Professing Education

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In this Edition

Editorial Note

John M. Novak and Kenneth A. McClelland,
Editors

It has been one year since the inception of Professing Education. Over the course of our first year it has been our objective to highlight the importance of education in a democratic culture. In focusing on two educative themes (Professing Education, and The Miseducation of the Democratic Public) we have been able to elicit thoughtful and provocative ideas from a wide variety