Governments are instituted among Men [sic], deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed,” a political expression of the moral and religious principles that “... all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...” The statement goes on to affirm the vital responsibility of the citizenry to maintain patient but critical vigilance of the government’s fidelity to those principles since, if the government should become despotic, “it is their Right, it is their Duty to throw off such Government.” In an echo of Sinai, an emerging people commits itself to a religious and moral vision as the boundaries of a new nation.

As the author of the Declaration of Independence, it is no surprise that Jefferson saw education as a critical dimension in the creation of the new democratic society. The suspicion of government’s capacity to oppress requiring “eternal vigilance” and the basic principle of the “consent of the governed” combine to require an alert, informed, and critical citizenry. Thus education in America shifted from a focus on the training of ministers and the enlightenment of an elite to an essential instrument of the empowerment of the individual and the preservation of the democratic vision. Later John Dewey saw the schools as the “laboratory” for democracy, where students and teachers could experience and reflect upon the problems and difficulties inherent in creating a world based on a commitment to dignity, justice, rationality, and tolerance. George Counts took this one step further by claiming for education the responsibility

for teaching the process not only of understanding but transforming society. In a memorable statement evocative of prophetic rhetoric Counts (1962, 37) once wrote:

If the schools are to be really effective, they must become centers for the building, and not merely for the contemplation, of our civilization. This does not mean that we should endeavor to promote particular reforms through the educational system. We should, however, give to our children a vision of the possibilities which lie ahead and endeavor to enlist their loyalties and enthusiasms in the realization of the vision. Also, our social institutions and practices, all of them, should be critically examined in the light of such a vision.

### Education, Society, and Culture Today

What then are educators who strive to evoke these prophetic traditions to make of our present historical moment? How well are we as a people doing in the struggle to reduce misery, poverty, suffering, oppression and to increase justice, peace, harmony, equality, and joy? We pose these questions not only because they are obviously of enormous import in and of themselves but more particularly because they ought to serve as the major point of departure for educators. Organized education is to be seen not predominately in the service of scholarship nor primarily to serve the state or the economy but primarily to serve the task of nurturing, nourishing, and sustaining the quest to meet our highest aspirations and most profound commitments. The standards of a society and culture (and hence of its educational institutions) involve concerns for the degree of freedom, equality, justice, and fulfillment enjoyed by its members.

The recognition of both the importance of affirming our solid and enduring social and cultural achievements as well as the dangers inherent in profound pessimism does not, however, mitigate the harsh and obscene reality of the horrors of our present condition, worldwide as well as nationally and locally. There are no end of indices, statistics, and observations to demonstrate and evoke the starkness, depth, and extent of profound and unnecessary human suffering. Indeed, this could be demonstrated

by a brief exposition of only one of the 20th Century's many catastrophes: World War I, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, World War II, Viet Nam, the Sub-Saharan famines, oil spills, the greenhouse effect, Cambodia, et al. It is extraordinary that such a list can only be suggestive and not definitive; there simply is not the space to list all or even most of the truly horrible events that occurred.

There have been a great many attempts to explain and provide meaning for such stupefying phenomena in the poignant assumption that there are indeed meaningful explanations. Attendant, then, to this terrible material and physical destructiveness has been a corresponding erosion of the spirit. Alienation, fragmentation, anomie, fear, and loneliness are virtually household names and routines. There is deep thirst for meaning and direction as a consequence of an increasing sense of meaninglessness and existential despair. The society and the schools urge us to work hard, strive for personal success, and compete with ourselves, our colleagues, and our enemies. Some (too many) people respond with drugs, crime, suicide, and depression. The society and schools extol individual achievement and indeed equate it with virtue. Some (surely too many) people respond with divorce, loneliness, and anomie. The society and the schools exhort us to be "number one" and that we are risking our loss of economic and political supremacy. Some (far too many) people respond with racism, sexism, jingoism, and homophobia. The society demands more control, discipline, hard work, and competition and the profession responds with more sophisticated tests and more clever modes of monitoring students and teachers. The people cry out for meaning, wisdom, and deliverance — and the society and school respond fearfully with more control, more jargon, more retrenchment, and less meaning and wisdom than ever.

The response of the dominant professional community has been at best evasive and at worst complicitous. Much of the profession has tried to stake out an area of expertise in which the broader cultural, moral, and social issues are left to non-professionals. This so-called professional orientation is one in which educators are cast as resource people charged with researching and implementing policy decisions. In a word, to follow but not to shape or-

ders. The great preponderance of educational research is technical, and indeed the term *research* has been reified and reduced to come to mean experimental, positivistic, quantified investigation. Even the broader cultural, social, and moral issues become objects of study rather than perspectives for affirmation.

A tragic consequence of this narrow, timid, and self-serving professional posture is the appallingly vulgar and ill-informed nature of the public dialogue on educational matters. It is surely true that in the long-run basic educational decisions emerge from a social and cultural consensus rather than from professional expertise. All the more reason then for the profession to meet its responsibilities to help the public frame its dialogue in ways consistent with the complexities, paradoxes, and profundities of the fundamental issues. The timidity and irrelevance of the professional response to our crises is pitiful and borders on the criminal. The moral fabric of our culture is in tatters and the public debates how much homework should be assigned. There are hundreds of thousands of people living in the streets; racial polarization increases; children suffer from neglect and malnutrition and educators offer up career ladders, standardized tests, more requirements, and more school time.

Happily, this is surely not to say that such reactions constitute the entire range of professional response. There is indeed a very lively, imaginative, and provocative body of educational criticism and theory that goes far beyond the toadying and myopic quality of the dominant elements of the profession. Much of the critical literature speaks directly and cogently to the cultural, social, and political aspects of education and to the necessity for rooting education reform in social and cultural transformation. The term "critical pedagogy" has been loosely applied to this broad school of educational criticism in reference to its major reliance on neo-Marxist critical theory.<sup>1</sup> Critical pedagogy puts a great deal of reliance on raising the consciousness of people's lived experiences, particularly as they relate to issues of power, freedom, equality, and justice. This school of thought has made and continues to make very important contributions to educational theory and has energized a great number of educators with its message

of criticism, hope, and possibility. Unfortunately, it has also met a great deal of resistance and even more unfortunately, it has largely failed to enter the consciousness of mainstream professionals or of the public. There are a number of possible explanations for the failure of these powerful ideas to have more impact (e.g., genuine and profound disagreement, the complexities of the analysis, and language). Many in the critical pedagogy movement are currently working on enriching their theoretical underpinnings through moral and psychological inquiries and broadening their political base by adapting a positive inclusivist approach, by reflecting on how their theory is related to a wide array of marginalized groups.

There are other qualitatively different voices of educational criticism that speak more directly to issues of psychological constriction, spiritual alienation, and ontological sterility. These voices emerge from traditions of progressive and libertarian education that stress the vital importance of individual freedom, creativity, and unfettered human potentiality (Stoddard 1991). In addition, these voices are often augmented by chords that resonate with New Age themes of spiritual quest, ecological concerns, and cosmological perspectives (LePage 1991). This broad movement has a major advantage over the critical pedagogy orientation in that its psychological and spiritual perspectives are shared by a great many people, although the lay public for the most part has failed to extend these perspectives into their interpretation of educational policies and practices. However, what these critical voices add by way of their concern for psychological, emotional, and spiritual matters is diminished by their relatively weak efforts to integrate their ideas with the social, political, cultural, and moral dimensions of the human struggle.

Another critical difference between these two very broad schools of educational criticism is found in the extremely vital issue of assumptions regarding human nature. At the real risk of oversimplification, these differences involve degrees of optimism, pessimism, and cynicism. One side is accused of sentimentality, romanticism, and denial while the other is accused of being overwhelmed if not energized by vision of gloom, despair, and futility. This is related

in part to theories of change which involve, on the one hand, the view that transformation must emerge from fundamental changes in social, cultural, and economic structures or, on the other hand, that transformation can emerge only from significant changes in human consciousness. While both are clearly needed and are surely interrelated, the rhetoric usually stresses one or the other. Those who stress the predominant importance of cultural and social transformation are likely to see such a process as involving quasi-permanent conflictual and frustrating struggles with uncertain prospects. Many theorists who focus on the psychological and spiritual dimensions are apt to be much more optimistic, if not euphoric, about the possibilities of quantum leaps in consciousness and are therefore able to envision the possibility of attaining significant and dramatic transformation.

To sum up our present section, we see a world at serious risk from a variety of material horrors (famine, disease, oppression, war, pollution) and suffering from a variety of diseases of the spirit (moral numbness, callousness, alienation, and powerlessness). The culture's educational response to these crises tends to promote the forces that contribute to the crises: concern for competition, achievement, hierarchy, and material success. The profession for the most part has renounced its responsibility to provide moral leadership, taking on instead a posture of being detached, technical experts. There are important and vital voices of educational dissent and alternatives, but they are divided particularly in how they view the relative significance of psychological and cultural forces and their degree of optimism.

I believe that the single most powerful contribution that the holistic education movement is making to the field of educational theory is the power of the metaphor of holism, i.e., of being aware of the parts, the sum of the parts, and that which is more than the sum of the parts. Further work is obviously needed to develop a more comprehensive theoretical framework that gives sufficient attention to all the important dimensions of human experience and education. I believe that the prophetic tradition can contribute to the further development of such theoretical work and will in the remainder of this essay

sketch out some ideas on what these contributions might be.

My own view is that educational institutions can only be truly transformed by social and cultural pressures. There is no credible evidence that the schools have ever been a major force in cultural and social transformation. At the same time, it is clear that they constitute at least both a force and a resource and it is vital that whatever the degree of their influence that they utilize their valid possibilities optimally. Although it is to the culture that we must ultimately look for the possibilities of transformation, the profession has an extremely important role in facilitating and guiding public dialogue and social movements. Significant experience as practitioners and theorists provide educators with a unique and necessary perspective to interpret the meaning of educational policies and practices in relationship to the culture's most profound aspirations. This responsibility includes not only developing critical and sensitive insights but also the task of making these insights vital and accessible to the general public. This task must seek a balance between the ethical requirements to convey the complexities, paradoxes, contradictions, and sensitivities of the crises with the moral competence to offer genuine and viable possibilities for transformation. I believe that a great deal of the necessary work has already been done by our current educational theorists and visionaries and the hope of this paper is to further the development of a greater degree of consensus among the varying views of these critics.

### **Education in a Prophetic Voice**

In this section, I sketch out an orientation toward education which reflects a selective blending of the voices of educational criticism and vision, an orientation rooted in the sacred and profound traditions which endeavor to speak in a prophetic voice. In addition to being informed by the contributions of these educational critics, I will be relying on the work of Abraham Heschel, Matthew Fox, and Cornel West to enrich and enhance these voices.

These three theologians can all be said to be in the prophetic traditions, although clearly they have very different perspectives and offer their own unique contributions. All three passionately affirm the

struggle to ground moral, political, and social struggles in spiritual and transcendental visions. I believe strongly that the work exemplified by these three champions of the "wretched of the earth" has powerful possibilities and implications for educators and those interested in the educative process. Moreover, their work also would seem to provide a nexus between those educational critics now divided by their differences on the significance of social/cultural/political forces as opposed to moral and spiritual ones.

### **Abraham Joshua Heschel**

Abraham Joshua Heschel's monumental analysis and interpretation of the biblical prophets rejects the necessity for such dualism. It is the prophets, according to Heschel, who established the profound possibility that humans have "the ability to hold God and man in a single thought." The prophetic consciousness is one in which the material and the spiritual are not separate categories but vital and interacting dimensions of human existence. God is seen by Heschel not as a detached observer eagerly but remotely watching to see how humans are doing; rather the God of the Prophets is a God of pathos and compassion whose own being is intimately linked to human destiny. This God is actively involved in the Covenant with humanity and makes it clear that deviations and violations of the Covenant stir divine anger, grief, and dismay. The prophetic sensibility is one which registers the profundity of the human activities, behaviors, and policies likely to incur this wrath and grief. In this sense, prophets are not to be seen as seers, sorcerers, or crystal ball readers but as shrewd and sensitive social and cultural critics. Their task is to interpret the degree to which the community has been true to its commitments and to speak openly of the serious dangers that will almost surely befall continuing violations of these commitments. Their message is, however, more than warning, outrage, and indictment but also one of hope, possibility, and redemption. What is recognized here is the inevitability of the human propensity to seek advantage rather than justice, as well as the possibility of transcendence over this propensity. This possibility lies in the dialectic between human imagination and divine energy. Social prophesy exists to

remind the human community of its responsibilities to engage in the enormously important struggle to create a humane community worthy of divine approval and to renew its commitment to those goals.

Central to this process is the concept of responsibility, or more particularly in Heschel's terms, "the ability to respond to divine commitments and imperatives." This ability involves the capacity to be alert, critical, and active and is absolutely crucial to the struggle for human freedom and fulfillment. The ability to respond is crucial because humans have the capacity to deny freedom to themselves and to others because of their impulse for greed, selfishness, and personal gain. Indeed, in Heschel's (1962, 14) terms, "The opposite of freedom is not determinism but hardness of heart." To be free is to be able to enjoy the fruits of life in a just, caring, and compassionate community.

There are other somewhat more subtle barriers to the emergence of such a community besides the propensity to evil, particularly the obstacles created by passivity, despair, and equivocation. Prophets speak with indignity and outrage at both flagrant and insidious violations of the commitment to the poor, hungry, and oppressed, being well aware of the dangers of both evil and indifference. In words evocative of the passion and eloquence of the prophets, Heschel (1962, 165) says:

Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, all are responsible. If we admit that the individual is in some measure conditional or affected by the spirit of society, an individual's crime discloses society's corruption. In a community not indifferent to suffering, uncompromisingly impatient with cruelty and falsehood, continually concerned for God and every man, crime would be infrequent rather than common.

### **Matthew Fox**

Matthew Fox, writing from a Catholic perspective, echoes the concept of co-creation in which humans participate in the further creation of a world inspired by a will toward justice, love, peace, and joy. His theology reaffirms a cosmological consciousness and insists that we situate our being in the universe lest we commit the error of intellectual shallowness and the

ontological arrogance of anthropocentrism, an undue concern for human/worldly perspectives. However, his mysticism does not at all take him into a totally contemplative position but actually quite the reverse. To Fox, the mystical, the divine, the universal, the human, and the social are to be seen in their uniqueness, diversity, and in their totality. Day-to-day life is to reflect and energize a universe of joy, vibrancy, and love in which we dance with the awe and radiance of the mystery (Fox, 1979).

Unlike other so-called New Age figures, Fox speaks directly, cogently, and specifically to social, political, and economic concerns. His passionate devotion to the well-being of the planet is deeply informed by an understanding of how our political and economic system contributes to our ecological dangers. Indeed, he speaks out against the spiritual dangers of a religious detachment in which the spiritual agenda of creating a world of justice and harmony can be ignored. Fox is particularly concerned that we be aware of the distinction between compassion and sentimentality since human compassion is the process of creating a daily life infused with divine light. Compassion involves genuine sharing of pain and joy and is inherently communal and interdependent, while sentimentality involves detached, shallow, and superficial recognition of the pain and joy of others. Compassion provides an opportunity to affirm and manifest human relationship and commitment while sentimentality facilitates separation and irresponsibility.

The struggle for creating a compassionate community is significantly facilitated through art, or more precisely through what Fox calls "art as meditation." In this concept, art is not limited only to the specially talented, but defined as the human process of imagination, creativity, and meaning making. It is the human genius to play, to dream, to have vision, and to imagine and it is art that gives form to these images, through the creation of rituals, stories, poems, paintings, sculpture, crafts, et al. In turn, these images guide and help us to interpret our lives and to make meaning of them. Clearly this process is critical to our responsibility to share in the creation of the world that is part of a vast and mysterious universe and hence one that must be enriched and nourished. It is to the creative process that we must look

for our ability to move beyond the horror of our present existence and to imagine and therefore make possible a more loving, compassionate, and joyful world. When we recognize that we have in fact created a world, we can accept the responsibility and appreciate the possibility of re-creating it.

### Cornel West

Cornel West's academic brilliance and astonishing scholarship is powerfully nourished by his affirmation of the Afro-American experience and the traditions of the black church. He proposes a bold and critical synthesis between Marxist analysis and Christian theology with particular attention to the plight of the oppressed and marginalized. His work is a superb blending of prophetic traditions, American pragmatism, and black liberation theology written with eloquence, power, elegance, and authority. He affirms the Christianity that speaks to the poor, the meek, and the oppressed with its promise of ultimate salvation. It is this promise that West believes can enable us to overcome our fears and dread of death, loss, and meaninglessness and thus provoke us with energy to struggle for what he calls "penultimate salvation," the redemption that derives from the struggle to create a just and caring community.

He also affirms American traditions of political protest against tyranny and declarations of independence from the domination of European philosophical traditions. In his book *The American Evasion of Philosophy*, West traces the origins of pragmatism to the optimism, individualism, and idealism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and to his efforts to side-step the distraction of metaphysical speculations. West critically describes and analyzes the contributions of others (such as Dewey, Mills, James, Du Bois, Niebuhr, and Rorty) to this pragmatic tradition and adds his own perspective which he calls "prophetic pragmatism." West (190, 228) approves of the American intellectual propensity to avoid traditional philosophical inquiry:

[T]he claim is that once one gives up on the search for foundations and the quest for certainty, human inquiry into truth and knowledge shifts to the social and communal circumstances under which persons can communicate and cooperate in the process of acquiring

knowledge. What was once epistemological now highlights the values and operations of power requisites for the human production of truth and knowledge.... Prophetic pragmatism makes the political motivation and political substance of the American evasion of philosophy explicit.... The emancipatory social experimentalism that sits at the center of prophetic politics closely resembles the democratic elements of Marxist theory, yet its flexibility shuns any dogmatic, a priori, or monistic pronouncement.

West, a deeply committed visionary, is no romantic and has internalized the bitter struggle of his community to make even minimal gains and addresses the dialectic between tragedy and progress directly:

Prophetic pragmatism refuses to side-step this issue. The brutalities and atrocities in human history, the genocidal attempts in this century, and the present-day barbarities require that those who accept the progressive and prophetic designations put forth some conception of the tragic ... yet prophetic pragmatism is a child of Protestant Christianity wedded to left romanticisms.... Prophetic pragmatism ... tempers its utopian impulse with a profound sense of the tragic character of life and history.... Prophetic pragmatism ... confronts candidly individual and collective experiences of evil in individuals and institutions — with little expectation of ridding the world of *all* evil. Yet it is a kind of romanticism in that it holds many experiences of evil to be neither inevitable nor necessary but rather the results of human agency, i.e., choice and actions. (West, 1990, 228)

This powerful reaffirmation of the human responsibility to avoid the twin perils of despair and sentimentality provide us with a language that helps in the struggle against contemporary weariness, anomie, and powerlessness. It is to remind us of both the sublimity of our aspirations and the finitude of our endeavors, although West is not unaware of the lingering sense of futility and meaninglessness that pervades our era. He chides those afflicted with this malaise for ignoring the redemptive qualities of a religious consciousness:

The severing of ties to churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques by the left intelligentsia is tantamount to political suicide; it turns the pessimism of many self-defeating and self-pitying secular progressive intellectuals into a self-fulfilling prophecy" (West 1990, 234).

The following quotation from West is unsurpassed in its ability to capture the essence of the prophetic tradition and to speak its essence in the context of our present movement. It can serve as a vital credo for the development of an educational process that can inform the struggle for a world of love, justice, peace, and joy. It is a statement that can energize us with its soaring hopes and its attainable possibilities:

Human struggle sits at the center of prophetic pragmatism, a struggle guided by a democratic and libertarian vision, sustained by moral courage and existential integrity, and tempered by the recognition of human finitude and frailty. It calls for utopian energies and tragic actions, energies and actions that yield permanent and perennial revolutionary, rebellious, and reformist strategies that oppose the status quo of our day. These strategies are never to become ends in themselves, but rather to remain means through which are channeled moral outrage and human desperation in the face of prevailing forms of evil in human societies and in human lives. Such outrage must never cease, and such desperation will never disappear, yet without revolutionary, rebellious and reformist strategies, credible and effective opposition wanes. Prophetic pragmatism attempts to keep alive the sense of alternative ways of life and of struggle based on the best of the past. In this sense, the praxis of prophetic pragmatism is tragic action with revolutionary intent, usually reformist consequences, and always visionary outlook. (West 1990, 229)

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These powerful and eloquent writers remind us of what our work entails rather than provide us with job descriptions. Our work as educators ought to have little to do with increasing productivity, patriotism, and pride but much more to do with meeting

our responsibilities to create a compassionate consciousness. Schools should not be objects of detached research and study but subjects of committed search and inquiry. They should be houses of study and affirmation and not sorting and counting houses. An education that speaks in a prophetic voice responds not to the possibility of becoming rich and famous but to the possibility of becoming loving and just. Its reference point is not the possible erosion of America's economic and military might but humanity's real erosion of its vision of universal harmony, peace, and fulfillment. Such an education is not rooted in strategies, planning, curriculum guides, decision plans, or programs for developing human resources but rather in the mystery that enables us to dream and hope beyond our present realities.

This educational vision encompasses the awe and majesty of the universe as well as the extraordinary capacities of humans to make meaning and create cultural and social structures. It is an education that commits itself to recreating human consciousness and structures in order to make real our dreams for justice, harmony, peace, and joy. This commitment involves a deep commitment to the democratic process that enables us to celebrate our freedom, interdependence, and individuality. The commitment also requires us to be alert to its violations and perversions and the necessity to respond to oppression and injustice with outrage and to be determined to engage in the struggle. It is an education whose starting point is not "excellence" or "achievement" but the grotesque realities of an obscene level of unnecessary human suffering. As members of the human community we need to be reminded that we have created hunger, war, poverty, and oppression and as citizens of the universe we must renew our covenant to repair the world. As simultaneous members of the human community and constituents of the universe we can find meaning in the intimate relationship between the pains we have cruelly inflicted and the healing we have lovingly extended.

Such an education links heaven and earth, moral and spiritual consciousness, and society and the individual. It also vitally requires all human energies — the mind, the intellect, the body, the soul, and their unity. It must take into account our history and our traditions of knowing and must seek to benefit

from accumulated knowledge and wisdom. Such an education requires the development of the skills of experiential and expressive writing; of critical and appreciative reading; knowledge of various symbolic systems; deep understanding of several cultures, languages, and histories; significant understanding of several modes of research; the capacity to create and imagine. It is an education in which knowledge, criticality, and skills are necessary but not sufficient, since such capacities need to be informed by moral energy and enriched by the social and practical skills required of those who would make a world.

What is also required is the courage and determination to maintain the struggle, especially since our education will likely reveal the depth, persistence, and well-nigh intractability of injustice, greed, callousness, and cruelty. We can take solace and comfort from the reality that the task of creating a just world is a relatively new one in the context even of human, never mind geologic, history. Moreover, we must celebrate the majesty of a struggle that binds us to the highest ideals of those who came before us and that will inspire even greater aspirations by those who come after us. As it is written in the Talmud, "The task is not for us to finish, but neither are we free not to take part in it."

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### Note

1. Prominent among these writers are Henry Giroux, Michael Apple, Roger Simon, Svi Shapiro, Michelle Fine, and Linda Christian-Smith.

# Integrating Silence Practices Into the Classroom

## The Value of Quiet

Cathleen Haskins

**Periods of silence that foster inner peace, creativity, and renewal can be remarkably beneficial in the classroom.**

**S**olitude and silence: Trappist Monk Thomas Merton wrote about it, renowned Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh teaches about it, Mother Teresa spoke of it, spiritual guide and author Eckhart Tolle addresses it, and Jesus spent 40 days in it. From Christianity to Buddhism, Hinduism and Quakerism, silence has held particular significance in the search for human wholeness. Ancient sages, scholars, and philosophers have historically sought out the refuge of solitude and silence. At the same time, engaging in moments of silence or practicing periods of solitude are not born of, nor do they belong to, any particular religion, but are of a broader spiritual nature. As we seek and work toward holistic education reform at all levels, we might consider the value of creating learning environments that offer exercises in stillness and silence. Not the silence commanded by a higher authority (adult), but the silence that fosters inner peace, creativity, and renewal.

Most young children today are bombarded with such a deluge of daily activity that their young lives are too busy for quiet time. They are rushed from one after school activity to another, hurriedly shuttled off to summer classes and camps when they could be reading on a blanket under a tree, gazing out a window, or sitting by a stream noticing pebbles, twigs, tadpoles, or the movement of the water. For these children, the slow, easy freedoms of childhood barely exist. They have so little time for doing nothing, so few opportunities to just *be*. Adolescents are growing up with technological innovations that interfere with their ability and desire to know quiet and solitude and to draw from the well of resources that private, silent experiences provide. Technology is easy and portable; stashed in pockets and purses,



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tiny devices make every moment an opportunity for communication with all things external, suppressing the sound of the inward call.

We adults know that the sounds of silence are hard to find these days, all but replaced with a sinking unsettledness, feelings of being overwhelmed, and an unconscious tendency to turn on the TV, radio, music, computer, or cell phone when we are alone. Our comfort with quiet has gone missing, noise has become commonplace, and we are disconnected from our own inner resources.

If children, starting at a young age and continuing throughout their school years, were able to experience stillness and silent activities during the school day, might they be better equipped to draw on the benefits that silence and solitude offer?

### How Silence and Stillness Benefits Children

#### Slowing Down

When I was teaching I had a handmade poster in a frame on a shelf that read, "Don't just do something, sit there." Those words weren't my own, but I liked the concept because the message signaled a shift in my productivity-centered paradigm toward an understanding of the value of balancing doing and non-doing. The notion that non-action merits consideration is a radical departure from the commonly held belief that has taken deep root over the last half century: that activity and productivity are the true measures of success. (Don't just sit there, do something!) Such an attitude promotes busyness over restorative practices, efficiency over craftsmanship, and multitasking over mindful presence and awareness. This is the same paradigm that values output more highly than focusing inward, and intellectual progress more than inner growth. Carl Honore, author of *In Praise of Slow* (2004, 14) writes,

Fast and slow do more than just describe a rate of change. They are shorthand for ways of being, or philosophies of life. Fast is busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried, analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity over quality. Slow is the opposite: calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality over quantity. It's about mak-

ing real and meaningful connections — with people, cultures, work, food, everything.

I worked at a public elementary school in which some members of the faculty did not want benches, picnic tables, or other seating on the playground for the children for fear they would just sit and do nothing. Can we come to see that simply being still is beneficial in itself? How are the first flowers of spring discovered, the fluid shapes of clouds observed, or the fragrance of dried autumn leaves taken in, if we are in constant motion?

It goes without saying that as long as our educational system remains standards-based and maintains a structure in which all students study the same thing at the same time, there will be little room for practices that support pause, pondering, or for breath-based exercises. Teachers who are persistently pressured to improve test scores will find it difficult to honor slowness, stillness, and silence.

In Waldorf and Montessori schools, however, the structure and philosophy do allow for such activities.

#### Transitioning and Renewing

Within traditional schools of thought, much learning in early childhood education is based in play, and it is thought that learning activities for older students should be fun. In a Montessori learning environment, the child's school activity is regarded (in a very positive way) as work that is respected and esteemed. There is something deeply authentic in valuing a child's school activity as purposeful work. "Fun" may not be the word of choice to describe a Montessori child's attitude toward her work, rather she might express enjoyment or acknowledge feeling satisfied or inspired by her work at school. It was Maria Montessori's (1972, 104) firsthand observation that a child is often energized by in-depth engagement work.

Children have instincts whose existence we did not even suspect. They possess a surprising fundamental instinct — he wants to work. The child teaches us that work is not a virtue, not an effort that man is forced to make; it is not the need to earn a livelihood. Work is fundamental instinct.

Imagine an early elementary classroom in which, as Montessori envisioned it, the children are free to choose their work each day. This is possible when the classroom environment is prepared in such a way that all options are meaningful learning activities, and when from the earliest educational experiences the issues of choice and responsibility are addressed. (The secret of successful choice-based classrooms is *always* in the prepared environment.) The student not only chooses what she will study, but where in the classroom she will sit, and whether or not to work alone. This level of control and choice fosters a deeper sense of purpose and the child becomes more deeply invested in her work.

When a child has completed a project in which she has invested so much of herself, working with vigor and diligence for an hour or a full morning work period, she may feel exuberant or excited in her accomplishment. She may feel tired or like she has lost her focus. A brief period of silence, some simple breathing exercises, or a visit to the inner peace area will provide an opportunity for the child to clear the mind, shift gears, and prepare a mental space to focus on the work activity that is chosen next. In this way, a short time spent in a silence and stilling exercise becomes a successful tool for transitioning from one activity to another.

### Cultivating Concentration

The ability to concentrate deeply is necessary for any significant accomplishment that is undertaken in life. Higher levels of concentration make learning easier, yet concentration is often elusive, interrupted by noise, either external or internal, most often both. Who will argue that our world has gotten progressively noisier as technology has advanced? Author Anne LeClaire spent two Mondays a month for five years in silence and suggests in her book, *Listening Beneath the Noise* (2009), that much of the noise that invades our homes and communities is a form of violence. Most people would think her assertion an exaggeration, yet for those who come to know silence intimately, who practice it on a daily basis and who find shelter and calm within the folds of quietude, LeClaire speaks a truth. There are few remaining sanctuaries of silence. Machines make our work easier and faster, but they add a lot of noise to our daily

living. Innovations for personal amusement assure that in our homes, vehicles, and backyards we shall not be without entertainment, but at the same time they distract and derail us. The diversions we seek to fill would-be moments of quiet have robbed our homes, neighborhoods, and communities of silence.

This is the world today's children know: nonstop, incessant noise. From the time they wake until the time they go to bed children are immersed in external noise from things we take for granted, rarely thinking twice about washers, dryers, dishwashers, garbage disposals, coffee grinders, blenders, electric toothbrushes, TVs, radio, music, and computers. Step outdoors and add lawnmowers, leaf blowers, snowblowers, and rototillers, not to mention traffic noise, car alarms, aircraft, and trains. We entertain ourselves with all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, and motorboats. At the very least we should be aware that we all live in a storm of noise that deprives children of knowing the beauty of silence. They walk around with ear jacks and cell phones pushed against their ears and they travel from place to place in vehicles whose headrests have been replaced with monitors for movie viewing. How can they know silence? How can they grow comfortable in quiet? How can they cultivate concentration?

However, in Montessori classrooms and others like them, children become familiar with the beauty of silence. Preschoolers learn that they have the power to create silence, having experienced *Quietly Be!* instead of *Be Quiet!* When students create a climate of quiet during work time, they are cultivating an environment that fosters concentration and attention. Unlike many classrooms in which quiet is compulsory, children take great pride in being able to create a quiet environment. As a new Montessori teacher, I was initially puzzled how I could create a learning environment that allowed for a low level of noise — an inherent part of freedom, movement, partner work, and discourse — while at the same time securing a quiet place that allowed deepened concentration and focus. The students and I found that by designating a section of the classroom as a sacred, silent place for working individually in silence and another area for working with partners, both elements could co-exist in the classroom. (This was a classroom that consists of tables and areas with car-

pet for floor work rather than a desk for each child and each child in his desk.) Through discussions and experience the children came to value working independently and began to understand that sometimes working with a friend or in small groups is the better choice, but at other times it is preferable to work independently. Given opportunities, students will come to understand the positive power of silence in developing strong habits of concentration and focus.

External noise is not the only barrier to developing concentration and attention; if the mind is ceaselessly chattering, silence is impossible. Imagine trying to read a science journal or a how-to book with an overactive mind. You are distracted internally by racing thoughts and you find that although you have "read" a page, you really don't remember what you've just read. You either lose some of the information, or you must reread the passage because your active mind interfered with your ability to concentrate.

Can we talk with our students about this? Are we able to help them find ways to still the overactive mind so that they are able to experience the inner peace of concentration and sustained attention? Inner silence is the more difficult silence to cultivate; yet it is the more important. It is often difficult to subdue external noise, but the silence of the mind is within our control. If our environment is quiet but our mind is chaotic, it is nearly impossible to achieve deep and lasting concentration. However, even when the external environment is noisy, if the mind is free of incessant chatter one can focus deeply on the activity at hand. Students want to develop these inner powers; they simply need to be given the proper tools and exercises to learn how to control internal noise. In this way students of all ages can improve their own concentration and attention which can make learning easier.

### Mindful Awareness and Presence

The practice of mindfulness has been getting a great deal of attention recently, and has found its way into classrooms across the country. My own interest in mindfulness in the classroom has been ongoing over the past decade, and though concentration and mindfulness often work together, for classroom purposes I differentiate between them. Concentration is a single-point focus attentiveness, to the

exclusion of all other thoughts or surrounding activity, whereas mindfulness, as described by Jon Kabat Zinn (1994, 4) is

paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. This kind of attention nurtures greater awareness, clarity, and acceptance of present-moment reality.

In silent mindfulness exercises students focus on their own breathing, learn to pay attention to the sensation in their bodies, and be more aware of their surroundings. Mindfulness is an experience in slowing down, increased clarity, and heightened sensory awareness.

For example, you may ask students to look about the room for objects that are a specific color, say, blue. After they have had a few minutes to scan the room, ask them to look for objects that are *dark* blue, next ask them to find *light* blue items. Continue on by changing the criteria: blue-gray, blue-green, blue-violet, turquoise, or robin's egg blue. Perhaps you can ask students to be mindful of the color blue throughout the day, noting all of the different shades of blue.

Mindfulness fine-tunes the senses in ways that bring clarity and keener awareness of the world around and within. While the decades-old practice of multitasking as a method for "getting more done" has diminished our ability to see clearly and has muddied the waters of tranquility, the slow, quiet practices of mindfulness allow full attention and wakefulness to what is going on in the present moment.

### Creativity

*Early on I discovered that there is a direct correlation between quiet and creativity. In the space of silence, ideas can surface and connections can be made. All distractions distort and ultimately destroy creativity, noise most of all. And, of course, on the most basic level, silence is enormously restful to both body and mind and that frees up energy to create. (Anne LeClaire 2009)*

Albert Einstein (2006) once said, "I lived in solitude in the country and noticed how the monotony of a quiet life stimulates the creative mind." We all, regardless of our age, need quiet time to mull around ideas, contemplate and reflect, just as Einstein came

to appreciate monotony. If creativity rises up when the mind is still enough for ideas and visions to surface, then we need time to empty into silence. When the surroundings are quiet and the mind slows down, there is space available to lay out and organize thoughts and for new ideas to surface and be known.

"Solitude," writes Bucholtz (1998)

is required for the unconscious to process and unravel problems. Others inspire us, information feeds us, practice improves our performance, but we need quiet time to figure things out, to emerge with new discoveries, to unearth original answers.

Are we able and willing to consider the practical value of silence for a child who simply needs time to think? Or is the potential for "wasted time" likely to stop the teacher from exploring with her students the meaning, value, self-discipline and trust that is a necessary prerequisite for the freedom to create and refine ideas. Virginia Woolf (1927) wrote of the creativity-silence connection in her book, *To The Lighthouse*.

And that was what now she often felt the need of — to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself.... When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless.

### Becoming Calm

I was about ready to begin my second year as an elementary Montessori teacher, preparing my classroom on an August day when my principal stopped in to inform me that a new student had been enrolled in my classroom. This young boy, I'll call him "James," was entering as a third grader, and had tried to kill himself only three months earlier. Although I was new as a Montessori teacher, I had years of experience working with children of all ages in many different environments. Despite that, I was not sure how I could meet the needs of this little boy, wounded as he must have been.

I had just read Aline Wolf's (1996) book, *Nurturing the Spirit of the Child*, and it inspired me to create a peace area with a Japanese rock garden at the table.

Since we were a small country school and my classroom was at the end of a short hallway, I made a quiet area directly outside the classroom door, where a large window provided a view of the pastoral country setting beyond. On the wall I hung a peaceful poster of a young child on the grass holding a small bunny, and on a small wooden TV table I placed my homemade rock garden. I brought out a wicker chest donated by a parent, upon which I placed a large, thriving philodendron plant.

It was a simple setting, but James, a tense, hesitant, distrusting child, was clearly drawn to it; he used it often, along with the other children. I saw how raking the paths around the pebbles in the rock garden calmed him. Sometimes he just sat and looked out the window. At the end of the year he gave me a hand drawn picture of himself in the classroom and across the top he had written, *I love this class. I wish I could be in it next year*. From then on, I always found a way to incorporate a quiet/peace area in my classroom.

Experiences in silence and stillness provide pathways to easing stress and calming the mind and body. Students often come to school bearing the weight of stress from the home environment and during the day friendship issues, schoolwork frustrations, and other worries add emotional distress. An inner peace area in which students can spend a bit of time relaxing by themselves is needed to nurture the spirit of the child.

### Creating Dedicated Inner Peace Place

It's not unusual to find a peace area in a Montessori classroom. A large space is not needed to create a place of inner peace. A chair by a low window functions as well as a quiet corner in the room and a low room divider or shelf partitions can define a peace area. Furnish your inner peace place simply; a comfortable chair and a small table will suffice. If you are fortunate to be in a classroom with more space available, you can set it up to be used by two students at the same time. Again, if space allows, include a shelf for peace objects or activities. A plant, fresh flowers, or other natural items add to the ambiance of your class peace area.

Students should have free access to the inner peace place, but it's helpful to give students a general

idea of what is a reasonable amount of time. A small clock works for older children, but young children might fare better with a sand timer.

### Peaceful Quiet Activities

There are, of course different ways to set up an inner peace place. The simplest arrangement is a table where a peaceful activity is available. Two exceptional activities are the tabletop Zen rock garden and a Japanese brush painting activity.

With the Zen rock garden, even young children can arrange pebbles and create paths in the sand around the pebbles with miniature rakes. The brush painting activity involves making strokes on a special board with a brush dipped in water. After the child has created a design on the board, he puts the brush down to sit still and quietly watch the design slowly disappear.

The soothing rhythmic motion of a sand pendulum will also calm students as they silently observe its movement trace intricate patterns in the sand. A battery-operated candle that changes colors, a sandtimer, a water fountain, fishbowl, ant farm, pair of binoculars (if near a window), or a mandala peace ring are all objects that encourage children and older students to point their focus on an object to still their bodies and quiet their minds.

It is worth considering setting aside a short time for silence each day, during which students might close their eyes, daydream, sketch, write poetry, engage in yoga, or simply do nothing. I incorporated this idea into my classroom the last year I was teaching. A teacher at a peace retreat shared it with me and when I told my students about it they were enthusiastic about trying it. We did, and they loved it!

### Conclusion

Most children know silence only as an action demanded from them, or as punishment from controlling adults and teachers. They have been denied, by adults who have lost their own way in this noisy world, the resources of quietude and contemplation. Yet, if we offer children opportunities to experience the sacred splendor of silence, they will receive what no textbook can offer — access to his inner self, a place of wisdom, authentic power, and creativity.

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# Waldorf and Montessori Combined

## A New Impulse in Education

James W. Peterson

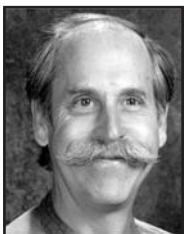
**Montessori and Waldorf approaches are usually considered mutually exclusive, but the best qualities of each can be effectively blended, even in public school classrooms.**

If you were going to enroll a preschooler or kindergarten in school and wanted to investigate *all* the educational options out there, the task would be vast. It soon becomes clear, however, that besides public education, there are two private options that stand out in philosophy, publications, and popularity. And these two options have representative schools in all fifty states. These are Waldorf and Montessori schools, which are also the two most widespread educational private options in the entire world.

Yet, these movements, the first characterized by artistic and imaginative group work, and the second by beautifully designed materials which help students independently explore their learning environment have been at odds for over seventy years. A grand old Waldorf professor, Dr. Leo Hierman of Northern Illinois University, told me that while lecturing on Waldorf education at Northwestern University in the 1970s, Montessori teachers used to sit in the back row and heckle him!

But are these seemingly opposite and antagonistic movements *really* mutually exclusive? In this article I would like to share my forty years of teaching experiences, in both public and private settings, in which I successfully blended both the Montessori and Waldorf approaches in my self-contained classroom.

A little background might set the stage for this discussion. By the time I started my teacher preparation at age twenty-one, I was already grounded in an encompassing, spiritual philosophy of life, blending Eastern and Western spiritual teachings and practices. It was quite natural that I sought out some educational philosophy that might at least recognize spiritual dimensions of child development. Many of



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my friends were Montessori teachers, and Montessori seemed to have the spiritual dimension I was looking for. However, only training in preschool education was available at that time in the United States. And I knew I was not interested in working with two- or three-year-olds! Few elementary Montessori jobs existed and the only training in 1970 was in Bergamo, Italy—and the course was mostly taught in Italian! Such training didn't seem workable.

One day I went to observe at the Berkeley Montessori School, which was run by a good friend of mine. I told him about my Montessori predicament over lunch. He said, "Jim, if you are really looking for a spiritually oriented educational philosophy, you should check out Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf education."

I immediately went over to the University of California Educational Library and they had virtually every lecture cycle Rudolf Steiner had given on education that was in print — as well as several transcribed lectures long out of print.

As I embarked on a course of self-study, I was thrilled by what I was reading. This was what I was looking for! And I also quickly got the idea that I might be able to simply use Dr. Steiner's principles in a public school. After all, Dr. Steiner said that to teach one only needed a nice barn, a few children, and a teacher's developed imagination! He also mentioned that he hoped his ideas would some day enliven state-run public schools.

In 1970, therefore, I applied and was accepted into a teaching credential cum Master's Degree program at U.C. Berkeley. One might ask, "Why didn't you just go and get Waldorf education training?" Somehow I had in me an advocacy for public education: I had worked for three summers at a Pennsylvania camp for underprivileged children, and I was well aware that such children could never afford a nice, private Waldorf or Montessori school. So I felt the "real work" needed to be done in the public schools. I was just a kid and excited about the possibilities.

But there was something else. The more time I spent with Waldorf teachers, and Rudolf Steiner followers in general (called anthroposophists), the more uneasy I became. Steiner's philosophy (Anthroposophy) was familiar to me because I had

studied Theosophy for some years. However, Steiner's approach was very "Western" and mostly Christian oriented — in fact, there was a distinct disapproval in Steiner's group of any Eastern path or Eastern ideas. Since I had become a follower of the Indian spiritual leader, Meher Baba, I didn't quite feel comfortable in anthroposophical circles. However, at the Sacramento Waldorf School in 1970 I found wonderful support for my Waldorf-in-the-public-schools idea. Franklin and Betty Kane, the head teachers at the school, offered me encouragement and practical ideas. Much later, by the way, I was to spark off a national debate by publishing in the Waldorf journal, *Education as an Art*, an article titled, "Waldorf Education and the Public Schools." A great many Waldorf teachers were not nearly as supportive of my work as the Kanes were in Sacramento.

In my public education training one of my teachers was a brilliant professor, Mary Collins, who advocated having children work independently with manipulative materials in so-called "learning centers." These centers were to be set up in different areas of the classroom and were designed to feature manipulative work in math in one area, language arts in another, and perhaps science experiments in yet another. This educational approach seemed very familiar to me since I had seen the same method used in the many Montessori schools I had visited.

My university training in a nutshell consisted of writing papers about how Rudolf Steiner's Waldorf curriculum and his vision of the stages of child development were compatible with and relevant to public education. At the same time, I was learning how to set up and manage a classroom where children worked independently with manipulative materials.

## Historical Background

### Waldorf

Perhaps a little historical background about these two great educational movements, Waldorf and Montessori, might be helpful. Rudolf Steiner was an Austrian seer and spiritual teacher who lived from 1861 until 1925. The headquarters for his international Anthroposophical Society has been located in Dornach, Switzerland, near Basel, for nearly a hundred years. The movement is well known for creat-

ing ideas and techniques for bringing spiritual principles into practical, everyday professions. Thus, there is an anthroposophic approach to farming and gardening, anthroposophic medicine, dance movements, styles of visual art and architecture, and, finally, education.

Steiner believed, like other spiritual teachers, that the interests and questions of the students should help determine the direction and nature of teaching. When farmers approached Dr. Steiner, for example, and asked, "How does your philosophy relate to my practical work in horticulture, he gave an agriculture course that later flowered into biodynamic gardening.

The same principle applied to education. In 1919, when the owner of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Factory in Stuttgart asked Dr. Steiner if he would develop a school for the children of the factory employees, Steiner agreed. When Dr. Steiner gave the initial training courses for perspective teachers, much of the focus was on the characteristics of child psychological and physical development as illuminated by his spiritual vision and occult insights. One of these insights was that children, before they lose their baby teeth, should not be studying reading or math; they are better off in the home environment and not even in school at all. Already one can see some vast differences with Montessori, whose methods are based on a good preschool program. I remember so clearly a Montessori leader coming to me after my son was born. She told me, "I can't wait till Blake is two and I can get him into my classroom."

Steiner's ideas, in the meantime, become relevant when the child is six or seven years old. For the school-age years (seven to eighteen) Rudolf Steiner developed on an extremely detailed curriculum in which subject matter is designed to complement and harmonize with the growing state of the child's inner consciousness. Thus the child is taught in ways he can deeply connect with, such as using fairy tales as the springboard for early language arts work — or studying a science unit comparing people and animals at an important developmental juncture at age nine. Steiner also expected that Waldorf classrooms would be very much driven by the authority, insights, and inspiration of the teacher. The teacher brings in stories, poems, songs, and a sense of lively

imagination and wonder to enliven curriculum topics. Written work is almost always approached with colorful drawings and artistic, often multicolored, writing. There is an artistic thrust to almost every lesson in all curricular areas — even math and science. And the lessons are always based on the premise that the teacher's knowledge of developmental stages and his/her inspiration can work with curricular impulses that uniquely nurture the whole child.

### Montessori

This is quite different from the Montessori Method. Dr. Maria Montessori was an Italian physician born in 1870. As a member of the University of Rome's psychiatric clinic, she became intrigued with the education of children with special needs. She was appointed director of a school for the mentally handicapped, where she was able to prepare them to pass the state examinations in reading and writing. She realized that the methods she was developing might also benefit normal children. In 1907 she opened her "Casa de Bambini" and started refining her materials, which allowed children to work at individualized tasks at their own individualized pace.

Far from Steiner's notion that the inspired teacher should present special lessons to the children, Montessori's radical idea was that the teacher should take a back row seat: "Education should no longer be mostly the imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities" (Montessori 1988). These human potentials were to be released by the children working at their own pace on individual projects and materials:

Scientific observation has established that education is not what the teacher gives; education is a natural process spontaneously carried out by the human individual, and is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment. The task of the teacher becomes that of [creating]... a specially prepared environment, and then refraining from obtrusive interference. (Montessori 1988)

It is interesting to note that J. Krishnamurti and Sri Aurobindo Ghose, through their own independent insights into the growth, development, and workings of the child-mind, advocated approaches to ed-

education that are more similar to Dr. Montessori's ideas than to those of Rudolf Steiner. Both sought to free the child's inner potentials by allowing him/her to follow independent, individualized programs in school. Sri Aurobindo's so-called "free progress system" particularly articulates this view. In fact early in 1910, Sri Aurobindo (n.d., 17) wrote in a pamphlet called "A System of National Education" that

the first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose. He does not actually train the pupil's mind, he only shows him how to perfect his instruments of knowledge and helps and encourages him in the process.

### Compatible Systems

Even though the individualized approach of Montessori and the more group-oriented, teacher-driven approach of Rudolf Steiner may seem different, even opposite, I view them as compatible and complementary. It doesn't take much philosophical insight to realize that children, and adults as well, learn in both ways. Quite obviously people can learn from the teacher. And equally obviously, people can learn from interacting independently with the environment. Yet somehow Steiner and his adherents, and Montessori and her followers believe that these two ways of learning are mutually exclusive! Rarely do Waldorf kids work with any manipulative materials except artistic ones. And equally rarely are Montessori kids given structured, teacher-centered, group lessons. It seems perfectly clear to me that a balanced approach to education would include both lively, inspiring group work and time to explore a carefully prepared environment of Montessori or other manipulative materials. This made sense to me in my first teaching assignment in 1971, and it still makes sense to me in my current (and no doubt last) teaching assignment in 2010.

In my early days in the public schools, I had little practical knowledge of either Steiner or Montessori. My Waldorf understanding arose from lots of reading in my college years, from weekend workshops in the Sacramento area, and from visits to the few Waldorf schools in the San Francisco region in 1971. I had

no real experience of Montessori, except I had seen classrooms filled with beautiful, wooden Montessori materials. I sort of imagined Montessori to be the "gold standard" of the learning centers approach. But in the public schools I stuck to my games, blocks, and homemade learning tools, since there was clearly no administrator willing to spend the money to supply me with expensive Montessori materials. And I also had little working knowledge of the art of properly presenting Montessori or similar materials to a classroom of children — and the presentation of the materials is a very important aspect of Montessori education.

I structured my first teaching years in second grade by having an early hour and a half my main lesson period, while an afternoon hour was my learning center period. Even in these early years, I experienced the lovely rhythm of alternating a teacher-inspired group lesson with a time for children to individually follow their own inner educational direction. The children really seemed to thrive with these alternating school structures. And I, as the teacher, loved the two roles: the orchestrator of happy group learning and the more behind the scenes resource guide, helping the children channel and express special, individual interests in the classroom.

I also noticed that kids developed different qualities in these two structures. With group work I was able to help the kids work on specific skills and to feel mastery with a prescribed curriculum. With individualized work the children developed a real feeling of confidence that they could do it all by themselves.

My interest in blending Montessori and Waldorf was soon to take a much more structured and concrete turn. In 1977 I was asked to help start a private school, The White Pony School, run by a small American Sufi Order reoriented by Meher Baba. Our teacher, Murshida Ivy Duce, was familiar with both Montessori and Waldorf, so she organized her fledgling school as a blend of both methods. I was hired to bring in the Waldorf philosophy and two trained Montessori teachers worked from their angle. In our first year my Montessori partner and I had a second and third grade class. Each classroom at the White Pony, by the way, was run by female and male

teachers working together. This was another White Pony innovation.

We would open with a Waldorf “morning circle” of movement exercises, poems, songs, and rhythmic math practice. Then I would take one grade for the Waldorf “Main Lesson,” while Adele took the other group for Montessori activities. Later in the morning we would switch groups.

At the White Pony School I apprenticed with my Montessori partner and finally learned how to introduce, present, and use the wonderful Montessori equipment designed for elementary children. I was reinforced in my early intuition that blending these two great educational approaches was the way I wanted to teach. It was not only right for the children, but right for me.

My tenure at the White Pony was followed by four years at an accredited Montessori school. The primary lesson I learned from four years at the Montessori school was the danger, as I saw it, of too much individual work. I noticed that children who had experienced only the Montessori Method from preschool to fourth or fifth grade were so conditioned to work independently and follow their own educational interests that they seemed bored and resentful if I tried to teach a group lesson. It was as if they said, “How dare you try to teach me something! I can do it all by myself.” These long time Montessori kids seemed to develop an exaggerated ego that made them overly self-reliant.

When I got a new job in 1989 at a small, rural public school, teaching kindergarten and first grade, I was determined to go back to my White Pony techniques and combine Waldorf-inspired group work with individual work in learning centers. As luck would have it, a Montessori teacher had been the administrator of the school earlier and she had purchased thousands of dollars of good Montessori materials for the primary grades. These materials had been stored in a big closet for several years, because none of the current faculty had any idea of how to use them. In my new class I was able to set up learning centers which included many Montessori materials, in addition to games and puzzles I had acquired through the years.

One interesting difference between the Montessori equipment and my own homemade or store

bought games and learning supplies was that my materials were open-ended and the Montessori work was always focused on a single, particular academic skill. In other words, with Montessori there was a specific way to use each piece of equipment, with the goal that the child would learn a specific math or language skill. To fully use my open-ended, creative materials I developed what I called the Imagination Center. This was an area in the class in which the children could build forts, castles out of blocks, dress up in costumes and put on puppet shows. I never felt like I had to be a strict Montessori teacher, but my Montessori background was very helpful.

Finally I was able to bring back my beloved Waldorf lessons. I would teach reading and phonics by first telling the students a fairy tale, which we later illustrated with a drawing done with beeswax crayons. From the drawing I would pull out an image which would suggest the shape of a letter—like M for mountains, or V for valley. I would develop the phonics lesson over the next few days with the backdrop of the week’s fairy tale.

After working on such Waldorf-type lessons for an hour and a half, our outdoor recess would be followed by a Learning Center period.

Individual learning would come through social interactions and through doing activities with the hands. Dr. Montessori always said that in childhood the hands had a special connection with the brain. What children touch and feel are “hardwired” directly to the brain and learning becomes effectively imprinted, which highlights the importance of choice in activities.

In groupwork the brain is not imprinted in the same way. The picture-making quality of the brain (as Steiner describes it) helps kids imaginatively explore academic skills with lessons in which members of the group join in and stimulate each other under the guidance of the teacher. A group dynamic is created which is both fun and stimulating. The mind is directly accessed through the imagination, not through the hands.

Many things were accomplished during my Waldorf-inspired lessons. I was able to systematically teach the benchmark skills — such as long or short vowels or the use of a question mark — and make

sure all the kids learned the skills. I was also able to hone listening and speaking benchmarks by telling and retelling the great folktales from many cultures, often with poems and songs to be memorized. Finally, I was able to give the kids specific artistic training with group artwork that accompanied each week's story.

During the Montessori period children reviewed and sharpened skills they had learned in the main lesson, as they learned new skills in math, language arts, and geography. Many children enjoy pursuing what are called in Montessori elementary classes "studies." Here kids research generally a science topic from library books and internet resources, and end up with a written and illustrated report they've created. Thus they have a nice introduction to writing a research paper, plus extra work to proudly take home to their parents.

The real goal of the activity period is to allow the children time to follow their own inner educational impulses and, as Sri Aurobindo (n.d., 17) would say, "utilize their inner potential in free progress." The children value and love this free time, and I love watching and orchestrating 21 human minds pursuing knowledge in 21 different directions. I asked one child last week why he liked activity period so much, and he replied, "In center period nobody tells me what to do."

The children, the parents, and I were very happy with this varied structure and the children were successfully able to learn, and even to continually raise standardized test scores.

These two modes of learning — learning in a group setting and following one's own self-chosen impulses — are both valid and complementary modes of learning for all of us. One has to ask, how is it that these two great educational impulses, arising from the philosophies of two educational giants, can be so different? And how is it that both approaches are touted as universally applicable answers to all educational questions?

One response is obvious: If you're trained to be a Steiner or Montessori teacher and you work in a school called a Waldorf or a Montessori school, you are required to represent that system. It certainly wouldn't do for a Waldorf teacher to tell parents how brilliant Maria Montessori was!

One colleague of mine at the White Pony School had a wise insight into how these two educational systems developed so differently. Monika Kocho-wiec, trained as a Waldorf teacher in Bern, Switzerland, told me:

Rudolf Steiner came out of the intellectual and stiff Germanic culture. So, his educational ideal balanced that background. Rather than emphasize that stiff, disciplined and intellectually strict impulse, the Waldorf schools are full of storytelling, art, imagination, knitting and flowing eurythmy movements.

Montessori, on the other hand, developed her ideas with poor Italian families. The open, flowing, emotional and less intellectual Italian temperament was balanced with a method that is very disciplined, sequential and even intellectual in its approach. Every piece of equipment has a correct way to be used and a single, strict intellectual outcome which arises out of its correct use.

No flowing, artistic work here!

Looking at the whole issue this way — through history, culture and national temperament — one can appreciate why the two approaches are different. But it is also clear that these two can easily complement each other and benefit from the others' strengths, for what Waldorf provides, Montessori needs; and what Montessori provides, Waldorf needs. They complement each other.

One renown educator that has understood and agreed with this premise is Dee Joy Coulter. She calls Montessori and Steiner "a pattern of reverse symmetries." Coulter is a neuroscience educator, holding a doctorate in neurological studies and holistic education from the University of Northern Colorado. She, like myself, has been a friend of both the Waldorf and Montessori movements for years. Coulter does not so much speak of how teachers should (or could) combine Waldorf and Montessori in the same classroom; she suggests instead that Waldorf and Montessori teachers could enrich their understanding of children by studying each other's philosophies.

Coulter (1991, 32) also points out masculine and feminine traits in these educational movements:

Montessori [the masculine impulse] spoke more of materials, environment, structure, building, play exercise, concepts, specificity, order and practicality...[whereas] Waldorf [the feminine impulse] spoke of delicate processes, essence, aspects, rhythm, feeling elements, context, imagination and beauty.

Maybe this almost Jungian concept of blending the feminine with the masculine, the inner with the outer, is why I've been obsessed for forty years with combining Waldorf and Montessori in my classroom. For an adult, the spiritual path, the psychological process of individuation, self-actualization or the Buddhist journey toward enlightenment, is nothing but *religio*, literally reuniting different inner and outer aspects of one's own being. Maybe that's what education should be for children: helping them learn about the world around them through touching their inner, subjective beings, as well as leading them to interact with a rich environment. In other words, maybe what children really need is a creative, nurturing, enlivening blend of Waldorf and Montessori.

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# Five Dimensions of Existentially Authentic Education

Clifford Mayes

**Education is existentially valid only when it helps an individual live authentically in the light of his own self-discovered, self-defined, and deepest meanings.**

We are beings who seek meaning, and we typically find it in creating a story of our lives, a narrative of our existence, a framework of significance within which we may evaluate the “determinants” of our lives — and also transcend them in self-defined trajectories of hope towards existentially compelling goals. This meaning reflects a person’s best knowledge and most compelling intuitions about his origins, what he should be doing in this life, and where (if anywhere at all) all of this might be leading after his last mortal breath. Thus, the stories that one tells himself and others about his life both rest upon and reveal what the existentialist theologian Paul Tillich (1957) called that person’s ultimate concerns.

To the degree that a person is in touch with and acting from the ultimate concern(s) at the core of his existence, his life is charged with the electricity of meaning. *Without* meaning, no set of circumstances, however pleasant, can ultimately sustain or satisfy a human being. *With* meaning, no set of circumstances, however difficult, can ultimately defeat an individual, who can find purpose, even joy, in the midst of his pain.

In *Man’s Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl (1967), a Jewish psychiatrist who survived the Nazi concentration camps, noted that many individuals found meaning in their lives — even a connection with God — in the midst of their horrors. Conversely, the pampered trophy wife driving a Mercedes Benz around Rodeo Drive in Beverley Hills, buying opulent ornaments and luxurious clothing, and getting cosmetic surgery every time she notices a wrinkle marring her Barbie Doll “perfection” can, and often does, lead a life of despair born of meaninglessness. Drugs may dull the existential pain of the vacuity of



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her life, but that brief escape only lasts until the next fix. Without meaning, any set of circumstances ultimately becomes an existential trap — a void and prison. With meaning, any set of circumstances, however painful, becomes the ground from which the individual can create an ever richer narrative of his life. In psychotherapy the task is often not so much to change the client's external conditions as to help him change his understanding of them, to discover how they may fit together to deepen his view of his existence and to create a constructive thrust towards a significant future (White & Epston 1990). Psychological pain is often a result of narrative rupture; when that is the case, therapy becomes narrative reconstruction.

When I speak of transcendence, I am not necessarily referring to something beyond this world. The individual may find his ultimate meaning *in* this world, and this world alone, just as another may find it in something beyond this world. But in either case, the meaning that the person discovers in his life is transcendent because it is the "bird's eye view" above the specific circumstances of his life. It is this transcendent view that gives meaning to his life. Education that helps teachers and students further their life-narratives is education for meaning, and it is the only form of education that is existentially vital and valid.

It is this view of education for existential significance that I want to explore in this article. Because I am drawing upon some basic ideas in existentialist philosophy, it is necessary to discuss a few of the most important ideas from that school of philosophy, which dominated the 20th Century and continue to exert a significant sway in this century.<sup>1</sup>

### Basic Ideas in Existentialist Philosophy

The central idea in existentialist philosophy and psychology is that the most important thing that a person can do in life is to discover what is most important to him at the deepest level — and then to honor, explore, and extend that commitment or set of commitments as best he can in his unique lifeworld. To do this comprises what Existentialism calls one's "life-project." To pursue it courageously is what Existentialism calls living in good faith — and this is the height of ethical living according to existentialist

ethics. Living in bad faith, on the other hand, resides in either not trying to discover what is most meaningful to oneself in one's life — or (even worse) knowing it but not living in it or up to it. It is a false life and thus the breeding ground of emotional despair, intellectual dishonesty, interpersonal phoniness, and political servitude.

According to Existentialism, when an individual is living authentically in the light of his own self-discovered, self-defined, and therefore best and deepest meanings, he is a "being-for-himself" (Camus 1970; Sartre 1956). This does not mean mere selfishness. It simply means that one is living true to oneself, one's deepest intuitions about oneself, and, in that sense, *for* oneself. When a person tries to live according to someone else's program or image of what he should be, and not on the basis of his best ethical sense about the meaning(s) of his life, then that person no longer lives for himself. He lives for others. Existentialism calls this "being-for-others."

Being-for-others has nothing to do with altruism or a sense of service to others. Indeed, a person who is being-for-others may be a crass materialist ever in search of more money and possessions. Such a person is not really being-for-himself if he is living in this way simply because he is mindlessly conforming to a soulless norm in a materialistic society. Postmodern American society is a good example of this. After many years of absorbing wave after wave of explicit and implicit messages in the media that the faster the car, the bigger the house and the easier the sex, the better; and after many years of subtle messages in schools and universities that what matters most is scoring high on standardized tests and landing a lucrative job — after all of this, the individual is not really living true to himself, not being-for-himself, but is aping a degraded and degrading social norm. He is conforming to the crowd, being-for-others. Conversely, someone who has devoted his energy and resources in the service of others because this answers to his highest vision of things has realized the goal of being-for-himself in honoring his most authentically and intensely felt convictions.

Existentialist psychotherapy sees being-for-others as the root of neurosis (May & Yalom 1995). When we are untrue to who we are as individuals, the result is feelings of guilt (for having betrayed our-

selves), panic (which always stems from losing touch with one's own being, a form of death), and disorientation (because one's life is no longer guided by the North Star of self-awareness). To be-for-others means that one has become "objectified" — an object of someone else's purposes, program, or perspective.

The same is true at the political level. In a consumer society, individuals tend to lose their status as

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individuals (or subjects) and become objects to be economically and politically manipulated, largely through statistical analysis, electronic surveillance, and, indeed, by the whole apparatus of corporate control that we now increasingly find ourselves (and our schools) caught in. In such a consumer society, perversely powered by the pathology of what Marx called "commodity fetishism," the person falls out of living relationship with himself and, consequently, with other people and with his work. This is what Marx meant by alienation — from self, others, and labor. It is another term for living in bad faith. When the agencies that exercise power over individuals are able to convince them that this is the way things should be, thus seducing them to give more and more of themselves over to the corporate complex of control, then those individuals are said to be living in false consciousness.

Education that seduces children — with the bait of grades, status, and possessions — into uncritical conformity is education for false consciousness. And this is precisely the state of things in our schools today. By means of increasing standardization (as imposed on schools by the new corporate masters) our educational sites are turning into places where teachers and students are whipped into uniformity through the lavish rewards and humiliating punishments for not scoring well on standardized tests.

They are thereby turned into objects, trained into false consciousness, alienated from themselves and others, and rewarded for losing the connection with their unique core selves.

This is education for neurosis, a pedagogy of psychosocial illness, and it is having tragically predictable results on our children, many of whom are increasingly being diagnosed with all sorts of "behavioral" and "learning" disorders. In a high percentage of these cases what we are really seeing is not evidence of children having "illnesses" but of them acting out against the illness of the classroom itself — the mind- and soul-numbing joylessness and anti-creativity of life in the standardized classroom today. And when the student's quite natural rejection of the sterility of the classroom becomes too pronounced, he is diagnosed as being ill and drugged into submission with pharmaceuticals provided by the same corporate system that caused the problem in the first place.

Being-for-oneself, on the other hand, is the source of creativity, realistic compassion, and emotional empowerment. Education that promotes being-for-oneself is what is needed to promote a society filled with existentially clear and (therefore) psychologically, intellectually, and politically empowered people who can make a nation both great and good, for such fundamental individual empowerment is crucial not only to individual but also communal well-being. In 1988, the dean of American educational history, Lawrence Cremin, warned that the major specter that would haunt the United States in the 21st Century would be the metastasizing of the cancerous military-industrial complex into the "military-industrial-educational complex." Our major challenge as educators, he predicted, would be to find ways to resist it. His prophecy has come to pass. As educators we must find ways to educate for existential authenticity in order to resist the incursion of the corporate behemoth into our educational spaces. Although a daunting task, it is also a noble one, amounting to nothing less than keeping alive the vision of education as the emotional, intellectual, and ethical nurturance of students.

How a teacher goes about the business of fostering narratives of empowerment and hope in his students will often vary from class to class, even student to

student. However, in what follows I will discuss some of what I believe to be the most crucial features of what might be called teaching for transcendence and transformation: education as caring; education as art; education as liberation; education as encounter; and education as transcendence.

### **Education as Caring: A Relational Pedagogy**

In his famous hierarchy of needs pyramid, Maslow placed at the very top what he considered to be the most important need of all: the desire to self-actualize. As a theorist and practitioner who was instrumental in the last half of the 20th Century in defining education as the enrichment of the student's existential lifeworld, Maslow's ideas are central in defining education for existential authenticity. "If we want to be helpers, counselors, teachers, guides, or psychotherapists," said Maslow (1968, vi),

what we must do is to accept the person and help him learn what kind of person he is already. What is his style, what are his aptitudes, what is the person good for, not good for, what can we build upon, what are his good raw materials, his potentialities? ... Above all, we [should] care for the child, that is, enjoy him and his growth and his self-actualization.

In the existentially sensitive curriculum, the student is offered the "possibility for him as an existing person [to make] sense of his own life-world" (Greene 1974, 69-83). What he studies is grist for the mill as he interprets and carries on his life as truly to himself and as serviceably to others as he can.

Because this view of educational processes is so tightly focused on individual uniqueness, there are no one-size-fits-all pedagogical tools or methodologies that can create zones for self-actualization in the classroom. It is an attitude *toward* the student, not a program *for* her, which lies at the heart of existentially rich pedagogy. This attitude can best be described as one of caring. Caring means reverence for who the student is at her core, gratitude for the chance to help her expand her intellectual horizons, and excitement at seeing the student make an idea her own in her own way, and then fold it into her own life story in order to vitalize her existence.

A pedagogy of deep caring — existential caring — is not coddling.<sup>2</sup> It is not the saccharine pedagogy of just making sure that students play "nice" and feel "good" about themselves at the end of the day because they were never particularly challenged to do anything difficult or to move out of their comfort zones. Rather, it sets the highest of all possible standards: that the student engage an activity or idea in the classroom as fully as she can, and always with an eye to enfolding what she has learned into her life story so that she is truer to herself and more genuine, and genuinely caring, with others. When this happens, then education goes beyond the mere training and memorizing that characterize standardized education; it ceases to be concerned with the mere transmission of facts and figures, an education that turns the individual into an object. Instead, it involves the transformation of self, other, and the world and helps a student in her ongoing project of becoming an ever deeper subject (Kane 1999).

### **Education as Art: "Poetic" Knowing**

This feature of existentially constructive education has to do with the famous Kantian distinction between mathetic (analytical) and poetic (intuitive) knowing. In the existential domain, the premium is on poetic ways of knowing. This is the case whether the subject is clearly in the poetic domain, as in art, or clearly in the mathetic domain, as in physics. When a subject is handled poetically, it is used primarily as a springboard for a student to explore and expand his existence, and to then express this experience in words, actions, and products that betoken his growth. From making a cutting board in a woodshop class to experiencing the power of an image in a Shakespearian sonnet, from charting a chemical reaction in a lab to running the 100 meter hurdles, virtually any idea or activity at a school can be an occasion for a student to grasp her existence more vitally, intuit its possible directions more subtly, and act on all of this more lucidly. Global, intuitive, and idiosyncratic, this way of knowing is deeply poetic. It is in this sense that

any activity — indeed, at their very best, activities that are engaged in to court surprise, to cultivate discovery, to find new forms of experi-

ence — is expressive in character. Nothing in the sciences, the home or mechanical arts, or in social relationships prohibits or diminishes the possibility of engaging in expressive outcomes. (Vallance 1991, 159-160)

Because this way of educating revolves around the uses of intuition and expression in the service of the care and cultivation of the individual, it is often called “humanist-aesthetic” (Ornstein & Hunkins 1988). Such pedagogies are also “aesthetic” because the goal is for the student to experience any topic or activity in the classroom as one would experience a work of art. Consider what happens when an art critic views a painting.

In looking at the painting, the idea is to approach the piece with as finely focused concentration as possible. Not taking anything for granted, she is always trying to see the piece with as much freshness of mind and clarity of judgment as possible. This means never taking anything for granted while engaging the painting but always being open to surprising new visions of what the painting is and what it suggests. When this happens, the painting reveals endless layers and types of meaning from viewing to viewing. The painting is not a static product. It is a living process: dynamic, open-ended, and varying from viewer to viewer. And of course, the confrontation with the piece of art becomes meaningful only when it casts light on the viewer’s own existence: its present state, its limitations and possibilities, its strengths and shortcomings, and, above all, its trajectory towards an ever more meaningful future.

When teachers and students engage a subject in this way, mining it together for its existential gold, then the curriculum is being experienced in an aesthetic manner. The curriculum becomes a living organism, not a dead object. And as both teacher and student enter into dialogue with each other through dialogue with the living curriculum, they, too, become more alive. Thus as the existentialist curriculum theorist Max van Manen (1982, 295) has wisely observed:

It is probably less correct to say that we learn *about* the subjects contained in the school curriculum than that the subjects let us know something. It is in this letting us know that subject

matter becomes a true subject: a subject which makes relationship possible. The subject calls upon us in such a way that its otherness, its itness, turns into the dialogic Other: the “you.” In this way our responsiveness, our “listening” to the subject, constitutes the very essence of the relationship of a student with subject matter.

The philosopher of art Theodore Meyer Greene (1953, 414) said that

a work of art is a unique, individual whole — a self-contained artistic “organism” with a “life” and “reality” of its own.... The competent critic ... apprehends the individual work of art in all its self-contained uniqueness through sensitive artistic re-creation.

Similarly, the teacher must help the student “recreate” a subject (which, no less than a work of art, is also “a self-contained ‘organism’ with a ‘life’ and ‘reality’ of its own”) so that the student experientially makes it her own. To accomplish this, the teacher must move the student — sometimes tenderly, sometimes forcefully — beyond the easy, standard interpretations of the subject matter in order to confront the issues under discussion with the same intensity, curiosity, and creativity as in confronting a piece of art for the first time. The teacher, no less than the student, must come face-to-face with the subject matter with the same emotional clarity and moral courage that a good critic brings to a work of art.

#### **Education as Liberation: “Conscientization”**

The existentially authentic curriculum rests on the idea that we are ethically obliged to construct ourselves not only individually but also collectively in ever greater degrees of humane and responsible freedom. Democracy is a political expression of the existential ideal of free individuals in mutually respectful, mutually enriching dialogue in the wider setting of a civic body. Perhaps the most important 20th-century educational prophet of this dual existential vision of personal and political freedom was the educational theorist Paulo Freire (2001, 27, 87):

Insofar as I am a conscious presence in the world, I cannot hope to escape my responsibility

for my action in the world.... At the heart of the experience of coherently democratic authority is a basic, almost obsessive dream: namely, to persuade or convince freedom of its vocation to autonomy as it travels the road of self-construction, using materials from within and without, but elaborated over and over again. It is within this autonomy, laboriously constructed, that freedom will gradually occupy those spaces previously inhabited by dependency.

This is Freire's well-known pedagogical practice of *conscientizacon*, roughly translated as "becoming aware." It means teaching for consciousness raising, both our own and our students'. *Conscientizacon* views the curriculum as an instrument of liberation in the classroom in the service of liberation of oneself and others in the larger world outside the classroom. Freire began his teaching and theorizing among the very poor in order to help them find personally meaningful ways to define and deal with their socio-economic oppression (1970). As his theorizing evolved, he began to view oppression more broadly as any set of internal or external constraints that hinder an individual — regardless of her socioeconomic status — from being able to take hold of her existence and build it up in ways that manifest her best talents and ethical intuitions (2001). Education as *conscientizacon* sees the curriculum as a tool that the student can use to examine her life, expose those forces that are illegitimately constricting it, and devise ways of unfettering it so as to exist in greater scope, wisdom, and compassion.

The chains that the student wishes to shake off may be primarily political or economic; however, these are not the only chains that bind. A boy who is discovering himself as a ballet dancer in a dance class and is beginning to break free of his father's brutish notions of masculinity is engaging in education as liberation. A girl who, in studying images of women in literature from other cultures, is learning how to reject the demeaning images of womanhood purveyed by American advertising, is also involved in education as liberation. And the teacher who is aiding her students in these ways is herself becoming freer and more empowered in rising to her full professional stature as a guide to her students. She becomes an example of how freedom is found, mani-

fested, and exercised in intelligent goodness. Such a teacher, by her very presence, generates hope in his students, who now experience

trust in the world because this [teacher] exists. That is the most inward achievement of the relation in education. Because this human being exists, meaninglessness, no matter how hard pressed you are by it, cannot be the real truth. Because this human being exists, in the darkness the light lies hidden, in fear salvation, and in the callousness of one's fellow-men the great Love. (Buber 1965, 98)

### Education as Encounter: The "I-Thou" Classroom

All talk of existentially responsive education amounts to nothing if a student is not seen and treated respectfully in the classroom. A student cannot be treated as an anonymous object and be expected to develop as a responsible subject. The degree to which a teacher may engage each student individually will vary, of course, depending upon institutional guidelines, class size, resources, and the student's own willingness to do so. But at any educational site that claims existential authenticity, there must be a basic attitude of what one might call existential regard for the student as a unique being, and this attitude must prevail in how teachers and students interact with each other. Where a student is treated as an object, no curriculum, however rich in existential potential, can really be existentially fruitful because, even though the teacher may talk the talk of helping students develop deeply, he is not walking the walk of authentic encounter with them.

Crucial to existentially fertile education is an *I-Thou* relationship between the teacher and student, not *I-It*. According to the Jewish existentialist theologian Martin Buber, an *I-Thou* relationship occurs in dialogue when individuals are intellectually sincere with and emotionally attuned to each other. The relationship, one of *care-full* listening and speaking, promotes each person's existential journey. An *I-It* relationship, on the other hand, is deeply unethical, for in such a relationship one person is trying to turn the other into an object, an "it," a mere instrument to serve his plans or programs with no regard for the other's individual nature or needs. An *I-It* relation-

ship is destructive because the “I” in this dyad has no interest in exploring or empowering the other person as a unique “Thou” with great existential potential. Instead, the “I” of the *I-it* relationship, seeing the other person as an object of its own domineering desires and acquisitive goals, tries to negate the other’s

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***From making a cutting board in a woodshop class to experiencing the power of an image in a Shakespearian sonnet, virtually any idea or activity at a school can be an occasion for a student to grasp her existence more vitally, intuit its possible directions more subtly, and act on all of this more lucidly.***

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existential identity in order to feed its own insatiable appetite and will. Yet, because we attain existential authenticity in ourselves only to the degree that we respond to it in others, we close the door on our own existential growth whenever we objectify another person in any fashion.

Buber saw the *I-Thou* relationship as both the origin and goal of any deeply educational situation, for ideally “the relation in education is one of pure dialogue.” The *I-Thou* relationship being the cornerstone of morality, Buber made what he called “dialogical ethics” the foundation of his pedagogy. In dialogical pedagogy, the relationship between the teacher and student is the nucleus around which everything else spins. The curriculum is the occasion for this relationship to happen. As a theologian, Buber even went so far as to claim that when a teacher and student are engaged in rich relationship, they reach not only intellectual but truly spiritual heights, coming into contact with Divinity, “the eternal *Thou*.” “The extended lines of relation meet in the eternal *Thou*,” wrote Buber (1965, 75) in his classic work *I and Thou*, and

every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou*, the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*. Through the mediation of the *Thou* of all beings, fulfillment, and non-fulfillment, of relations comes to them: The inborn *Thou* is realized in each relation and consummated in none.

On the other hand, in an *I-It* pedagogy the teacher and student soon find themselves in an interpersonal and spiritual wasteland, for

if a man lets it have the mastery, the continuing growing world of *It* overruns him and robs him of the reality of his own *I*, till the incubus over him and the ghost within him whisper to one another the confession of their non-salvation. (Buber 1965, 46)

Thus it is imperative that the existentially authentic teacher enter into a relationship with the student in increasingly deep encounter. The subject under analysis in the classroom is not a thing unto itself but rather the curricular infrastructure of this essentially ethical process of relationship in education. This is a process that rests upon subject matter but ultimately transcends it as the teacher and student, through dialogical encounter, approach the realm of meaning in their individual lifeworlds. Whatever sets itself up against relationship in education — and this is, of course, precisely what standardized forms of instruction and assessment by definition do — commits moral violence. It is also intellectually inadequate because the teacher and student will achieve the most profound forms of understanding of the subject matter by exploring it together.

In the *I-Thou* classroom, discourse must be honest, whether that honesty be comfortable or not to the members of a classroom; for, what is dishonest could hardly be considered ethical. To be sure, *I-Thou* conversation must always be civil. Uncivil discourse — such as abounds on radio and television talk shows, in which the object is not really to make a useful point but to skewer and even humiliate an opponent — never results in any ultimate good. How could it? Existentially authentic discourse is mindful of the ethical building up of oneself and others through (inter)penetrating encounter, not the public

shaming of others through merely slick verbal attacks. *I-Thou* discourse must, by definition, be civil.

However, it need not always be comfortable. Indeed, existentially authentic conversation will sometimes *not* be comfortable because each conversant may be being challenged to examine and even change deeply held convictions. Dishonest discourse designed to keep things superficially “friendly” in the classroom by timidly evading real differences in points of view and conclusions among the participants is (be it ever so “polite”) not authentic. Not being authentic, it is not constructive. Not being constructive, it is not truly *care-full* of oneself and others. It is, therefore, although sweet-seeming, not really *I-Thou* discourse but simply a polite version of unethical *I-It* talk.

Civil, frank, and characterized by genuine listening to others and humility in speaking one’s own truth, *I-Thou* classroom discourse is both open and humane. It is an approach to conversation in which the conversant is like the character in *The Canterbury Tales* of whom Chaucer wrote, “Gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.”

Healthy humor — not demeaning to anyone or any group of people in any way — can play a significant role in the creation of an *I-Thou* classroom. Laughter can humanize things, tempering the high drama of existentially authentic encounter with a well-timed chuckle. Just as the comic-relief scenes in *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, or *Julius Caesar* give the audience a chance to breathe, relax, and reconstitute themselves for the next crucial existential encounter, so a good laugh in the classroom can be restorative, bonding, and clarifying.

Furthermore, a teacher must always be resisting the temptation to engage in “power talk” if he wishes to foster real communication (Huebner 1999). Power talk is any talk that is meant to illegitimately assert the teacher’s inherent power in the classroom in order to shut a student down. There are many varieties of power talk.

Often it consists of the teacher trying to run circles around students by whipping out obscure, unnecessarily technical, and arrogant language. For the student, such talk is disempowering and demeaning. Power talk is a sort of verbal web that a teacher maliciously spins in order to immobilize and then devour

the student psychologically, politically, and morally. Power talk is also a steamroller that the teacher mounts in order to force his interpretation of something onto students who have not had the chance to explore it by feeling their way through it individually, poking inquisitively into its various corners and alleys, peaks and valleys, and thereby making it their own in their own way and for their own purposes. Such exploration is the only kind of classroom discourse that produces free individuals in *I-Thou* conversation. Indeed, “the natural educative consequences of conversation are broken when the power relations between speaker and listener are unequal and when power is used [by the teacher] to impose an interpretation” (Huebner 1999, 256).

In short, power talk in the classroom is unethical.

The teacher who does not respect the student’s curiosity in its diverse aesthetic, linguistic, and syntactic expressions; who uses irony to put down legitimate questioning...; who is not respectfully present in the educational experience of the student, transgresses fundamental ethical principles of the human condition. (Freire 2001, 59).

Besides being wrong, power talk is pedagogically useless because no one will truly accept an imposed interpretation, however much she may sycophantically feign agreement in the classroom in order to appease the teacher.

Not power talk but *empowering* talk should be the gold-standard in the existentially rich classroom.

### **Education as Transcendence: The Sacred Space of the Classroom**

For some teachers and students, educational processes and products attain their greatest significance only when they point beyond themselves to a realm of spirit that transcends this world in every way — while investing itself in this world at every turn. For such individuals, education must ultimately revolve around this Spirit in order for education to have existential validity. Inviting, invoking, being with, and celebrating this Presence *is* their ultimate concern. For them, education is one of the primary ways of moving towards communion with and celebration of the Absolute Other, the Divine, which, although invisible and often enough incomprehensible to us,

gives visible life and meaning to everything we see. Since it is in the light of this Spirit that such individuals ultimately inhabit and interpret their lifeworlds, education that exists for the Spirit as it dwells uniquely in each of them is of the highest existential worth to them.

Education in the spirit is not typically “religious,” nor need it even be obviously “spiritual.” The only requirement is that it be an occasion for the individual, in his own quiet and particular way, to seek out the presence of the Divine that inheres in education. This can happen on a football field, in an art class, within a lab, in a discussion about literature, or on a theatrical stage. For as curricular theorist Duane Huebner, has declared, any educational content or relationship may be a dwelling place for the Divine. The Spirit, Huebner (1999) asserts, is inevitably present in existentially authentic education.

Hovering always is the absolute “other,” Spirit, that overwhelms us in moments of awe, terror, tragedy, beauty, and peace. Content is the “other.” Knowing is the process of being in relationship with that “other.” Knowledge is an abstraction from that process.

To define the goal of education in lesser terms is a mistake, for “the journey of the self is short circuited or derailed by those who define the ends of life and education in less than ultimate terms.”<sup>3</sup> Huebner (1999, 360) notes in similar strains that

the otherness that informs and accompanies education is the absolute Otherness, the transcendent Other, however we name that which goes beyond appearances and all conditions. Education is the lure of the transcendent — that openness to a future that is beyond all futures.

When teaching and learning occur under the pull of that lure, when it is a trajectory towards the transcendent, education is in and for the Spirit.

The Divine may announce itself in the classroom all of a sudden. This is what happens in the story told by Martin Buber in his essay “On Teaching.” Here he portrays a young teacher entering a classroom full of unruly boys at the beginning of a term in geography. Understandably defensive, the teacher’s initial im-

pulse is to assert his power in order to establish control — and just

to say No, to say No to everything rising against him from beneath.... And if one starts from beneath one perhaps never arrives above, but everything comes down. But then his eyes meet a face which strikes him. It is not a beautiful face nor particularly intelligent; but it is a real face, or rather, the chaos preceding the cosmos of a real face. On it he reads a question which is something different from the general curiosity.... And he, the young teacher, addresses this face. He says nothing very ponderous or important, he puts an ordinary introductory question: “What did you talk about last in geography? The Dead Sea? Well, what about the Dead Sea?” But there was obviously something not quite usual in the question, for the answer he gets is not the ordinary schoolboy answer; the boy begins to *tell a story*. Some months earlier he had stayed for a few hours on the shores of the Dead Sea and it is of this he tells. He adds: “And everything looked to me as if it had been created a day before the rest of creation.” Quite unmistakably he had only in this moment made up his mind to talk about it. In the meantime his face has changed. It is no longer quite as chaotic as before. And the class has fallen silent. They all listen. The class, too, is no longer a chaos. Something has happened. The young teacher has started from above. (1985, 112-113)

Although such collective moments as these are not rare in the existentially vibrant classroom, neither are they the norm. More typically, the Spirit addresses the *individual* student and teacher in the classroom in silent, idiosyncratic, quite unpredictable ways throughout the day, alerting him that what he is experiencing in the classroom can be absorbed into the larger narrative of his life, holding out to him the promise of greater involvement in his own depths, where the Divine stirs him, meets him, and, in showing him how to be more like himself, makes him more like Itself. In the existentially vital curriculum, the student and teacher increasingly learn to attend to the classic Zen imperative, “Become who you are!”

In sum, the teacher has both the burden and the boon of being entrusted with a sacred work — that of fostering narratives of hope in his students, narratives that promote their transformation and transcendence. He does this by means of a caring pedagogy, rooted in genuine encounter with his students and oriented towards a celebration of their creative potential within the spaces that the curriculum provides. In this manner he truly becomes a mentor — one who fosters his students' personal liberation and promotes their communion with ultimacy as they conceive it and live it out freely *in* their own lives and *as* their own lives.

2. Nel Noddings' (1995) phrase for this is "ontological caring."
3. Standardized "education" is the most obvious culprit, of course, in this "short circuiting" and "derailing" of the individual's trek down the many paths of education towards the god within.

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### Notes

1. I have drawn especially from the works of Jean Paul Sartre (1956), Martin Heidegger (1964), and Albert Camus (1970). Also important for this article has been the work of the religious existentialist writers Soren Kierkegaard (1969), Martin Buber (1965), and Paul Tillich (1975).

# In Grief, a Father Goes Hunting for Answers

Kevin O'Connor

**What would you do if you discovered that your teenager committed suicide because of relentless bullying?**

Vermonters John Halligan felt like he had died when he learned of his 13-year-old son's suicide.

It was 6 a.m., Oct. 7, 2003. The IBM engineer, away on business, woke to a phone call from his wife, Kelly.

"You need to come home," she said through hysterical sobs. "Our son is dead. Ryan killed himself."

Ryan what? It seemed impossible. His boy wasn't dark-hearted or delinquent, but instead a gentle soul disguised as just another gangly eighth-grader.

Numb in disbelief, Halligan stuffed his belongings into a suitcase, raced out of his hotel and, crashing into reality, collapsed on a plane.

Tears streamed down his face as he stared out the window, his mind replaying the same question: "Why? Why? Why?"

Frantic for answers, he couldn't foresee the journey he was about to take.

## The Best Present

Ryan Patrick Halligan was born a week before Christmas, on Dec. 18, 1989. "Ryan was the best present," his father recalls. "Life at that point felt so perfect."

Ryan had loving parents, an older sister and, later, a younger brother. But by age 2, the green-eyed, brown-haired boy struggled to move about and had not spoken or seemingly understood a single word.

Diagnosed with developmental delays in speech and motor skills, Ryan received early and special education. He learned he'd always have to work harder than his classmates on assignments. But by fourth grade, he was back on track with his peers.

Then came fifth grade. His father noticed students starting to decipher who had better marks, more friends and wealthier families. Ryan complained of

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one boy in particular who picked on his academic and athletic struggles. Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can shatter your spirit.

"Ryan, that kid probably has a lot of issues of his own," the father told his son, "and he's looking to take it out on somebody." Dad's advice: Walk away and eventually he will, too.

Graduating to Essex's sixth-through-eighth-grade middle school, Ryan seemingly left the teasing behind. Then in December 2002, his father came home to find his son face down atop the kitchen table.

"Can you homeschool me?" he remembers the seventh-grader asking. "Can we move?"

His tormentor was back to bullying. The Halligans wanted to talk to the principal, but Ryan said a classmate who complained was tagged a crybaby and tattletale. Wiping away tears, he had another idea: "Dad, I want you to teach me how to fight."

His father didn't believe in fisticuffs, yet thought of the self-defense film "The Karate Kid." Soon he and his son were training in the martial arts program Tae-Bo.

Halligan told his son not to attack anyone but, if hit, to stand up for himself. And so his parents were not entirely surprised when a school administrator called in February 2003 to say he had broken up a fight between Ryan and the bully.

"I got a few good punches in," the boy, still trembling with adrenaline, told his father, "and I don't think this kid is ever going to bother me again."

Cue the credits and you'd have a happy ending. But the Halligans faced new concerns. By the end of seventh grade, they exchanged skeptical glances when Ryan announced the bully had befriended him. Then they watched their once avid swimmer, camper, skateboarder and cyclist sit hypnotized all summer in front of the computer.

Halligan reminded his son of the family's Internet rules: No contact with strangers and no secret passwords. The parents respected their children's privacy. But in a cyberworld of scammers and stalkers, they wanted access if the unthinkable ever struck.

### All About U

Halligan will share his every thought and feeling from before and after his son's suicide. But the specif-

ics of the death itself are too horrific to remember, let alone recount.

"We tore the house apart," the father says after a moment of silence, "searching for the note that would answer the question, 'Why?'"

Afterward, Ryan's room looked like a tornado had hit. But there was no explanation underneath the wreckage.

Then Halligan, crying uncontrollably, spotted his son's seventh-grade yearbook. Opening it, he discovered photo after photo crossed out with scornful scribbling. The bully's picture was written over so hard, the pen had shredded the paper. Worst of all was the stick-figure drawing of a hangman.

After dinner, Halligan turned on a computer, typed the password he had given his son and, with an unsettling feeling of thrill and trepidation, saw the boy's Internet account spring to life.

Classmates couldn't believe the signal that popped up on their screens: Two days after his funeral, Ryan appeared to be back online.

"Who are you?" they typed one after another. "What are you doing? This isn't funny ..."

"I'm Mr. Halligan," he replied. "Is there anything anybody is willing to share that might explain why Ryan did what he did?"

The responses came together like puzzle pieces. Months earlier, Ryan had wound up in the emergency room with digestive pains. Back at school, he confided the particulars of the doctor's private exam, thinking them funny.

The bully thought so, too. He told everyone Ryan must be gay.

Halligan stared at the computer as schoolmates recounted how his son, inconsolable, hid in a bathroom between classes so not to drown in the tsunami of corridor torment.

The father then clicked on a file of his son's correspondence.

"I have found all about u," one student wrote.

Too many others sent messages too graphic to repeat. That's what made one giddy, giggling back-and-forth between his boy and a girl so unexpected.

He liked her. She liked him. Amid all the mud, a seed appeared to be sprouting.

Halligan knew only the girl's screen name, but he feared his son's death had left her heartbroken.

### Why Didn't I?

Soon after, a policeman arrived with news: On his last day, Ryan had told a classmate, "It's girls like you who make me want to kill myself."

The boy bared his heart to his online crush, only to discover her true intentions.

"Ryan, you're just a loser," classmates said she told him. "I was just joking."

Worse, she had forwarded his personal messages to her friends.

The Halligans were hurt and angry. But hearing that the girl was skipping school after a firestorm of blame, they knew they didn't want another family to suffer.

Reaching out, the Halligans told her Ryan's suicide wasn't sparked by one person but rather a snowballing depression hardened by years of bullying. The girl was so choked up she couldn't speak. But her vise-like hug communicated her sorrow and remorse.

The bully was a different story. When Halligan heard about the gay rumor just after his son's funeral, he grabbed his car keys and headed for the door.

"I want to crush this kid," he told his wife.

Kelly, more reasoned and reserved, told her husband to sit down. Two months later, he received a call from another father. The bully, it seemed, was still spreading tales about Ryan. Halligan again grabbed his car keys. This time, his wife wasn't there to stop him.

Driving to the bully's house, he strangled the steering wheel when he reached a red light.

"I'll be honest with you," he says now. "I wanted to kill him."

Minutes after the light changed, he stood face to face with his target.

The boy didn't know who Halligan was or why he was asking for his father or mother. This is Ryan's dad, his parents went on to say. The teenager turned white.

"You probably have no idea the amount of pain you brought into my son's life," Halligan practically shouted.

The bully denied everything. Halligan looked him straight in the eyes.

"You're lying," he said.

The boy went silent. Then he started to sob. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he said over and over.

Halligan breathed in the apology and exhaled. "Why didn't I do this a lot sooner?" he thought on his way home. "If I'd only ... my son would still be alive today."

### Beyond Belief

What if Halligan had consulted the school from the start? He learned that administrators would have brought the boys together for a "conflict resolution" session, asked Ryan to describe what happened, then waited until the bully apologized.

The father figured that would only humiliate his son further and persuade the bully to say he'd stop, knowing he could start again with little penalty.

What if Halligan had talked to police instead? He learned that authorities couldn't prosecute, as state law at the time didn't address bullying.

Seeking a strong deterrent, Halligan went to his state representative. Seven months after Ryan's death, the Legislature voted to require all Vermont schools to develop rules to prevent and respond to bullying. Two years later in 2006, Halligan won passage of a law supplementing health education with lessons about depression and risk of suicide.

But for Halligan, it wasn't enough. In 2005, he accepted an invitation to tell his son's story at a local school. Afterward, one student e-mailed: "I just wanted to let you know how you affected me.... I had picked on kids, after that speech I went to the few that I had and broke down apologizing to them."

Soon other schools asked him to speak. IBM let him take time off from work. But again for Halligan, it wasn't enough. Last year, when the microelectronics manager had to lay off workers, he gave himself notice, calculated what he'd need to charge to cover household and travel expenses, and began touring the nation.

Halligan has spoken at more than 350 schools in 21 states and two Canadian provinces, is booked for the rest of the academic year and has filled almost half of his fall calendar.

Last week, on his way home for Easter, he told audiences in Charlotte and Williamstown that while society talks of protecting children from computer predators and pedophiles, students are hurting each other daily through unsupervised e-mail, texts, and message boards.

His son, alive in photos projected on the wall, was so present yet so painfully missing.

Halligan concludes his talks by recalling his own childhood and his favorite art teacher. "You can always turn an inkblot into a butterfly," he quotes her.

Some days, the stain of what his family has experienced seems indelible. "Ur finally gonna kill urself?!" a boy e-mailed Ryan before his suicide. "Yep," he replied.

But Halligan keeps striving to rise above.

"All I want is to be with Ryan again someday," he says. "My wife and I have a strong faith he's with God, and we need to live the rest of our lives in such a way that we earn the right to be reunited. If we keep using him as a guiding light, everything will be fine. But I know if I go down that path of anger and do something I'd regret, I'll jeopardize that."

He understands how striking out hurts — and speaking up heals.

"There is no greater pain than for a parent to lose a child," he tells students. "Don't ever believe for a second that you don't matter, that no one would miss you if you were gone. I don't care who you are or what circumstance you're in. You all are loved beyond belief. Trust me on this one."

# Teaching Toward Wholeness

## The Aesthetic in Education

Kathleen Kristin Ruen

**Teaching toward wholeness is a commitment by the teacher to view each child as a whole person who is in the process of change and growth and to create a classroom environment that supports the many ways that children grow.**

Education has been viewed over time through many different lenses. It has been looked at as a garden, a process whereby knowledge is poured into a vessel, a child left behind, and, currently, “a race to the top.” All of these lenses, or metaphors, have had an influence on the way children are seen and taught.

Over the past few decades there has been a growing acceptance of viewing education as if it were a business. At its extreme children are provided “educational services” by teachers reading from scripts (in order that each child get exactly the same service) and, in turn, the children show what they have learned by providing a test score (a “profit”) which will show their potential economic worth. Of course, if you look closely at the research that supports these curricula, and the evaluation methods themselves, it becomes apparent that they are subject to manipulation and outright error (Kohn 2007). There are many schools where children are already seeing themselves as a number between one and four, which has eerie parallels to seeing oneself as one’s salary. Whole schools are being given grades (Gootman & Medina 2007), similar to Fortune 500 corporations. The lure of this view of education is that it is simple, it is measurable, and it is easily replicated in schools. Unfortunately, it often results in the corruption of administrators and the dehumanization of children and educators.

### The Aesthetic in Education

A far better metaphor for education is that teaching is an art form, like dance, theatre, music, and the visual arts. The relationship between teachers and students is similar to the painter’s relationship with his painting or the musician’s relationship with her com-



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position. There is a constant back and forth between what the teacher sees in the students and what the students reflect back to him. This is similar to what happens when the stone "calls out" to be sculpted, or when an accident in a dance becomes a major phrase. Each are constantly in relationship with the other, in a dance of sorts, making and remaking each other moment after moment and day after day.

John Dewey's (1934) seminal work, *Art as Experience* is a compelling foundation for viewing education as an art form. His aim was to define the inherent duality between what the artist creates and what the audience sees. In doing so, he introduced the idea that what is viewed as artistic and what is viewed as aesthetic are essentially the same experience coming from different directions. The artist expresses an experience through an interaction with a medium and the perceiver creates her own experience by interacting with the medium and form of the art object. Dewey (1934, 54) expands this dynamic by observing that the artist "embodies the attitude of the perceiver while at work." So, while the audience, or perceiver, can travel between the artwork and themselves and create an experience, only the artist can travel the entire spectrum, taking on the role of creator and observer at the same time.

Applying this metaphor to education, the teacher, as the artist, is alongside and interacts with the child as he develops as a person and makes his own work, or meaning, of the world. The teacher is also the perceiver of the child, often bringing the child in on what is noticed about the self or the work made. The teacher is there to support the child in making himself, and is also there to assist the child in becoming aware of the making. What is central is the child and his work, not external standards or curriculum. Once standards or curriculum are placed in the center, the aesthetic dimension is lost.

When the curriculum takes center stage, the most important aspect of education (the student) is moved over to the side, and education becomes primarily content and procedures, not people. Children and teachers are in service to the curriculum. Both the child and the teacher are interpreting the curriculum in their own ways, but each cannot truly see the other.

When one places the child and her work in the center, the view is not only unobstructed, it has a re-

fracting, reflecting, transactional, and transformative quality. As in making and viewing art, one is changed, if only minutely, by what one sees, and by seeing, one changes, if only minutely, what is there. In a similar manner, if teachers can truly see children, and if the child is allowed to truly see the teacher, both will be changed in the process. As Karen Gallas (1998, 140), a first grade teacher, eloquently states,

Who I am, and who an individual child I teach is and will become, is always a continuing piece of work, constructed in relation to the other, in conversation with the other, in the best of possible worlds, in communion with the other.

### **The Role of Curriculum and Subject Matter**

So what about the curriculum? Where does subject matter fit in this picture? I suggest that the subject matter and "wonderful ideas" (Duckworth 2008) are inherently inside and connected to both teacher and child. There is an odd notion that subject matter, like math, reading, sciences and even the arts are outside of us, and that we must be brought to the subject matter by studying each as a separate piece. The role of the teacher is not to bring subject matter to children, but instead to *bring it out of them*.

In a painting, for example, an artist uses paint and color to work out an idea. She is also using forms of literacy (story and communication), mathematical thinking (perspective, balance, and symmetry) and perhaps a host of other ideas (biology, current events, other forms of art) to inspire and inform her work. When the artist is in the act of creating she is not aware of all the complex elements she is drawing upon to achieve a final work. However, in looking back at the painting, as an artist or as the viewer, it is possible, through an aesthetic interaction (Eisner 2002), to explore and make these connections to the other disciplines.

Like the artist, the teacher draws on *all* of her own experiences and knowledge of the subject matter when working with an individual child or a group of children. But ideally the child and his work are the centerpiece. When subject matter becomes central, there is an immediate cutting off of connection and possibility. Keeping the child central while intuitively knowing when to introduce appropriate

skills, questions, and ideas is the work of an artist. The teacher then can look at the child's work and help him see connections to other subjects and ideas. This interaction has a potential for great change and growth for all involved. As artists through their artwork have changed the way cultures see themselves, so teachers have the potential of transforming the world by supporting children in their growth as thinkers and makers.

### Upending and Re-thinking Education

We need to both rethink and revisit schooling, and create a vision of it that connects to what really happens when children learn and change and grow. This means working with the child as a whole person, and looking at schools as a collective of respected adults responsible for the care and growth of each individual child. Re-envisioning needs to begin from the relationship between the child and the teacher, then move on to organizational structures, supports, and community involvement. Instead of a top-down organization, schools need to have a bottom-up structure.

This implies an organic structure that will be constantly changing to meet the needs of children, teachers, administrators, and school districts. How might it look? First, there is the child and his work in relationship with the teacher. The teacher is in relationship with many children, and the children in turn are in relationship with each other. The teacher is responsible for the growth of each child and the growth of the whole group. Second, teachers are in relationship with a principal, who supports each individual teacher and the group of teachers as a community that ideally learn from one other. Lastly, there is the district level, where principals meet together with a experienced mentor who can support the needs of each school.

What is aesthetic about this model for education? It places the child in the front and center of the conversation. Also, instead of asking children to constantly adapt to the methods of teachers, teachers are asked to adapt themselves to the needs and interests of their students. In turn, principals are asked to adapt themselves to the needs of their teachers and district leaders are asked to adapt to the needs of each school. This does not mean that teachers, principals, and district leaders lose their voice and ideas

and visions, it just means that these visions need to be tempered by the reality that education ultimately centers on students and their needs. This model holds the potential of keeping children, teachers, and administrators visible to each other. And with visibility comes valuing and care.

When districts and states mandate a curriculum from the top, without a constant dialogue with children, teachers, and administrators, everyone underneath in effect becomes invisible. And when people are invisible, when they become mere numbers and grades and statistics, society does not even notice when they are mistreated.

Schools may be asked to produce high quality students for the future marketplace, but they will not succeed in this by forcing children to fit into one standard. This is where economics has it wrong. Children and people cannot be educated without attention being paid to who they are as persons, how they learn, and what they are interested in. As in art, education needs to value visibility and clarity and diversity, not sameness and loss of self. If teachers can make human connections with their students and artfully support their learning and ideas, there are no limits to a child's growth.

### Teaching Toward Wholeness

When an artist is using paint, she does not only work with the colors on her palette. She also works with the texture, weight, and transparency of her media, and how that media reacts with the surface she is painting on. She is working with time as well, for watercolors and acrylics dry quite quickly, while oils give the ability to work into the painting more.

A director working with actors is sensitive not only to the timing of the words spoken by them, but also to their body language, tone of voice, positioning on the stage, and psychological state. The director knows that all these help connect the audience to the story of the play. Likewise, a choreographer not only looks at a physical body moving through space, she is working with timing, color, emotional content, and the limits of bodily movement.

The point here is that all artists are both conscious of and working on multiple aspects of their craft at the same time. Dewey (1934, 191) refers to this as attention to form. By form, he means a common pro-

cess in which a work of art is made. Forming, like experiencing, also has a rhythm of reflection. The artist often stops and reflects on what has happened so far within the context of the whole work that she intends to make. In this shaping, the artist finds a way to make a whole out of parts, an undefined characteristic which Maxine Greene (2001, 158) alludes to as "a certain mystery associated with the arts."

Of course, the child, like a completed painting, is not simply an assemblage of parts. She is a whole, and in respecting this wholeness, the teacher knows that she will never be able to truly define her, put her into a category, or give her any label but her own name. Art is mysterious in this way as well. A critic may pigeonhole a playwright's body of work into a particular genre, and then the playwright writes a play in a completely different one. A song often has strains and themes that connect to music beyond its typical style.

While it is important to consider the child as a whole, it is also important to accept that she is in the process of growth and change. She is, in a way, her own work in progress. Indeed, many adults still feel this way about themselves. If one is to teach toward wholeness, it follows that one must be attentive to all the aspects of the child throughout their schooling. It is odd that schools have this notion that one needs to only teach academic subjects that engage the brain, mouth, and hands, when there is a whole body there that has the ability to move, to sing and clap, to paint with large brushstrokes, and to express feelings. To tell a work in progress that they can only develop their math and reading skills is like asking a musician to write a score without attending to volume or meter.

Teaching toward wholeness is a commitment by the teacher to view each child as a whole and to create a classroom environment that supports the many ways that children grow. It is a determination to have a relationship with each child, and a trust that this relationship will inform curriculum and pedagogy. It is a decision to allow children to make and create things, whether it is a painting, a story, a dance, a block building, a song, a construction, a play, a drawing, or a creation we cannot yet envision. Children are essentially makers, and even artists themselves. In fact, if one broadens the definition of

artist to one who makes things, I think we would all fall into that category in one way or another. Breaking through the notion that art is only for an elite, gifted group opens up the possibility that making things is a way for all children to learn, and teachers, administrators, and politicians can artfully create environments for this to occur. As educators, we need to acknowledge the living medium that we interact with daily, our students, and fight for schools that teach toward wholeness.

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# Helping Young People Establish Mentoring Connections

Laura Grace Weldon

**Mentors can help young people cultivate the qualities that lie dormant within them and discover the future direction of their lives.**

*Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them.*

(James Baldwin)

Sonia doesn't know who she might be today if not for people she considers mentors. In her earliest years she benefitted from informal mentoring relationships. She describes learning to make holiday foods with a grandmother she called Jaddati. Their time together taught Sonia to mix pastry dough with her fingers and how to recognize when food is done by its smell. It also taught her, from watching her highly opinionated grandmother, to speak up for herself. Sonia talks about a former neighbor who let her help as he worked on outdoor tasks. She recalls the utter satisfaction she experienced when his motorcycle started up after she'd assisted in the repair, a feeling as powerful as the sound was loud. And she reminisces about a babysitter whose confidence she envied and whose elegant long hair Sonia still copies today.

Sonia left these early mentors far behind after her mother divorced and moved away with her two daughters. Sonia and her older sister took on more chores including the care of the family dog, a young St. Bernard named Oscar. When the girls walked Oscar together, neighbors told them about a city council resolution to create a nearby dog park. When the proposal failed Sonia went door-to-door with these neighbors seeking petition signatures to put the resolution on a citywide ballot. It took over a year to get the measure to the voters and even longer for funds to be allocated. Sonia doesn't recall the names of these neighborhood mentors but their calm persistence made a lasting impression on her. She saw the value of collaboration each time she took Oscar to the new safely fenced dog park.

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Oscar motivated Sonia to pursue more specific mentoring. By the time the dog was four years old he was in poor health. The family couldn't afford further vet bills. So Sonia, age 14 at the time, reached out for guidance using the family computer. She registered on several online forums focused on canine health. There she found supportive people who explained concepts new to her such as biologically appropriate diets and responded to her posts with genuine concern. When Sonia needed more information, her mentors explained how to access academic journals through her library, helped her decipher terminology and showed her ways to apply research data to Oscar's recovery. Sonia kept her online correspondents up-to-date on the results of her efforts. Once Oscar's health improved she maintained a presence on the forums, participating in off-topic threads to converse about a range of subjects. She also helped other forum members with the knowledge she'd gained.

Sonia felt particularly close to several of her online mentors, including a retired veterinarian whose counsel she regularly sought. He let her know that he was impressed by her initiative. He encouraged her to build on her experience by working at an animal shelter or veterinary clinic, and offered to write a letter of recommendation. His letter emphasized her ability to research answers on her own and her dedication to solving any problem she encountered. Now 15 years old, Sonia was unable to find a job but she used his letter to get a volunteer position at a small wildlife rehabilitation center.

There she mostly cleaned cages and prepared food, but she benefitted from contact with a whole new range of mentors. She observed the thoughtful way adults made decisions and experienced profound pleasure each time she watched healed animals being released back to the wild. Most important to her was the way she felt accepted as a peer by men and women she admired. That acceptance, as she describes it, kept her spirits up even when her home life was difficult.

During the two and a half years Sonia volunteered at the wildlife rehabilitation center she became interested, again, in working with others on legislative changes to help animals. The director of the center began to rely on Sonia to look up information, both

scientific and political. The director as well as other volunteers at the center fully expected that Sonia would apply her interests to a career in research or veterinary work. Instead, Sonia is now a student at a large state university majoring in political science. She hopes to enter law with an eye on public service. She says that her mentors gave her more than life direction. They also helped her find the ability and idealism that lay dormant within her, qualities she now hopes to use for a greater good.

Sonia's eagerness to observe, emulate, and internalize examples of wisdom in action drew her to adults who helped her fine-tune the process of maturing. She was fortunate to have the freedom to help out a neighbor with repairs and later, participate in a local petition drive. As she grew older she was resourceful enough to seek out long-standing relationships with adults she admired. Natural mentor-mentee bonds typically develop gradually within a youth's social network, such as neighborhoods, churches, schools, extended families, clubs and other relationship-building associations. They are often built on shared interests or mutual activities in larger groups. Many such mentors become regular figures in the lives of young people and such longer-term relationships provide additional beneficial influence (DuBois & Silverthorn 2005).

However, many of today's youth may not have sufficient opportunities to engage in meaningful ways with potential mentors. Children and teens tend to be separated from ongoing engagement with a range of people in the community. This is partly for their perceived safety (Ungar 2007) due to exaggerated adult concerns like the risk of predatory strangers, fear of physical harm, and a lack of trust in youthful behavior.

But age segregation has a longer history. Transmission of culture from elders to youth has been supplanted by "...the institutionalization of teaching and learning, the removal of young people from familial and community-based learning, and the confinement of learning to the schoolhouse" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin 2007, 362). This has the unintended effect of constraining young people's active participation in the wider community and thereby limiting vital connections with the very people who might best guide them toward adulthood.

This leaves many of today's youth relating only to those adults whose main function is to nurture, entertain or educate them. While such relationships are of crucial importance, these limitations don't offer children and teens the chance to form close connections with and model themselves after adults whose life choices do not center around young people (Weldon 2010).

In addition, today's young people tend to experience time pressure. Their daily lives are often heavily scheduled (Crain 2004) in activities and programs designed by others. This leaves them few chances to wander next door to help the neighbor fix a computer or to walk in the park with an elder friend. Each natural mentoring opportunity lost deprives the child from tapping into a well of richly authentic experience.

According to young people in mentoring relationships (Beyene, Anglin, Sanchez, Ballou 2002) the importance of feeling accepted by adults they admire is a key to the success of that bond. But even more critical is experiencing the connection as a friendship. Their descriptions of successful mentoring relationships go well beyond receiving advice and instruction. Among many vital characteristics they highlight the importance of trust, communication, shared interests, open-mindedness, patience, approachability, and positive, non-judgmental attitudes. Interestingly, the concept that mentoring is beneficial to both mentor and mentee is increasingly noted. (Philip & Hendry 2000). This illuminates the reciprocal nature of these relationships. Adults as well as youth appreciate the insight and purpose to be found in the unique bonds of intergenerational friendship.

Studies (Sanchez, Esparza & Colon 2008) indicate that youth benefit significantly from consistent natural mentoring relationships. Their educational outcomes improve and their expectations of long-term success go up. A meta-analysis notes measurable positive effects on a broad range of public health measures for young people in long-term natural mentoring relationships (DuBois & Silverthorn 2005). Compared to youth who have not established these relationships, they are more likely to complete higher levels of education, work at least ten hours a week, and exhibit good mental health indicators as well as good physical health indicators (birth control

use, physical activity). They are less likely to experience problem behavior such as fighting, gang membership, and risk taking.

A more formal version of the mentoring relationship is often sought for today's youth. Some schools, religious institutions, and other organizations offer to link young people with adult mentors. These programs have their limitations, because the most effective mentoring connections are those based on close and enduring relationships (Rhodes & DuBois 2008).

### Helping Youth Find Out-of-School Mentors

But what about youth who want to be matched with a person in an interest area not covered by any school or organization? What about those youth who have no access to an institutional mentoring program? And what about those who prefer to establish an independent mentoring relationship? There are many ways that a motivated young person can find his or her own interest-based mentor, as Sonia did with great success.

The following information is useful for youth seeking independent mentors and the adults guiding them.

### Finding a Mentor by Choice

Sometimes fate and opportunity converge. The right mentor just seems to appear. This isn't unusual. When a young person has an abiding interest in a particular area, whether forensic science or vintage motorcycle restoration, he or she will get involved in that field in their own way. That may include reading magazines and books on the topic, joining special interest organizations, contributing to online forums, attending workshops or lectures, and doing projects that inspire them to seek out advice. Many of these activities put them in touch with adults who are active in the field.

But sometimes fate and opportunity need a little help, and it is useful to learn about some little known steps that one could take to find a good mentor. Such a search may require concerted effort, but the steps can be rewarding because all the while the pursuit is about one's own interests.

### Identify and Connect

*Identify resource people through active participation.* Attend lectures and special interest programs. Take

part in competitions, specialty summer camps, museum classes, fairs, rallies, and workshops open to all ages. Presenters there have already shown a willingness to be involved in educating the public when they lecture, judge competitions and lead programs. Even if youth are only briefly acquainted with these professionals as a competition participant or lecture attendee, each time they are, they should send these men or women a letter or email of appreciation. This can be as simple as "Thank you, the program was great." Make sure to mention one's interest in the same field.

*Identify resource people through organizational affiliation.* Chances are good that there are professional or networking associations in your area of interest. Consult such groups for information and outreach programs. Read newsletters and research put out by the organization. Join forums. Identify members who have been involved in area projects. Ask if there are local people willing to be interviewed about their research or activities. Again, if one takes part in an outreach program, conducts an interview, or reads an article by a professional, make sure to follow up by sending a letter, blog comment, or email of appreciation that also mentions an interest in the same field.

*Identify resource people through academia.* Look up faculty listings at nearby universities or research institutions. Check for names of those who have written books or articles, contributed to blogs or websites, or been recently interviewed. Do an Internet search to check out their bios, paying attention to scholarly and mainstream articles they have recently authored. Look those articles up to become more familiar with their work. Young people may need to go through a subscription database offered by the public library system. If, for example, a young person is hoping to assist a scientist in the lab, check out current articles to determine if their research is the type he or she would be interested in doing. To establish contact, write a note of appreciation about a recent article or lecture.

### **Extend the Connection**

Extend your learning. Continue to take these interests as far as possible in the field. Articulate questions too difficult to answer through one's own reading and investigation. These are perfect questions to

pose to the resource people previously contacted. Ask a question or two by mail, email, forum posting, or online contact form.

Intelligent, well-written questions from young people are likely to spark a response for several reasons. First, these experts are often excited about their own field and enjoy talking about it. Second, they are likely to be impressed by a motivated young person who independently is looking for greater expertise. And third, it's a time-honored tradition to pass along knowledge to young people. That's how humanity progresses.

If the question or questions go unanswered, pose them to another resource person. If an answer is received, respond right away with thanks. Stay in touch, letting this person know how his or her answer helped advance one's learning.

### **Ask**

Ask how to gain experience. This step may not be necessary for some young people. Connections made in the first two steps often naturally lead to helpful and interesting relationships. If not, it's time to write a short personal but carefully constructed letter identifying yourself, any background information that might be relevant, your efforts in the field and specific interests in this person's area of expertise. Make sure that it is clear that you are looking for experience.

Then ask and include a variety of options: shadowing at work; volunteering for a few hours a week; assisting with research or a project. Ask if mentorship is possible, and that your request be shared with others if your recipient is unable to consider your request at this time.

Young people should emphasize that they can be flexible to coordinate with a busy person's schedule. And of course, remember to offer friendly appreciation.

Seeking a mentor is an excellent way to reach, stretch, and unfold in the direction of one's future. The potential for synergy increases when young people connect with those who have experience and insight in an area of interest. Sometimes, as in Sonia's case, it's even transformative.

### **Note**

Portions of this material were excerpted from *Free Range Learning* (Hohm Press, 2010) by Laura Grace Weldon.

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# Educational Reform

## A Design Problem

Edward T. Clark

**Education, as it is currently structured, is incapable of preparing students to deal with the real issues that will impact their future.**

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on Americans the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.

Educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society. The goal must be to develop the talents of all to their fullest.... At the heart of such a society is the commitment to a set of values and to a system of education that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity, from early childhood through adulthood, learning more as the world itself changes. Such a society has as a basic foundation the idea that education is important not only because of what it contributes to one's career goals but also because of the value it adds to the general quality of one's life.

(National Commission [*A Nation at Risk*] 1983)

It is no secret that public education simply is not working in this country. In fact, if statistics are a valid indicator (as many as one-fourth of those who graduate from high school are not functionally literate), it hasn't been working for some time. It certainly isn't for lack of trying. Ever since the publication of *A Nation At Risk* in 1983, education has received a great deal of attention. However, in spite of many new and innovative programs such as Cooperative Learning, Whole Language and Outcome Based Education, in the words of Charles McDowell of PBS's *Washington Week in Review* each year on the anniversary of *A Nation at Risk*, "Nothing much has changed."

In 1993, the Education Commission of the States reported that fewer than 1% of the nation's schools have completed the process of restructuring, while

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less than 5% of the remainder had even embarked on the process. At that time, fully 95% of America's schools seemed locked in the status quo (Smith 1995). As we reach the end of the millennium, schools are little different from those observed by journalist Charles Silberman's (1970) more than a quarter of a century ago:

The public schools are the kind of institution one cannot really dislike until one gets to know them well. Because the adults take the schools so much for granted, they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are, how oppressive and petty are the rules by which they are governed, how intellectually sterile and aesthetically barren the atmosphere, what an appalling lack of civility obtains on the part of teachers and principals, what contempt they unconsciously display for children as children.

This has occurred not because of a lack of commitment on the part of teachers, most of whom are among the hardest working, most responsible, and lowest paid of professional workers in our society. Most are dedicated far beyond the call of duty. Why else would anyone deliberately choose a vocation which required that they supervise, monitor, and teach 25 to 30 restless children for six hours a day — kids who would often rather be anywhere else than in school! I have long believed that teachers have had a bum rap in our society.

If it's not for lack of innovative programs and it's not teachers, what is the problem? Businessman and corporate consultant Paul Hawken (1993) suggests that whenever we have systems that aren't achieving the ends we seek, we have a design problem. This means that the problems and dilemmas are the result of the way the system is designed and no amount of tinkering or "problem-solving" can correct the problem. Hierarchical systems, e.g., governments, corporations, schools, and the military, were designed to maintain the status quo. There is no way that these systems *as they are presently structured* can adapt to the rapid transitions and emerging crises that confront us. While these systems have served us well in the past, as Hawken points out, the only way to make them serve today's requirements is to change their

fundamental design. Unfortunately, as Alfie Kohn (1986) observes, there is an "entrenched reluctance of Americans to consider structural explanations for problems.... We prefer to hold individuals responsible for whatever happens." In our aversion to acknowledging the existence of structural problems we are like "the cartoon animals on Sunday morning TV who continue to run even when there is no longer any ground under their feet — at least until they look down. It is as if some combination of ignorance and momentum allows them to keep going."

In short, in typical problem-solving fashion, our approach to educational reform has been to apply Band-Aids to the most obvious symptoms while ignoring the more serious life-threatening condition. This is why the many exciting, innovative programs have had little substantive impact on what happens in our schools. Each of these programs reflects an attempt to treat a symptom, that is, to fix a particular piece of the problem. For example, Cooperative Learning seeks to transform the way classrooms are organized for teaching and learning by encouraging peer learning. Whole Language programs provide teachers with new insights as to how reading and writing are actually learned and experienced, while Outcome Based Education challenges teachers to pay more attention to the desired outcomes of educational practices. The difficulty is that teachers are attempting to cure one aspect of an unhealthy system and, because of the system's faulty structure, the program doesn't work and soon is abandoned. As a consequence, teachers have become tired and skeptical of any reform program because, even when they are taken seriously, they don't make that much difference in the long run.

### The Real Problem

This problem-solving strategy — attempting to cure the illness by treating the symptoms — is implicit in *A Nation at Risk* and is reflected in virtually every major report that has followed. Embedded in each report is the tacit assumption that substantive educational reform would follow once we changed the prescribed goals of education. For example, *A Nation at Risk* identified what was essentially a new and certainly appropriate mission for education — "learning how to learn" and a "commitment to life-

long learning." But the report's recommendations seemed to assume that the way to achieve this new mission was by more efficient application of traditional methodologies. In short, the message of *A Nation at Risk* was "Continue your current practice — only do it better," e.g., increase high school graduation requirements. Since 1983 other reports have echoed the same message. Although George Bush's *America 2000* did acknowledge the need to challenge some of the assumptions related to the physical structures of education — e.g., length of the school year and the configuration of the school day — it fell far short of calling for the kind of comprehensive restructuring that is necessary for substantive change. Specifically, *America 2000* left intact the basic conceptual framework of psychological and epistemological assumptions that have shaped education in America for most of its history.

To say that the problem facing educational reformers is structural is to suggest that the problem is so fundamental that no piecemeal strategy will be sufficient. Once a new educational mission is identified, it will be necessary to design a new structure based on a conceptual framework appropriate to the mission. For example, it should be clear to even the most naïve that the knowledge and skills needed for "learning how to learn" are radically different from those that are necessary to achieve education's traditional outcomes, e.g., good grades on standardized tests. And yet our national reports seem to think otherwise. While we would all agree with the need for "a Learning Society ... that affords all members the opportunity to stretch their minds to full capacity, from early childhood through adulthood..." few would argue that this expansive goal can be achieved in a system where, in the words of one 15-year-old, "schools are designed to teach you to take life sitting down. They prepare you to work in office buildings, to sit in rows or cubicles, to be on time, not to talk back, and to let somebody else grade you" (Keen 1991).

### Outdated Assumptions

Education will not change substantively as long as the underlying assumptions that have shaped educational theory and practice for most of this century remain unquestioned and unexamined by most educa-

tors. Based on what still goes on in one form or another in many classrooms, most teachers still believe that the essence of good teaching is the passing on of information from a teacher to a student who passively accepts, memorizes, and reproduces on worksheets and tests what the teacher deems to be important. In most classrooms, the model students are those who listen quietly, take appropriate notes, and feed back the expected answer when asked by the teacher. This was brought home to me recently when I presented a demonstration class to a group of fifth grade students. My purpose was to demonstrate to the teachers who were observing how provocative questions might trigger creative and imaginative thinking. In the context of an environmental focus, I asked a series of open-ended, metaphorical questions like, "How is the Earth like a washing machine? a suitcase? a book?" During the discussion that followed the presentation, the teacher in whose class I had conducted the demonstration remarked, "What struck me was that the children who responded to your questions were not the same ones who always respond to my questions." I wasn't surprised but wondered if she had really gotten the point.

This suggests that in spite of the rhetoric of national reports and the thousands of new mission statements that these reports triggered, there is a profound disconnect in most of our schools between what organizational theorist Chris Argyris calls "espoused theories" and "theories-in-use."

In education, as in other arenas in our culture, our "theories-in-use" are so ingrained that they are seldom examined, precisely because they "remain unconscious and therefore uncritical, concepts ... which we take for granted without realizing that we do" (Osborne 1970).

When one examines the assumptions that drive education — not what educators profess to believe (their "espoused theories"), but what actually goes on in most classrooms (their "theories-in-use") — it is clear where the difficulty lies. These tacit assumptions cover the entire spectrum of educational practice. They include assumptions about human nature and human potential, assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the way knowledge is acquired, assumptions about intelligence, thinking and learning, and, congruent with these, cultural assumptions

about the purposes and goals of education. Together these assumptions make up our mental models. These mental constructs reflect the shared world-view that helps us make sense of the world and thus determine our actions. Scott Peck (1987) refers to these mental models as “rules of the game” and points out that “it is not impractical to consider changing the rules of the game when the game is killing you.”

If there is to be substantive educational reform, it must begin with an exploration of these fundamental assumptions. As Chet Bowers (1993) points out, it is necessary to acknowledge that the old rules are no longer effective.

When traditional practices and beliefs are made explicit, a period of conceptual openness is created that allows for new definitions and relationships to be established. This process involves naming old practices and beliefs in new ways, and then establishing a basis of authority for the newly constituted way of thinking. By this process traditions are modified, renewed, and in some instances, totally discarded.

In short, the first step in any change process is to become aware of what has been taken for granted for so long. This process, which Charles Tart (1987) calls “waking up,” is at times difficult, if not impossible, because it is hard for us to even conceptualize any alternative. An examination of these assumptions will make my point clear.

Joseph Chilton Pearce (1980) identifies what may be the most pernicious of all these assumptions. He writes, “We have a cultural notion that if children were not engineered, if we did not manipulate them, they would grow up as beasts in the field.” While most parents and teachers would react with discomfort to such a statement, when we consider what goes on in school — and, not so incidentally, in many homes — the truth of his statement is obvious.

Closely akin to and emerging from this very fundamental assumption about human nature are others which, though seldom verbalized are reflected in what actually happens in many, probably most, classrooms. For example, the assumptions that

- Children won’t learn unless you make them.

- Children can’t be trusted to learn on their own.
- Children cannot make intelligent decisions related to their education.
- Only some children are educable.
- All children learn the same way and have similar rates of learning.
- Intelligence is a limited, fixed amount that can be accurately measured with a mathematical formula.
- Intelligence can be defined and measured exclusively in terms of mathematical and verbal skills.
- The ability to remember and recall is a valid measure of intelligence and a good predictor of success.
- Learning is the retention of facts.
- Learning efficiency equals learning effectiveness.
- Teachers know best what is good for children to learn.
- The only way of knowing, i.e., acquiring knowledge, is through our physical senses.
- Each body of knowledge is a distinct and separate “subject” composed of objective, undeniable facts that can be transmitted by teachers talking to students.

Of course, the great irony is that few, if any, educators profess belief in these. Once while I was presenting this list to a large audience of high school teachers, I was interrupted by an angry voice that literally shouted at me: “You don’t think any of *us* believe those, do you?” While educators may indeed profess that they do not accept these assumptions, it is clear to anyone who observes what goes on in schools today that they continue to shape current educational practice.

One thing can be said about these assumptions. They are internally consistent. This is because each reflects a depersonalized, antihuman, empirical perspective that has its roots deep in Western culture and has been a major factor in our perception and

treatment of children since the founding of our nation. Even today, in spite of the insights of modern psychology, the viewpoint that “children are little animals” or “children must be seen and not heard” is used by many well-meaning parents to justify harsh and abusive discipline.

### The Technological Worldview

This view of human nature is based on an even more fundamental assumption about the nature of reality — an ontological assumption that philosophers call a first principle. A survey of Western intellectual history from Socrates to the present reveals a long history of what today are called paradigm shifts — shifts in the fundamental assumptions, first principles, and subsequent mental models that shape the thinking and action of a culture, i.e., its worldview. Tarnas (1991) points out that beginning in the sixteenth century with the work of Copernicus and Galileo, “a new mental world” was forged

in which old patterns of thinking, traditional prejudices, subjective distortions, verbal confusions, and general intellectual blindness would be overcome by a new (empirical and rational) method of acquiring knowledge.

During the next century, based on the work of Newton, Descartes, Bacon, and Darwin, a radically new view of the universe and man’s place in it gradually emerged. This new paradigm established a new first principle — namely that “the universe was an impersonal phenomenon, governed by regular natural laws, and understandable in exclusively physical and mathematical terms.” Newton’s metaphor for the universe — a clock — provided a mental model that gave shape to this impersonal, mechanistic worldview, in which “the structure and movement of nature was an entirely secular phenomenon the result of an amoral, random, and brutal struggle for survival” (Tarnas 1991). For sake of clarity, I will refer to this perspective as the *technological worldview*. One of the significant consequences of this worldview is that a conceptual split between man and nature was created, which continues even today. In short, nature became the enemy to be conquered.

Closely associated with the technological worldview is the scientific method. Empirical, rational, an-

alytical, atomistic, and linear, this powerful methodology soon became the single acceptable criterion for acquiring knowledge and defining reality. Based on this pragmatic approach, scientists and, in time, lay persons as well, came to assume that reality actually was the way science has described it: a set of irreducible building blocks each of which could be characterized by its precise definition and empirical description. In short, the map, i.e., the scientific method, became identified with the territory, i.e., the world it sought to define and describe. In the words of biophysicist Beverly Rubik (1994), “What began as a method of inquiry was, in time, elevated to an ontology and an epistemology.” Acknowledging the impact of this confusion on our entire culture, physicist Frank Tipler suggests that we have become “ontological reductionists.” It is as though the world was a fragmented and random collection of jigsaw puzzle pieces. In order to survive, each of us strives to gather together as many pieces as possible. I think of this as an *assumption of separateness*. The mindset based on this assumption has shaped and dominated education during most of the last century and is still the most prevalent perspective in schools today where getting an education is like trying to put together an ever-expanding jigsaw puzzle. Students spend years collecting and sorting pieces of the puzzle. But without some picture to aid their understanding, the pieces they have collected are essentially meaningless and, therefore, useless.

In order to understand the technological worldview, it is necessary to place it in historical perspective. This radically new way of thinking about and understanding our world played a central role in leading Western civilization on the long journey from the Middle Ages into the modern era. Because of its pragmatic power, humans no longer had to depend on traditional authority to tell them what to believe. With the Renaissance and the subsequent Scientific Revolution, people discovered the intellectual tools to acquire for themselves knowledge based on natural, rather than supernatural, explanations for universal processes. In time, “verifiable facts and theories tested and discussed among equals replaced dogmatic revelation hierarchically imposed by an institutional Church” (Tarnas 1991).

American Education has always reflected the technological worldview with its conceptual framework rooted in Newtonian-Cartesian science. Faced with challenges of geographic and industrial expansion, public education was designed with two goals in mind: to Americanize the immigrants who flocked to our shores and to provide industry with a skilled workforce. What better way to train children to sit in rows or cubicles, to be on time, not to talk back, and to let somebody else grade you than to design schools that resembled the factories in which those children would someday work. And, of course, it was a highly successful model. However, as organizational theorist Stan Davis (1979) argues, "Just as farms were not appropriate models for factories, neither are factories appropriate models for information age organizations." In short, the old models have outlived their usefulness. The time has come to design new models that are relevant to the needs of the twenty-first rather than the nineteenth century.

### **The Educational Needs of the Twenty-First Century**

An important step in designing new educational models is to identify the desired outcomes — that is, the knowledge and skills that today's students will need to succeed in the next century. To determine exactly what those skills might be requires a rigorous analysis of the real world — a world that has changed dramatically in the last 50 years. Indeed, these changes have been so profound that although many in our society are still pursuing the post-World War II American Dream, there now appears to be a fundamental disconnect between the assumptions upon which that dream was based and the harsh realities that today's high school and college graduates face. While we should be preparing students for life in the twenty-first century, we are actually educating them to live in the "good old days" of the mid-twentieth century. This incongruence between the dream and the reality has resulted in a series of anomalies that are harbingers of even more potentially devastating disconnects to come. The reality is that:

- There is no longer a guaranteed job waiting for every high school or college graduate. An increasing number of available jobs are low-pay-

ing positions for which many graduates are overqualified.

- An increasing number of better-paying jobs, e.g., Robert Reich's (1992) "symbolic analysts," require skills that aren't learned by most students in most schools.
- There is no longer the promise of a better standard of living for each succeeding generation. Indeed, the reverse is more often the case.
- Our institutions are either not working, e.g., government, or are changing rapidly as traditional organizational structures and management strategies become increasingly counterproductive.
- There is no longer a consensus on the fundamental values that shape our national character and guide our personal lives. Issues that seemed clear and unambiguous for most of our parents now threaten the very fabric of our society.
- There seems to be a loss of vision and lack of will on the part of ordinary citizens. As people feel ever more powerless, individually and collectively we seem to have become a nation of victims who have little, if any, apparent control over our lives.

The truth, often hidden under layers of political rhetoric, is that everything is coming unglued. The assumptions that have held our world together for the last 50 years — assumptions that every American could take for granted — are no longer valid. Violence, crime, drug abuse, child abuse, famine, and war are merely symptoms of a far more fundamental incongruity between the dream and the reality.

### **The Educational Challenges of Living in a Global Village**

But there is more. Although many still wish to define our "national interest" in narrow, parochial, self-serving terms, the reality is otherwise. As *A Nation at Risk* observed, "The world is indeed one global village." And, whether we want to acknowledge it or not, the problems and issues we face at

the national level are reflected globally where future generations will be confronted with profound and universal dilemmas that, at the present time, seem to be intransigent. These dilemmas, and their relevance to the goals of education, can no longer be ignored.

### **Destruction of the Planetary Ecological Systems**

Of all the dilemmas this is the most threatening precisely because if the planet's ecological systems break down, no one can survive. Although at a national level most people would accept this fact, we continue to take our natural world for granted, in spite of all the warning signals. And yet these planetary life support systems are as fragile and as essential to human survival as the air tanks carried on the backs of scuba divers. When they stop functioning survival is impossible.

### **Population Growth and Limited Resources/Resource Depletion**

The potential breakdown of ecological systems is exacerbated by human population growth and the competition for increasingly scarce resources. Today, world population is growing exponentially while the natural resources on which we humans are dependent are at best stable, but more often diminishing at alarming rates — usually as the consequence of applied technology that is the hallmark of Western culture.

### **The Economic Imparity Between the "Haves" and the "Have-Nots"**

Lester Brown and his colleagues at Worldwatch Institute have concluded that of all the principal driving forces that have contributed directly to the excessive pressures on the earth's natural systems, the growing inequality in income between rich and poor stands out in sharpest relief. "This chasm of inequity ... fosters over-consumption at the top of the ladder and persistent poverty at the bottom."

### **The Vulnerability of Technological Systems**

Western nations are increasingly saddled with the fiscal nightmare of trying to maintain their highly sophisticated technological infrastructures. For example, it has been estimated it will cost more than the present three trillion dollar national debt *just to restore to maintenance level* our highways, bridges, pub-

lic buildings, power lines, and public transportation systems. In addition, our centralized national infrastructures are highly vulnerable to both terrorist attacks and natural disasters. Ironically, in spite of a hundred years of channeling, dredging, damming, and diking by the Army Corps of Engineers, in a few short weeks the Mississippi River effectively demonstrated the limitations of human hubris.

### **Genocide/Arms Race/Nuclear War**

Lester Brown (1994) notes that "during 40 years of East-West confrontation, government planners seemed prepared for every possible scenario and braced for every contingency save one: the end of the cold war." One consequence is that the arms race goes on unabated. While the growth of nuclear weapons has lessened considerably, now small nations and often their racial or ethnic minorities attempt to emulate large nations by arming themselves to the teeth. Within our own country neighbors and even entire neighborhoods are trapped in their own arms races.

Genocide neither began nor ended with the Holocaust. Since World War II, it has continued virtually unabated in Cambodia and is evident in former Yugoslavia and in the Rwandan Civil War where entire tribes were literally threatened with extinction. Roger Winter (1994), director of the U.S. Committee for Refugees writes, "Go deep inside Rwanda today and you will not find gas chambers or massive crematoria. But you will find genocide eerily reminiscent of the Final Solution attempted 50 years ago."

### **The Failure of Political Action at a Global Level**

Ultimately, the ability to address the dilemmas identified above is dependent upon the willingness of nations — reflecting the intention and commitment of their citizens — to both individually and collectively take positive and aggressive corrective action. Yet, in face of these overarching issues, the political capacities of governmental agencies seems trapped in gridlock.

### **The Breakdown of Community**

Shaped by the atomistic perspective of the Scientific Revolution, our modern society operates on the assumption that the individual is the fundamental social unit — the "basic building block" — of hu-

man society. The reality is quite different. Until quite recently in Western culture, it was recognized that the community — the neighborhood, extended family, clan, or tribe — provided the crucial social cohesion that is so necessary for an individual's physical protection, social well-being, and emotional health.

The deterioration of community that has taken place in our own country during the last 50 years, is now taking place worldwide. As a result of the pervasive economic imperialism of the West, community is being replaced by a universal market that is very expensive in human terms. "The unification of the market goes hand in hand with the fragmentation of culture" (Lasch 1955).

### **The Lack of Vision and the Loss of Will by Ordinary Citizens**

One byproduct of the loss of community has been the diminution of personal power. Yet, until ordinary citizens decide that they can make a difference, neither nations nor global organizations like the United Nations can act decisively to address the crises that humanity faces. As they are now organized, political and economic systems are hierarchial and serve primarily the interests of those who have a stake in maintaining the status quo. Even in democracies, elections reflect little more than a change in the faces of those in power.

### **Conclusion**

Education, as it is presently structured, is simply not capable of preparing students to face the real issues that will have most impact on their futures, *primarily because outdated assumptions that have driven educational theory and practice for most of the twentieth century are no longer relevant to the real world.* Organizational consultant Joel Barker (1990) states the case succinctly: "The solutions to the future lie outside the boundaries of our present assumptions about the way we do things."

This suggests that if our children and grandchildren are to have any hope of living in a better, safer, happier world, their education must be based on a different set of assumptions — assumptions that are appropriate to the realities of the world as it is today. The rest of this book is designed to aid in this task.

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# Auroville School and Holistic Education

Kalpana Vengopal and Priya Kumari

**The Auroville School is the living embodiment of Sri Aurobindo's vision of an integral education that incorporates all aspects of being human.**

Auroville (City of Dawn), an “experimental” township in southern India dedicated to human unity and based on the vision of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother [see inset], has created an education program designed to release constraints on imagination, creativity, and growth, and to enable young children and their teachers to pursue their highest potential.

True education, according to Sri Aurobindo, is integral. It includes all the aspects of the human being: physical, vital, mental, psychic, and spiritual. It is an education designed to foster the evolution of the individual, the nation, and humanity. Sri Aurobindo's perspective on education and human development calls for a shift from the current educational paradigm to one where the curriculum is individualized and linked to the life experiences of students. It seeks a new approach to schooling and considers different ways to approach curriculum planning, teaching, and the role of teacher and the learner in the learning and evaluation processes. It is based on man's eternal aspiration for perfection and progress. In short, it is education of the whole man and for whole life (Partho 2007).

## Learning Environment

The schools of Auroville are nestled in natural settings with wide open green spaces and groves of trees. The buildings are simple open structures, aesthetically faced with burnt brick, bamboo, and



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### Sri Aurobindo and The Mother

Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) was born in Calcutta and received his early education at Darjeeling. Later was sent to England to pursue his education along with his brothers. On his return to India, he became a prominent figure in India's struggle for independence.

He later founded an ashram at Pondicherry, which became famous as "Auroville", "The International Village." There he became an important philosopher, yogi, and teacher and developed Integral Yoga, the yoga of the whole being which forms the basis for Integral Education, education for the whole man and for the whole of life.

He was later joined by Adept Mirra Alfassa (The Mother). It was under her initiative that schools based on the philosophy of Integral Education were established in Auroville. She also took care of all residents of the ashram and became known simply as "The Mother."

red tiles. Most of the seats are either stone benches or little bamboo seats made by students. The learning environment purposely has meaningful connections to the world of nature. The physical design of the school and workrooms brings nature indoors and invites students into the surrounding ecosystem. Most of the time children work in groups outdoors in the shade and move indoors only when necessary.

On one side of the school is a large pond and on the other, agricultural, horticultural, and medicinal farms. There are rooms for clay modeling, painting, music, library, yoga, and preparing and enjoying food, as well as laboratories for computers and other subjects.

There are no electric lights or fans in the school. Solar energy used to power the water pump and for cooking. Electricity is used only in the laboratories. One rarely finds manufactured toys in Auroville classrooms; instead, students bring seashells, rocks, pebbles, tree branches and bark, pieces of wood, dried flowers and leaves, and clay to life with their imaginations. Large open spaces are used for play and games. Children play both indigenous and modern sports. There is no separate room for the head teacher or other teachers except a central office.

The children, head teacher, and teachers work together to create plans for school celebrations, field trips, community work, and even weekly menus. The school grounds are maintained by the children and their teachers. Parents are invited to participate in the life of the school as volunteers. The school is also open to the members of the entire community,

many of whom share their experiences and expertise with the children.

At Auroville there is a genuine sense of community among students, teachers, and parents. Students and adults care about each other and work toward mutual goals. Communication is open and honest and differences between people are respected and appreciated. Auroville provides a learning environment that offers periods of respite from constant noise, competitive materialism, and distraction by providing time and space for centering activities like nature walks, solitude, and meditation.

The classrooms are small with 15 to 18 mixed-ability and mixed-age students. Children work in groups with the teacher and volunteers and are free to move from one group to another. There is flexibility in terms of how the classes are structured so that it is possible for a child to change classes without regard for the school calendar.

There is no punishment of any kind or are any restrictions imposed on children, who are expected to be self-disciplined. Teachers use different strategies to channel children's restlessness and inattentiveness, often by assigning responsibility to them.

### Learner and Learning

According to Sri Aurobindo, the learner's mind has to be consulted in its own growth. He believed that the idea of hammering the child into a shape designed by the parent or teacher is both barbarous and ignorant. The sovereignty of the child is supreme. At Auroville children work in groups on themes that cut across disciplines. The teacher observes the group's workings and intervenes only occasionally to direct and guide. Much of the learning is experiential and collaborative. Children freely express themselves, question, agree, and dissent. There are no instructions about what is right, wrong, correct, or incorrect. The teacher encourages each group to probe the effects of its decisions and actions, and reflect on the students' past experiences, connecting them to the present and the challenges and benefits that may lie ahead.

Children use different media to express themselves: essays, poetry, songs, skits, paintings, models, chart, or simple experiments. Some children work on their own while others help, but the whole

group reflects on and explores the meaning of what they have learned.

Learning at Auroville is not reduced to academic memorizing, linear thinking, or materialistic training. Instead, learning is related to the total awareness and experience of the child. It is about making meaning by discovering and experiencing. The children express themselves freely through various media — clay and sand; paints and colors; leaves, trees and flowers; stories and poems; sounds and music; movement, dance and theatre — while experiencing awe and wonder at creation and the universe, at beauty and harmony, and the quietitude and rhythm within, and transcendence.

Each child maintains a reflective diary, “Know Myself,” which reveals that everyone is a constellation of experiences, feelings, ideas, dreams, fears, and hopes. Auroville teachers believe that the reflective diaries are fundamental to healthy self-respect and self-esteem. The child is able to realize that he/she is not only a body and a mind, but also a soul within a human frame that aspires to know its real nature.

Children learn to inquire about processes, events, concepts, and effects. They learn to care about how their actions affect others and the universe at large. They learn communally and experience connectedness. They learn about relationships as they share joys and sorrows, and discover that relationships are their greatest source of happiness, misery, and strength. They learn emotional literacy as they work collaboratively to be patient and accommodating, and when they agree to disagree and ventilate positively. They learn aesthetics as they appreciate beauty and harmony in the universe and their own creations. They learn resilience as they face challenges and difficulties.

### Curriculum

The Auroville curriculum is based on the philosophy of Integral Education of Sri Aurobindo and Mother, whose principal aim is the creation of an integrated personality. The curriculum is designed to foster harmony of body, mind, and soul through the growth and evolution of the vital mental, psychic, and spiritual aspects of personality.

The curriculum is not rigid but emerges as a product of the interaction between the learner and the teacher. There are no textbooks and no fixed timetables or schedules. Each teacher creates a weekly workplan and maintains a work diary. The curriculum provides for interesting activities and relies heavily on innovation. Activities include clay modeling, painting, gardening, cycling, music, literature, theatre, nature walks, sky watching, silent sitting, sports and games, yoga and meditation, reflective diary writing, field trips, and community work. The curriculum also offers vocational courses in carpentry, horticulture, agriculture, tailoring, embroidery, and herbal medicine. Children are introduced to the world of work at a very early age. They learn to find joy in being creative and productive. Their products are put on sale in the Auroville exhibitions and fairs and are greatly sought after by the community and visitors to the school.

Evaluation at Auroville is aimed at self-knowledge and self-direction. It is based on individualized goals established by the child and the teacher. There are no grades, marks, honors, or other trappings of competitive learning. The teacher and the child evaluate the student’s progress together and then plan the future course of learning.

The curriculum allows learners to actively construct their own knowledge by connecting new ideas to what they already know. Active engagement involves inquiry, exploration, questioning, debates, application, experimentation, and reflection that lead to new ideas and new meaning. It deemphasizes the mechanical retrieval of information from textbooks and the notion that information is more important than knowledge. Collaborative learning provides opportunities for negotiation about meaning, sharing multiple views, and changing the internal representation of the external reality. Each learner individually and socially constructs meaning and knowledge.

The curriculum provides for a multidisciplinary approach. Teaching and learning are thematic and based on the assumption that knowledge cannot be compartmentalized into separate subjects. This approach is used for the primary classes and to a certain extent in the upper grades. It insures that the child’s way of viewing the world becomes the start-

ing point of knowledge. Learning is viewed as a whole and is connected through multiple layers rather than closed disciplines.

Sri Aurobindo and Mother have stressed that spiritual education is necessary for the development of an integrated personality. The curriculum provides for centering processes like the “self-journey” practiced in the morning for about half an hour. Children sit quietly anywhere in the open space of the school. Later, they enter their experiences in a reflective diary. Children say they experience calm and silence; they dream, listen to the sounds in nature, watch nature closely, and feel one with everything around them. This provides space and time for every child to discover the self within and aspire for the ultimate.

The curriculum emphasizes the synthesis of science and spirituality, cultures, all beings, and the universe. Children learn that they are not only individuals but that they are interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated to everyone and everything in the cosmos and that all their actions have a ripple effect on everything around them.

The education at Auroville addresses the development of the individual in the context of the community, the nation, and all humanity. The schools are deeply embedded in the local community and the children participate actively in the development activities in the community like awareness campaigns, trading community goods at the fairs and exhibitions, and offering services to the sick and aged during disasters and crises.

The Auroville curriculum emerges from the interaction between the teacher, the child, and the world. For most part of it, the child determines what he or she wants to learn. The child is engaged in the teaching-learning process and both the teacher and the child become responsible for it.

### Tools and Strategies for Teaching

Auroville’s chief principle of learning is based on *svabhava*, one’s own nature. “The child by itself must be induced to expand in accordance with its own nature. To force the child to abandon its *dharma* (duty) is to do it permanent harm, mutilate its growth, and deface its perfection” (Sri Aurobindo 1974). All strategies of teaching are designed to allow every soul to draw out its best. The teachers firmly believe that no

single strategy can be used in every situation because each child is different and has its own individuality and personality with a unique blend, however imperfect, of perfection and strength. Teachers are innovative and creative in employing different strategies and approaches, such as experiential learning, project work using multi-disciplinary approaches, creative work through various media, groupwork with mixed-ability and mixed-age groups, individualized educational planning, and centering processes.

Sri Aurobindo (2003) explained that “knowledge is already dormant within the child and so the teacher does not impart knowledge.” Rather, the teacher respects the child and accepts the knowledge which each one brings to the class. Learning grows from the events and interpersonal dynamics that are a part of every child’s life.

The Mother (2003) believed that children should be treated as individuals in the process of learning. Teachers recognize that all children do not learn at the same speed and that no one consistently learns at the same speed all the time. Each child is allowed to discover its own rate of learning.

Children experience for themselves and create their own meaning rather than passively receive it from others. Learning is experiential; it requires patience and persistence by the pupil. As Sen (1961) observes, no education can be effective if it is not rooted in the enthusiasm of the student’s own quest.

Children are inspired by bright visions of the world through stories, plays, poetry, drawing, painting, clay modeling, scientific experimentation, music, dance, and gardening. They are free to pursue personal interests and passions through creative efforts and are encouraged to wonder about deeper questions, about the meaning of life, creation, and beauty.

### Auroville Teachers

Auroville teachers are simple, unassuming, and approachable. They bubble with enthusiasm and energy and lead lives close to nature, responding to its beauty. It is this responsiveness to life that inspires children.

Teachers don’t scold nor punish; they seem to know every child as individuals as they eat, drink,

laugh, cry, and live with them. The children address them by their given names and there is no feeling of hierarchy in their relationship. Teachers are known for their patience and gentleness in interacting with children at the school and children find them easily approachable and are able to confide things that they cannot with their parents. In short, they are friends.

During groupwork teachers join in as group members. They are innovative and creative and encourage children to be the same. They allow children to be different and think for themselves as they learn. They find it challenging, yet interesting, to creatively facilitate each child's learning. Their relationship with children extends well beyond the school day while traveling to and from school, in the marketplace and in the local community.

They believe in the sovereignty of the child and that the child's unique nature, its *svabhava*, should be fostered. By accommodating differences and refusing to label children as learning disabled or hyperactive, teachers help reveal the unique gifts contained within each child's spirit.

The Auroville teacher is seen less as a person of authority who leads and controls but as a friend, a mentor, a facilitator, and an experienced traveling companion. Nonetheless, teacher direction and supervision are required in order to channel the dynamics of student freedom. The teacher's role is active involvement in the preparation of rich supportive learning environments for effective facilitation of growth through learning. The Auroville educator is directly involved in the organization and expansion of the curriculum and the design of learning experiences to facilitate learning and accomplish learner-set goals. Thus, the teacher is a facilitator of learning.

### Summary

Auroville is a living example of the type of school envisioned by Ron Miller (2003)

When we look beneath the surface, the everyday practices, of various kinds of alternative schools, we find a common vision of the human being, a sense of awe and reverence for the creative spirit that animates the unfolding of a human personality. When education begins with this reverence, with this respect for the individ-

ual personhood of every learner, it cannot be standardized. It cannot be managed in undemocratic, authoritarian ways. It does not become obsessed with measuring "outcomes" or bureaucratically mandating what every child must "know and be able to do."

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# Teaching for Personal And Spiritual Growth

Annie Simpson

**Our core values and beliefs are reflected in what we teach and how we relate to our students.**

Teaching is a spiritual activity. It is both a direct reflection of who we are, and a way to uncover who we are. Inspired teaching involves sharing and generating passion, stimulating wonder, and expanding students' awareness and sense of possibility for themselves, their lives, and the world. The purpose of this article is to encourage teachers to explore how both the content and the process of their teaching are a mirror into their own deepest values and personal spirituality.

Holistic education literature promotes teaching and curriculum that engages the whole person: mind, body, emotions (Miller 2006, Macy 1998, Palmer 1993). Our overemphasis on the intellect at the expense of emotional and spiritual development has compromised humanity and the health of the planet. My teaching aspires to foster self-awareness and emotional intelligence as well as intellectual growth. I offer many opportunities for students to reflect on themselves, notice and engage their feelings, and explore their assumptions about self and others.

Throughout my seven years as a post-secondary educator I have been motivated to support students to become more self-aware. With a longstanding interest in psychology and personal actualization, I teach with the hope that I can support students to live in courageous alignment with their deepest values. As coordinator of a leadership program in the Faculty of Engineering at the University of Toronto, I work in a culture where emphasis on logic and rationality is exceedingly high. I have always valued subjective truth as much as objective fact and believe that emotions are the gateway to our inner lives. We need to know how we feel before we can uncover the beliefs, interpretations, and assumptions that create the feeling. In the context of a leadership program

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this self-awareness is supremely important. Effective leadership requires the ability to work with others and to respect diverse approaches and viewpoints, which requires first that we know ourselves, our strengths, our limitations, and our sensitivities.

Whatever the content of our teaching, we are consciously or unconsciously expressing our core beliefs. As Parker Palmer writes, "teaching like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse." It is important for teachers to become aware of the assumptions and values that inform our behavior. The opportunity for this realization lies in the teaching itself.

If someone had asked me five or ten years ago to articulate how my core values were expressed through teaching, I likely would have spoken of my subject matter, which includes conflict resolution, group facilitation, team development, and citizenship. Now, however, I can tell you about the process through which my values are expressed and enlivened. It is apparent to me that teaching and learning are reciprocal processes. The teacher and the learner foster each other's growth. As we teach we can uncover the values that inform our thinking and our feeling. As a way to illustrate how my values are expressed both through the content and process of my teaching I would like to share four teaching moments. Each of these vignettes is chosen to reflect a theme which is at the heart of my personal spirituality. I encourage my readers to reflect on the moments (whether teaching or otherwise) that reveal *your* most deeply held values.

### **Cultivating Courage ~ Jason**

I led a five-week highly experiential certificate program called Leading from the Inside Out. The process of designing the curriculum was an opportunity to incorporate some of my favorite subjects and to craft an experience that would be intimate, challenging, and meaningful. Throughout the five sessions we explored paradigms of power (power-over vs. power-within), the Jungian concept of the shadow, personal values and vision, empathy, and risk-taking. Throughout the series students participated in theater-based activities inspired by the work of Augusto Boal (2000). One of the goals of the curriculum was to give students opportunities to

take risks and to experience being pushed beyond their comfort zone. Leadership takes courage and "comfort with discomfort" is an important competency to practice. In order to support risk-taking, significant time was directed towards creating a safe group environment. Students were given opportunities to share themselves, be seen in their authenticity, reflect on their risks of self-expression, and celebrate the courage exercised. During the fourth session I led students through a guided visualization where they met their future selves. Their future selves were ten years older, radiantly healthy, and happy with their life choices. After the visualization students engaged in reflective writing and created a vision piece (such as a collage, a painting, or a poem) to represent their future selves. On the final session each of the thirty students stood up and spoke about their future. Because the students had begun to feel safe within the group and had been challenged to work with each other throughout the program in ways that promoted intimacy, truth-speaking, and risk, the speeches were incredibly powerful.

Jason had a deep fear of public speaking. To share his vision and speak from his heart was frightening for him. I encouraged him to feel the fear and do it anyway. Jason turned out to be one of the most powerful speakers that night. He made everyone laugh hysterically with his sincerity. I received an email from Jason a few days later saying what a valuable experience the program had been and how grateful he was that I supported him to push through his fear.

I believe that courage is a requirement for a life of integrity. We must be brave and practice leaning into discomfort. The rewards are immense. Practicing and encouraging courage is at the root of my spirituality and teaching. I often remember that the word *courage* comes from the French word *coeur* which means heart. To be courageous is to live with heart.

### **Softening and Opening to Compassion ~ Shahed**

I also taught a workshop to forty engineering students on emotional intelligence and conflict. I shared a model, developed by Anima Leadership, Inc., that explained how when we are in conflict we tend to go either into fight or flight mode. I drew a continuum on the board and on the fight side I spoke about the archetype of the Warrior. On the flight side I dis-

cussed the archetype of the Nurturer. I explained that as leaders, students will be called to respond to a variety of challenging situations and that it is important to identify their default response to conflict in order to recognize when it's helpful and when it isn't. I explained that if we always respond in the same way, we are not acting as intelligently as we could be. I discussed, as Anima Leadership, Inc. teaches, that both the Warrior and the Nurturer have empowered and disempowered versions. The empowered Warrior is direct, advocates well, can organize others, and sets clear boundaries. The disempowered Warrior can be bossy, self-centered, and unkind. The empowered Nurturer listens well, creates consensus, collaborates and synergizes, while the disempowered Nurturer either lacks assertiveness or denies his own needs in order to maintain harmony.

Towards the end of the session I asked students to reflect on what holds them back from responding in their atypical way. The Nurturers expressed fear that if they acted like Warriors they would not be liked, and would be perceived as bossy. When I asked the Warriors what made it difficult for them to respond as Nurturers, Shahed said that he didn't want to deal with others' emotions — when working in a group or team he wanted to get the job done and not engage with people's feelings. "Other people's feelings were for *them* to address." I found this to be a very interesting conversation.

I did my best at the time to encourage Shahed and the other Warriors to question their response. Engineers are known to be quite task-oriented and not overly attentive to group process. While the task of any group is important, so is the process. I couldn't help but wonder whether the students who saw others' emotions as an imposition felt similarly about their own. I posed this question at the end of the session which led to a highly engaging discussion.

To me this story reflects the importance of compassion. The workshop was meant to encourage students to reflect on their personal reaction patterns, see the positives in both responses, and expand their ability to respond appropriately to a variety of situations. While I understood the perspective of Warrior-types who wanted to focus on the task, it felt important to question their lack of tolerance for feel-

ings. I hope that this session encouraged some softening of the heart and mind.

### **"Love can Bridge the Sense of Otherness" ~ Keisha**

Keisha was a highly politicized black woman in her thirties. She was a participant in a day-long session on group facilitation that I offered with a friend. A major focus of the session was self-awareness and becoming mindful of personal triggers (experiences that evoke emotions out of proportion to the situation) so that we can be fully present as facilitators and do our best work. In a group discussion Keisha shared that one of her triggers was people who smile when they are angry. She felt mistrustful of people whose physical gestures did not align with their true feelings. Shortly after sharing this, due to an uneven number of participants, I partnered with Keisha in an experience of deep listening. The instruction was to tell each other about a challenging experience that still carried a charge for us and for the other person to notice their breath and be as present to the teller as they could be. I shared an experience of frustration and disappointment that I had with a co-worker. Although I had perceived a strong protective barrier around Keisha since the morning began, I felt that by sharing our personal stories some trust had been built between us.

When we came back to the group Keisha proceeded to tell the large group that her personal trigger had occurred in *our* conversation — that I smiled as I was telling a story of frustration. She went on to say how difficult it was for her to listen to me and how she had to continually pull herself back to her breath in order to stay open.

I felt hurt at Keisha's comments. I wished that she had told me of her reaction and not the whole group, especially because I was a co-facilitator and felt I had to walk a difficult balance by responding intelligently to her comments, while also dealing with and managing my own feelings of being publicly stung.

I knew intuitively that this dynamic was not new for Keisha and that it reflected deep pain. Her defensiveness was evident to me the moment she walked through the door, and from her comments I knew that her mistrust of white people was strong. Because of previous experience working in highly diverse teams, and because I am well aware of racial in-

equality and the dynamics of power and privilege that result in cultural, gender, and economic disparities, I chose to address my experience with her. I knew that if she wanted to be an effective facilitator, and that if she did to others what she had just done to me, she would not succeed.

Initiating this conversation took courage but I was clear in my intention and I trusted myself. bell hooks (1999, 118) speaks about how "love can bridge the sense of otherness. But it is a practice to beam that love out. It takes work." My raising the issue with Keisha came from love. We ended up having lunch together and she explained that my politeness felt like part of the legacy of white colonialism that made her feel very mistrusting. She explained that as a black woman she was taught to express her true feelings — if she's mad she looks mad, if she's happy then she smiles. I knew that we both had something to learn from each other. I know that I have work to do in the area of trusting my anger and feeling entitled to frustration, rather than doubting myself. Keisha had work to do in taking down her guard and letting people in.

As an educator with a strong spiritual sense, I believe it is important to acknowledge issues of diversity and equity. They are real. I have also come to realize that healing can only happen when we have the courage and the love to engage in painful conversations.

In order for us as individuals to critique the cultural myths that oppress us — and I include white males in this community of suffering — we are called to an elemental act of meditation. We have to have a few conversations with the pain in our gut; we have to know the world outside and the world within, value both and give both their due. For anyone enduring the pain of dissonance, this is a brave act of integration and a generous contribution to community. (O'Reilly 1998, 34)

Learning to skillfully and respectfully build trust and community across difference is another aspect of my spirituality and my teaching.

### **Bearing Witness to Pain ~ Sabrina**

As part of the same certificate program in which Jason had told his story, I had another important

teaching moment. Shortly after the future self visualization, a student started to cry. While others worked on their vision pieces Sabrina and I left the room to talk. I sat with her while she cried and told me that during the visualization she had seen nothing, only "total darkness." I did my best to listen deeply and to let her know that her experience was ok and was actually an opportunity to inquire within herself. Sabrina began to share that she didn't know what she wanted in the future, that she wasn't sure she wanted to be an engineer, and that she was concerned about the direction of her current path. Her fear and despair were evident.

In *To Know as We are Known* Parker Palmer (1993) says that teaching is about creating space. I held space for Sabrina and for her feelings. I acknowledged the fear and grief that she was feeling and I encouraged her to explore them further, not shut them off but to welcome their messages.

As an educator teaching with the intention of supporting and empowering students to live their most authentic life, I believe that holding space for pain is extremely important. I see these moments as transformative and as opportunities for students to connect with their deeper truths. For those of us with the courage to explore it and a genuine desire to grow, I see our pain as a gateway to truth, integrity, and greater understanding.

### **Conclusion**

These vignettes and the values of cultivating courage, softening to compassion, working across difference and bearing witness to pain inform my teaching. I believe that if we were given more opportunities to develop self-knowledge, we would live lives of greater integrity. When we are living with integrity we are happier and therefore better able to contribute our gifts to the world. We all need to reflect on our own hidden curriculum and the values that underlie our teaching.

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# Book Reviews

## **The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice Are Undermining Education**

by Diane Ravitch

Published by Basic Books (New York, 2010)

Reviewed by P. J. Nelsen

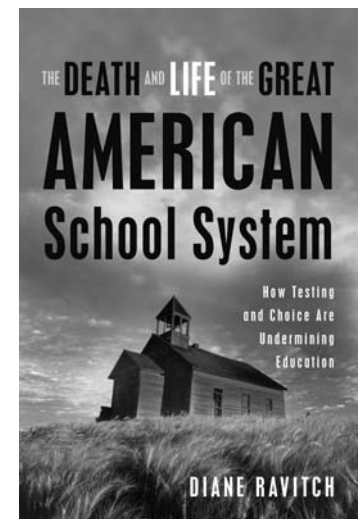
Never in the history of the United States was there a foundation as rich and powerful as the Gates Foundation. Never was there one that sought to steer state and national policy in education. And never before was there a foundation that gave grants to almost every major think tank and advocacy group in the field of education, leaving no one willing to criticize its vast power and unchecked influence. (p. 211)

Read this book. While billed in the national media as combination tale of the transformation of a conservative advocate for NCLB into a critic and an analysis of the ills of the market-driven accountability movement, the text is much more; it is a frightening tale of the corporate domination of the public school educational agenda in the contemporary United States. As has been her hallmark throughout her career, as educational historian and policy analyst, Diane Ravitch continues to offer a highly engaging, thought provoking and accessible analysis of schooling in the United States. Of course, as a former Department of Education staffer in the first Bush administration and longtime member of a number of conservative educational organizations like the Hoover Institute, her analysis emerges from a conserva-

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tive political perspective, and despite the media hype, she has not adopted a progressive viewpoint.

Reminiscent of Mortimer Adler's advocacy for a thick liberal arts curriculum, Ravitch argues for a return to the conservative educational agenda she advocated in the 1980s, most clearly displayed in her repeated endorsement of the recommendations found in the 1983 landmark report, *A Nation of Risk*, and the adoption of a liberal arts-focused national curriculum. In so doing, she parts company with longtime conservative colleagues like Chester Finn, but, as in previous writings, she does not offer a fair or balanced treatment



of progressive educational ideas or positions. Despite these shortcomings, the text's analysis of the corporate influence on the current educational scene alone makes it invaluable. In what follows, I separate the text's political analysis of the historical trajectory of the current educational scene from Ravitch's rebirth as a conservative educational thinker. While both are fascinating accounts, I believe that the former is much more important to progressive readers.

### **The Corporate Takeover of Public Education in the United States**

While much of the text offers important historical analysis, the tenth chapter, "The Billionaire Boys' Club" is especially important. Ravitch documents the rise of the Gates, Walton, and Broad foundations' influence on the national school agenda. Through analyses of their donation patterns, their access to politicians, and their successful influencing of the topics promoted by the Bush and now the Obama

administrations, Ravitch concludes that these three organizations, headed by corporate billionaires without any educational expertise, have hijacked the national educational agenda and are promoting their private visions of educational reform without any public scrutiny or accountability. Ravitch (p. 201) concludes that

There is something fundamentally antidemocratic about relinquishing control of the public education policy agenda to private foundations run by society's wealthiest people; when the wealthiest of these foundations are joined in common purpose, they represent an unusually powerful force that is beyond the reach of democratic institutions. These foundations, no matter how worthy and high-minded, are after all, not public agencies. They are not subject to public oversight or review, as a public agency would be. They have taken it upon themselves to reform public education, perhaps in ways that would never survive the scrutiny of voters in any district or state. If voters don't like the foundations' reform agenda, they can't vote them out of office. The foundations demand that public schools and teachers be held accountable for performance, but they themselves are accountable to no one. If their plans fail, no sanctions are levied against them. They are bastions of unaccountable power.

Focusing on the unexamined corporate influence within mainstream discussions of education, Ravitch breaks the "conspiracy of silence" surrounding the big three corporate foundations and their unparalleled domination of the current educational agenda. They are able to manipulate national policies indirectly by offering sizable grants to schools that adjust their school structures and policies to match the foundations' agendas, or directly by selling their beliefs to local and national politicians who set educational policies. For example, Ravitch argues that Eli Broad's experience as a self-made life insurance mogul, an outsider who made his vast fortune in an industry for which he had no specific training, has led to his beliefs that educational insiders are to blame for school problems. Hence, the Broad Foundation recruits and trains school leaders (superintendents

and principals) from corporate backgrounds to implement corporate-style (i.e., top-down) managerial models in schools. Similarly, Broad has persuaded Gates to collaborate, and the two are jointly pushing an agenda that "would de-professionalize education, uses bonuses to motivate (or 'incentivize') teachers and students, and seeks to replace neighborhood schools with a competitive marketplace of choices." (p. 217)

Their influence reverberates throughout the Obama administration's current educational direction. It has embraced competitive market reform strategies based on high stakes assessment, top-down management, and the promotion of charter schools and Milton Friedman's free market school ideology. Perhaps their influence is most clear in Obama's choice of Arne Duncan, a non-educational professional, to lead the Education Department rather than Linda Darling-Hammond, a consummate teacher educator. One of Duncan's first acts as Secretary of Education was to appoint Margot Rogers, the Gates Foundation's former primary education strategist, as his chief of staff. In her analysis of the implications of the corporate stranglehold of the educational agenda, Ravitch (p. 221) insightfully argues:

Business leaders like the idea of turning the schools into a marketplace where the consumer is king. But the problem with the marketplace is that it dissolves communities and replaces them with consumers. Going to school is not the same as going shopping. Parents should not be burdened with locating a suitable school for their child. They should be able to take their child to the neighborhood public school as a matter of course and expect that it has well-educated teachers and a sound educational program.

While this analysis of the corporate takeover of the national educational agenda alone makes the text valuable, the other chapters also offer a valuable resource for contextualizing how the "big three" foundations were able to position themselves strategically within the context of a failed national discussion about the nature of schooling in the United States — a story that begins with the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983.

After an introduction to the general argument and her change in viewpoint in the opening chapter, Chapter 2 (“Hijacked! How the Standards Movement Turned Into the Testing Movement”) dives into the historical account, mostly focusing on the last thirty years, especially the time between 1983 and 1994 when *A Nation at Risk* and the national standards movement it inspired dominated the educational discussion. This sets the backdrop for the rest of the argument. In Ravitch’s account, the educational discussion was hijacked by free market reformers who emerged in the vacuum left by the failed attempt to establish voluntary national history standards as a result of what Ravitch argues were misguided attacks on the standards’ shortcomings. She (p. 25) lauds *A Nation at Risk*, describing it as “an impassioned plea to make our schools function better in their core mission as academic institutions and to make our education system live up to our nation’s ideals” She argues that the report focused on issues of equity without specifically addressing race and class by strengthening high school graduation requirements: “higher standards for academic performance and student conduct; more time devoted to instruction and homework; and higher standards for entry into the teaching profession and better salaries for teachers” (p. 25). These are outcomes she applauds, and she repeatedly endorses them and *A Nation at Risk* throughout the text.

Chapters Three through Five trace the rise of the accountability movement in New York City and San Diego. Ravitch repeatedly documents that school administrators with no educational background implemented mandatory curricular reforms without significant teacher and parent input, and in nearly every case that Ravitch describes, despite parents’ and teachers’ significant objections. Despite the media hype at the time that portrayed such reforms as necessary *and* successful, Ravitch repeatedly demonstrates that careful analysis of the data reveals that reports of miracle results in both cities were false.

For example, Chapter Three focuses on New York City’s District 2 as an apparent model of school reform done well. With the rise of Anthony Alvarado in 1987 and his embracing of “Balanced Literacy” as *the* key to educational success, 1990s corporate-minded educational reformers became

convinced that his top-down management practices and adoption of uniform and mandatory approaches to teaching literacy would result in a quick reduction in the so-called achievement gap (i.e., higher test scores for minority and poor students), if replicated efficiently in other places. Ravitch unpacks the District 2 myth and argues that it did not represent a cross section of the city; instead, its gains can be traced to gentrification and the increase in enrollments of white, more affluent students, a population that scores better on standardized assessments. Regardless, the district’s methods became emblematic of the accountability movement’s corporate ethos: heavy handed corporate style leadership leading to the imposition of standardized curricula and teaching programs without worrying about collaboration with teachers. Again, Balanced Literacy became the lynchpin of the reforms. “This strategy assumes that the central planners know exactly what to do and how to do it. It relies on command-and-control methods rather than consensus. It brooks no dissent” (p. 53).

The tale Ravitch continues to weave is one of political struggle marked by the embracing of corporate style management and top-down reform strategies. This is typified by Alan Bersin, a former Federal prosecutor turned San Diego’s city superintendent of schools, and his embrace of Anthony Alvarado and his approaches:

The political genius of the San Diego approach was what I call a left-right strategy. Bersin’s instructional reforms employed and empowered the pedagogical left; he directed millions of dollars in professional development contracts to those who were deeply versed in Balanced Literacy and constructivist math. At the same time, Bersin’s accountability reforms and organizational policies — firing principals, demanding higher test scores, fighting the teachers’ union, attacking the bureaucracy, and opening charter schools — delighted the business community and those on the right who believe that public agencies, especially schools, are overflowing with waste, inefficiency, and incompetence and are greatly in need of accountability, competition, and choice. (p. 65)

In Chapter Five, "The Business Model in New York City," Ravitch continues the tale to document Mayor Michael Bloomberg and school chancellor Joel Klein's battles to control schooling within the largest school district in the nation. In direct opposition to the decentralization that marked New York schools from 1969-2002, Bloomberg and Klein's control of the schools was unparalleled. Despite national accolades that they had turned the city's schools around (i.e., the "Bloomberg Miracle"), Ravitch spins a tale of top-down management gone awry, the alienation of the city's teachers and parents, and false claims of academic achievement dependent upon test gerrymandering.

Ravitch's detailed analyses of the corporate model of educational reform practiced in New York City and San Diego function well as a pre-cursor to her accounting of the rise of the No Child Left Behind legislation and the accountability movement's dominance of the national education scene. Chapter Six, "NCLB: Measure and Punish," documents the roots of NCLB in the Clinton years and then its embrace by the Bush White House. It is a particularly interesting account because the analysis is offered by one of NCLB's staunchest supporters, now turned critic. Ravitch (p. 102) reflects:

I realized that incentives and sanctions were not the right levers to improve education; incentives and sanctions were right for business organizations, where the bottom line — profit — is the highest priority.

Ravitch's personal reflections on her transformation from someone who embraced NCLB to her rejecting its fundamental premises becomes perhaps clearest in Chapter Seven's discussion of educational choice. Grounding the tale in an account of Milton Friedman's free market arguments about school choice, Ravitch describes the rise of the voucher movement in the 1980s in the Reagan administration and its eventual transformation (for political expediency) into the charter school movement of today. Once again, she (p. 127) reflects upon her own political naivete:

I got caught up in the wave of enthusiasm for choice in education. I began to wonder why families should not be able to choose their chil-

dren's schools the way they choose their place of residence, their line of work, their shoes, or their car. In part, I was swept along by my immersion in the upper reaches of the first Bush presidency, where choice and competition were taken for granted as successful ways to improve student achievement.

After studying the results of the latest iteration of the choice movement, charter schools, Ravitch's analysis is that despite her early faith in the power of choice and market competition, the charter school movement is hurting public education for two central reasons. First, charter schools fare no better on average than public schools in quality of program (measured in diverse ways); second, because they are freed from the constraints of public schools with regard to enrollment, they can limit their student populations to students who are more desirable (i.e., produce better test results and/or cost less to educate because they require fewer expensive services). She concludes her discussion by raising objections to the Obama administration's embracing of the free-market model of competition as ensconced in charter schools as an educational reform tool (so much so that it has tied state receipt of discretionary federal funding to their expanding of charter schools within their states.) Ravitch's (p. 146) critique is clear and important:

In their current manifestation, charters are supposed to disseminate the free-market model of competition and choice. Now charters compete for the most successful students in the poorest of communities, or they accept all applicants and push the low performers back into the public school system. Either approach further disables public schools in those communities by leaving the lowest-performing and least motivated students to the regular public schools.

### The Rebirth of a Conservative

Much has been made in the national press about Ravitch's rejection of policies that she formerly held. In his review in the *New York Times Review of Books*, Alan Wolfe (2010) describes Ravitch's reform as leftist, as does Richard Kahlenberg (2010) who describes Ravitch's shift in position as a *return* to the left. For

all of this book's value — its analysis and summary of data on numerous aspects of the accountability movement's influence on schools — it is a mistake to construe Ravitch's "change of heart" as a move from a conservative to a more progressive agenda. She retains a conservative conception of education; she just alters conservative camps. She sheds her "new-found skin" — the one that she adopted in part as a result of the intoxicating experiences of working in the first President Bush's Department of Education — and returns to the themes she and her counterparts pushed in the 1980s. In sum, Ravitch argues that rather than adopt a marketplace reform agenda marked by high stakes testing, competition, and top-down management strategies, we need to return to the highly structured, liberal arts curricula of her youth in 1950s Texas, as exemplified in Chapter Nine, "What Would Mrs. Ratliff Do?" The chapter's frame is inspired by Ravitch's cherished high school teacher, Ruby Ratliff, a strict disciplinarian, grammarian, and by all accounts, a tough, no-nonsense, "traditional" teacher who pushed a classic liberal arts approach to the study of English.

Nowhere in the text do we find Ravitch embracing or even favorably discussing progressive educational ideas. For example, in her critique of New York City's District 2, she (pp. 40–41) dismisses constructivism as a theory

that students construct their own knowledge; in its extreme forms, constructivism eschews direct instruction, focusing instead on activities, process and social interaction among students.

Regardless of whether or not so-called constructivist approaches to mathematics or literacy instruction do indeed represent progressive, democratically focused educational approaches, the point here is that Ravitch, for all of her self-reflection and public admission of her misguided embracing of the standards movement and NCLB, remains resolutely ensconced in an educational worldview that sees what students learn and how they should learn it as a relatively settled affair, one clearly outlined in E. D. Hirsch's arguments in *Cultural Literacy* and the Core Knowledge curricular movement it inspired. At the end of the book, Ravitch (p. 236) opines that states should not allow the content of its curricula to be

"discretionary or left to chance." She repeatedly argues that a national curriculum is important because

a sound curriculum insures that young people will not remain ignorant of the most essential facts and ideas of the humanities and sciences. Background knowledge is critical to understanding and learning; whether one studies history or science or any other field, background knowledge is crucial in enabling the student to quickly grasp and integrate new information.

Throughout this book, she argues that we need to return to classrooms like the one she remembers Mrs. Ratliff creating in Houston in the 1950s. For example, she (p. 240) praises the "no-nonsense" policies of KIPP schools because they

unabashedly teach the behaviors and attitudes students need for success in school. Students are taught to sit up straight; dress neatly; look at the teacher; shake hands firmly; make eye contact with the person who is talking; don't speak out in class unless called upon by the teacher; be nice; work hard.... The no-excuses schools are a response to the weakening of social norms that once supported parents; now even the best efforts of families are often contradicted by what children see on television, in the movies, and in their interactions with peers.

My point here is not to engage in a debate about the merits and shortcomings of Diane Ravitch's educational beliefs, only to demonstrate that her so-called radical change is less extreme than the national press has characterized. I must admit that I found *that* version of conservative educational conversation refreshingly comforting. While we may disagree about many details, at least we can have an educational conversation based upon our agreements and disagreements about the aims of schooling, what it means to be an educated person, and how thick or thin a curriculum needs to be and why. As Ravitch's text so clearly documents repeatedly, those are topics that are *not* on the national educational agenda. Instead, the corporate reformers — Bill Gates, Eli Broad, and the Walton family — have already decided what we should think and how we should educate our youth. Sadly, the Obama admin-

istration has been only too willing to accept their corporate-minded educational agenda. So, despite our disagreements, I, for one, welcome *this* Diane Ravitch back to the conversation.

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## Whitewashing War: Historical Myth, Corporate Textbooks, and Possibilities for Democratic Education

by Christopher Leahey

Published by Teachers College Press (New York, 2009)

Reviewed by Doug Selwyn

There is a parable told about three monks who are walking by a river when their peaceful afternoon is interrupted by human cries coming from the water. The monks look into the river and see that there is a seemingly endless stream of babies being swept by the current to their certain deaths. The monks leap into the water and begin lifting the babies to the safety of the shoreline. After several frantic minutes one of the monks leaps out of the water and begins racing upstream along the bank. One of his fellow monks calls to him, saying that there are still babies to pull out of the river, and asking him where he is going. The monk calls back over his shoulder, I'm going to stop whoever is throwing the babies into the river.

Memorial Day 2010 has just passed and ceremonies were held in communities, towns, and major cities across the country. Speakers at all these ceremonies were unanimous in thanking our brave men and

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women in uniform who place themselves in harm's way so we can be free. Vice President Biden's comments as he laid a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, were typical of what politicians have been saying at these Memorial Day rituals for a very long time.

Today is a day in which sorrow mixes with incredible pride. We mourn those we've lost, but also take great pride in the lives they lived and the service they provided.

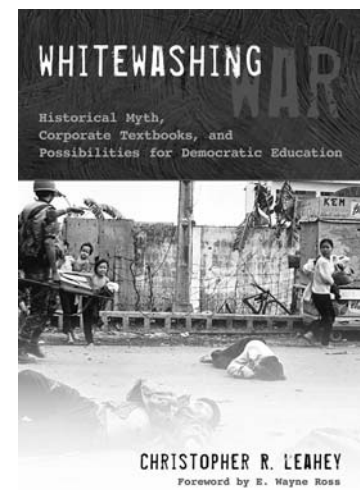
Love is why we're here today. To show our love for the men and women who died showing their love for this great country.

America's soldiers [who Vice President Biden called "a new generation of warriors"] know that the promise and the peril of this time have never been greater.

Many of you are now waiting for family members still overseas, many in harm's way. And some of you have stood and waited for a loved one that did not return, and live now with the knowledge that you'll one day be reunited with him, with our heavenly father. (Frumin 2010)

What went unasked and unanswered at each of these ceremonies, were fundamental questions about the policies that underlie the decisions to continue to send our children to war. Why does our government continue to make the choice to go to war? Who benefits from these decisions and on what grounds are they made? Why are we continually asked to sacrifice our children to endless war, and for whose benefit? And why do we continually agree to allow our children to be taken from us and thrown into the river?

Columnist Glenn Greenwald, writing on the absence of debate about our seemingly perpetual state of war said this in his May 24th column in Salon.com:



...War is basically the permanent American condition: War is who we are and what we do as a nation. We're essentially a war fighting state. We have been at "war" the entire last decade (as well as largely non-stop for the decades which preceded it), and continue now to be at "war" with no end in sight. That's clearly true of our specific wars (in Afghanistan). And, worse, the way in which The War, more broadly, has been defined (i.e., against Islamic extremism/those who wish to harm Americans) makes it highly likely that it will never end in our lifetime.... With war this normalized, is it really surprising that nobody debates it any longer? It'd be like debating the color of the sky.

Greenwald's focus was clearly on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which have been ongoing for most of the past decade, but America has been in a state of war for much of the last century, and if we include wars with those on the North American continent and Central America, the country has been at war for virtually its entire history. We have rarely stopped to ask why, and those who have done so have been branded as traitors, lunatics, or labeled "weak on defense," a near-death sentence for a politician.

Mark Twain, an opponent of the U.S. war in the Philippines at the turn of the twentieth century, wrote a very short story called "The War Prayer," a piece that captures the love and patriotic fervor with which a small town sends off its young men to an unnamed and undefined war. Twain begins the story during the height of the celebration:

It was a time of great and exalting excitement. The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism;... daily the young volunteers marched down the wide avenue gay and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung by; nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest depths of their hearts, and which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down

their cheeks the while; in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpourings of fervid eloquence which moved every listener.

Midway through this passionate sermon, Twain interrupts the ecstatic service by introducing a question about war through a stranger who is dressed and bearded as a prophet from the Bible, and who has suddenly appeared at the back of the church. The stranger comes to the front of the church to say that he carries a message from the lord.

"I come from the Throne — bearing a message from Almighty God!" The words smote the house with a shock; if the stranger perceived it he gave no attention. "He has heard the prayer of His servant your shepherd, and will grant it if such shall be your desire after I, His messenger, shall have explained to you its import — that is to say, its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men, in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of — except he pause and think.

God's servant and yours has prayed his prayer. Has he paused and taken thought? Is it one prayer? No, it is two — one uttered, the other not...

The stranger then offers the congregation the unuttered prayer saying that if, after fully realizing what they are asking for they still want it, their wishes will be granted.

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle — be Thou near them! With them — in spirit — we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with little children to

wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it — for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

(\*After a pause.\*) “Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak! The messenger of the Most High waits!”

It was believed afterward that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.

Which brings us to *Whitewashing War: Historical Myth, Corporate Textbooks, and Possibilities for Democratic Education* by Christopher Leahey. In this slim volume Christopher Leahey challenges the myth of war that continues to be perpetuated by powerful forces: by the government, by the media, by the military itself, and by the corporate culture that defines our society in the first decades of the twenty-first century. Leahey decries the simplistic, reductive textbook accounts of wars past and present that keep the true nature of war hidden, and helps to link those accounts to the corporate culture that produces them. He has provided context and helped us to connect the dots between and among media (and textbooks are media), the standardized, one-size-fits-all pendulum swing that education has taken, and our understanding of, and attitudes towards foreign policy, war, and the world. He helps us to see that, as long as the myth of war curtains off the reality of and brutality of war, we will continue, in ignorance, to send our young men and women off to fight. Leahey then offers thoughts and resources to support educators who would reclaim their role as educators, rather than middle managers of mandated curriculum. He asks us to take a step back from simply responding to the crisis of the moment, and provides a

resource for helping us to identify those who continue to throw our children into the river, and for taking some first steps towards stopping them.

One of the truly fundamental questions we bring to our classes in social studies and history is to ask how we know what we know, or think we know about the world. We each have some personal experience, and extend our knowledge through the experiences of those we know. Beyond that, we rely on various forms of media, on our teachers and schools, and on our leaders to help us to understand the “known knowns and known unknowns” that make up our increasingly complex world. We trust that our various media will provide us with the content and resources that will help us to understand why things are the way they are, so that we can perform our roles as citizens in a democracy in ways that are useful to ourselves, our communities, and to the nation.

Unfortunately, as Christopher Leahey makes clear throughout *Whitewashing War*, those sources have often proven to be the opposite of trustworthy. Instead, Leahey says that society, led by political and economic elites “use schools, the mass media, and popular culture as instruments to faithfully transmit a particular tradition, set of values, beliefs, or customs from one generation to the next,” and that “by coloring the way we interpret the past, these traditions shape our national identity and establish parameters for normative discourse and political action” (p. 12). Leahey labels this established norm the “selective tradition,” choosing the phrase first used by Raymond Williams in the early 1960s. “Selective tradition” establishes the “norm,” and defines what we can and can’t talk about, and how we can or can’t talk about it. Selective tradition has a major impact on what happens in schools.

Leahey sees schools as socializing students “into accepting the dominant political, economic, and social realities (p. 12).” The elites make sure that history is being taught in a way that supports the status quo, using state curriculum guides, standardized tests, corporate textbooks, and other means. James Loewen has found that textbooks play a larger role in determining what students learn in history/social studies courses than in any other subject area (Loewen 2007), and he has written best selling books

documenting the damage those deadly and inaccurate texts have done.

Perhaps the most basic reason why students need to take history/social studies is this: history is power.... Students who do not know their own history or how to think critically about historical assertions will be ignorant and helpless before someone who does claim to know it. (Loewen 2010, 12)

Christopher Leahey has clearly paid attention to Loewen's work and follows in his footsteps with *Whitewashing War*. His thesis is that we don't question the myth of war, or the policies or interests supporting a perpetual war policy because we have been taught not to question, and we have been taught not to think. Through educational standards, which are more political than they are educational, through our history texts, which are corporate produced products designed for sale, and through an educational system that measures success through standardized testing, students and teachers have become passive, jumping through hoops determined by others, at a distance. It is not theirs' to question, but to obey. Leahey (p. 41) says:

The entire system of standardized education relies on a culture of compliance where local school officials and teachers are compelled to carry out an educational system where the curricular content, pedagogical strategies, and methods of evaluation are determined by external authorities.

Leahey's focus in this book is war, with particular attention to the link or pipeline between schools and the military. Leahey follows Loewen's lead by investigating high school textbooks, and his specific lens is on how textbooks "teach" about war, and specifically about the Vietnam War. Through this focus, Leahey is able to show that the accounts of the high school texts are misleading and inaccurate, and that students depending on their texts to learn about the Vietnam War would complete their studies with an incomplete, inaccurate, and incomprehensible picture of that tragic event, and with a mythological and totally unrealistic picture of the nature of war.

Leahey begins his exploration of corporate textbooks and the influence they extend over the schooling experience by briefly introducing the larger context in which textbooks exist. Textbooks are published by publishing companies that are part of complex corporations, and those corporations are in business to make money. That is the reason they exist, and textbooks are products, like blockbuster movies, television sitcoms, or bars of soap. Leahey says that "textbook writing is a corporate venture where publishers tightly control the production and marketing processes to ensure adoption and substantial profit (p. 33)." They produce books that are designed to sell, to satisfy school boards, or state boards. For this reason they tend to be inoffensive, uncontroversial, and determinedly positive. "Traditional history treats the U.S. war on Native Americans, the Revolutionary, Civil, and World Wars as a series of triumphs, each bringing the nation one step closer to greatness." (p. 13) Telling the full story of the United States in perpetual war does not fit this archetype, and does not lead to textbook adoptions, and so that story is sanitized, and/or omitted.

Once Leahey describes the overall nature of the corporate intrusion into schools, through textbooks and other means, he moves to concrete examples to prove his case by providing examples of textbook accounts of the Vietnam War. He looks in detail at the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis, and then at the Têt offensive and other failures of 1968, including the My Lai massacre. Comparing what actually happened in Vietnam with the textbook accounts makes clear that what the students are getting is not history, but lies and partial truths that help to maintain "selective tradition." It leaves students without the means to make sense of what happened in Vietnam, or to learn from it, which undercuts the mission of schools to develop adults who have the content, skills, and dispositions that position them to make informed, thoughtful decisions that benefit themselves, their communities, and their country.

Leahey finishes *Whitewashing War* with a chapter entitled "Recovering Democratic History Education in an Era of Standardization." He has made an efficient and effective case to this point in how we have gotten to our current state. In this chapter he offers some ideas about how classroom teachers can resist the pull of the

standards movement and to reassume their roles as educators. He encourages teachers to stop teaching the myth of war and poses a rhetorical question:

What do we, as teachers, do to create classroom environments that allow and even encourage students to think critically about past, present and future American wars? My answer is to this question is simple: let's set aside standards-based learning initiatives, compromised textbooks, and high-stakes exams, and return to our democratic tradition of education that views learning as a continual process where students actively engage in authentic inquiry, exploring the past, and constructing knowledge. (p. 98)

He then makes some suggestions as to the general direction teachers might take to transform their classrooms into more democratic communities. He urges teachers to

offer students opportunities to actively study history, critically examine their textbooks, and develop skills that will allow them to effectively participate in governing their nation. Critically examining war requires teachers to take risks by stepping out of the maze of objectives and engage in what is widely known by history educators as "historical thinking." (p. 100)

These general suggestions seem useful and relevant, and it is possible that some individual teachers may feel supported to take steps in that direction. But it is, to be sure, a tall order, and unfortunately it is not as simple as he makes it sound. Leahey's call to return to the democratic tradition of education merely walks us into another well-maintained myth. While there have been (and thankfully continue to be) individual educators who teach in the manner that Leahey advocates, there are no good old days (when the U.S. educational system functioned in an idealized, democratic manner) to return to, for the reasons he has elaborated in the first chapters of the book. It is true that the standardization and top down pressure have increased and become more obvious in recent years, but the system has always functioned to direct a steady stream of young men and women to their proper places within the existing structure, in service to those in power. The textbook accounts of

Vietnam are clearly full of lies and myth, but governments and textbooks have lied about every war, and virtually every encounter between the European Americans, with whom the writers of textbooks most identify, and everyone else. Families have been seduced into sacrificing their young men and women for patriotism, for love of country, to combat evil, for longer than the U.S. has been a country. When Leahey says that all we have to do is just say no, to standardization, to the top-down, mindless memorization of endless dates, wars, and leaders that comprise too many social studies classes, he is being naïve. The system that is in place will not give over its power easily, and has been dealing with, or absorbing isolated individuals who are offering classes that feature the critical thinking and inquiry advocated by Leahey. It will take much more organized and cooperative resistance to make real change. And it definitely won't be simple.

This is not to suggest that we are powerless, and *Whitewashing War* is an important and useful book. Leahey has raised essential questions about war, and about the role that powerful elites in government and corporate media play in maintaining the myth of war. He helps us to see that the elite benefit from the status quo, and they have a vested interest in keeping the public ignorant about the true nature of war and of the policies that lead to war. Much like Mark Twain's Old Testament prophet, Leahey has provided us with a clear description of the ways in which the myth of war has been maintained and helped us to recognize the need for an accurate and honest accounting of what war is, and why we continue to engage in it. He has helped us approach our nation's policy of perpetual war as something to be questioned, and has made suggestions how educators might expose the myth of war for what it is. Our students are those who will be asked to serve in the current wars, or the next ones, and we can be sure that those in power will not be telling them the truth about why their services are "needed," or about the nature of war itself. That truth telling falls to us, and we must work individually, and with others to act. It is up to us to stop those in power from continuing to throw our children into the river. Christopher Leahey has given us a powerful resource to help us on our journey upstream.

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## Freefall, America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy

by Joseph E. Stiglitz

Published by Norton (New York, 2010)

Reviewed by Alan Singer

Al Gore may have received an Academy Award and a Nobel Peace Prize for producing the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), but in both cases the voters were not environmental scientists. If the environmental problems Gore described in the movie and book are as severe as he portrays them — and I believe they are — the solutions he proposes, returning to 1990 levels of carbon emissions and personal lifestyle changes, in no way address the magnitude of the problem facing the earth and humanity. I had the exact same feeling as I read Joseph E. Stiglitz's *Freefall, America, Free Markets, and the Sinking of the World Economy*. If the world economy is as bad as he suggests, we are only in the early stages of a steep, bitter, and long-term economic decline.

I am not an academic economist, but I am fairly well educated. Stiglitz has a relatively accessible writing style that avoids the overuse of technical jargon, so I think I understood what he wrote. Overall, I was frightened by his analysis and disappointed by his

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policy suggestions. I also have one very big complaint either with Stiglitz or his publisher. The book has no index so it is impossible to look things up and cross-reference. They probably did it to save money on production costs, but it makes the book very hard to use.

Joseph Stiglitz is a Nobel Prize-winning economist, a professor at Columbia University, a former member of President Bill Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors, a former Vice President and Chief Economic advisor to the World Bank, and a supporter of capitalism. He views economics as a hard science, good at identifying trends in the underlying economic currents, not so good at predicting the precise timing of events (p. xxi).

Stiglitz has been very critical of globalization dominated by free market ideologies and unregulated corporations. He believes that the current Great Recession was "Made in the USA," perhaps the only thing that still is (p. 3), and that "a crisis that began in America soon turned global, as tens of millions lost their jobs worldwide — 20 million in China alone — and tens of millions fell into poverty" (p. xi).

A moderate-to-left leaning Keynesian, Stiglitz wants more active government intervention in the economy through regulation and pump-priming investments. He fundamentally believes, in a religious sense that "markets lie at the heart of every successful economy but that markets do not do well on their own" (p.xii). In the tradition of John Maynard Keynes, he argues, first, that "economies need a balance between the role of markets and the role of government" and second, that "America lost that balance" (p. xiii).

My primary problem with Stiglitz is that like most liberal and conservative capitalist economists, he counts on Adam Smith's invisible hand of the marketplace to eventually kick in, though Stiglitz believes it will need a cardiac boost from government. The Bush economic team as described by Stiglitz,



was so myopic in its economic views that it restricted economic policy options to Choices A and B and the Obama administration did little more than add a Choice C. Stiglitz accuses Obama of lacking any alternative economic vision (p. 31). While Stiglitz explores alternatives D and E, he still rejects or ignores the rest of the economic alphabet. When he was on the Clinton Council of Economic Advisors in the 1990s, he was considered a moderate member of the team, not a radical or activist.

I approached this book as a historian, teacher, and leftist political activist trying to organize my ideas about globalization and the current economic crisis, and to understand why the entire capitalist world is worried about the collapse of the economy of Greece, a small Mediterranean country with nice beaches and lots of historical artifacts, but a population of only 11 million people and a Gross Domestic Product roughly comparable to the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. Greece may go bankrupt before this review is published, but Stiglitz left me no closer to understanding why or why it threatens the stability of the global economy.

The strength of this book is Stiglitz's assertion that the global economic crisis that began in 2008 was not an accident, but the result of both failed U.S. economic policies and deep-seated global structural imbalances. According to Stiglitz, the crisis was precipitated by the irresponsible practices of U.S. banks, brokerages, and insurance companies and the failure of the federal government and private regulatory agencies to rein in the "Frankenstein laboratories of Wall Street." A major cause of the collapse was the 1999 repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, New Deal-era legislation from the 1930s that prevented banks and brokerages from merging and successfully restricted their ability to speculate with our money and pensions. As with the Asian financial crisis of 1997, once it began, the financial collapse spread from company to company, market to market, and country to country like a contagious virus.

From my perspective, the underlying cause of the current economic crisis is inadequate and unbalanced global demand for products. The world's industrial capacity is much greater than the ability or willingness of people to purchase goods, either because they do not need them or because they need

them and cannot afford them. The U.S. housing bubble both temporarily postponed the economic downturn and made it worse. It made possible sustained borrowing and consumer purchasing which helped to subsidize global production and caused it to expand, but when the bubble burst no other countries could absorb enough of the production to bail out the global economy. Asian economies, including China and Japan, have too little aggregate domestic demand and rely heavily on the U.S. to purchase their exports. As the U.S. economy slipped, tens of millions of people lost their jobs worldwide. The UN Secretariat estimated that approximately 100 million people would fall into poverty or remain in poverty as a result of the Great Recession. The situation is exacerbated by technological innovation during the last few decades that made it possible for a small fraction of the global workforce to produce all the goods that people need (pp. 24-26).

Stiglitz believes, as do most, if not all, capitalist economists, that the U.S. economy is cyclical and that the current recession will eventually end. However, he is concerned that the flaws in the global economy will not be corrected and the system will become increasingly vulnerable. Economic crises in Third World countries have occurred on a regular basis during the past forty years. A working paper developed for the International Monetary Fund argued that between 1970 and 2007 there were 124 economic upheavals including 42 systemic banking crises or banking and currency crises in 37 separate countries, including the 1997-1998 Asian Tiger crisis that threatened a global collapse until bailed out by U.S. government borrowing and the housing bubble. But the world can no longer count on U.S. consumer demand as its economic growth engine.

Part of Stiglitz's problem is that he shares President Barack Obama's belief that if smart people run the country and the economy, things will turn out all right. Clearly, in Stiglitz's view, Bush and his people do not qualify as smart. Tax cuts and deregulation after 2001 made the economic situation worse, and the decline was further exacerbated when oil prices soared from \$32 to \$137 a barrel after the invasion of Iraq (p. 4).

Stiglitz, however, is seriously disappointed, even angry, that Obama placed his more conservative colleagues from the Clinton years and holdovers from

the Bush administration in charge of his economic team and not him. Obama, by the way, is not the only one ignoring Stiglitz. At the 2007 meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos he played the role of Cassandra; no one wanted to hear him (p. xxi). If the problems are structural and the system no longer works, the collapse of Lehman Brothers was the result of the crisis not the cause (p. 29), but Stiglitz has not convinced me how he or any smart technocrat is going to get the economy to bounce back.

Stiglitz claims that his major concern is not the immediate economic crisis, but what will happen next. As a religious fundamentalist of the capitalist church he just knows (p. xiii),

If we make the right decisions, not merely the politically or socially expedient ones, we will not only make another crisis less likely, but perhaps even accelerate the kinds of real innovations that would improve the lives of people around the world.

His concluding advice is to seize new opportunities (p. 297), but nowhere in the book does he suggest what political alignments will make this possible.

I concluded a review (*Encounter* 23[1]: 61-63) I wrote of a book by Arundhati Roy by saying that if she ever had time while visiting New York City, I would love to take her out for a cup of tea or coffee and chat about her ideas. Joseph Stiglitz lives in the New York metropolitan area, but after plowing through this book I really would not like to spend any more time with him.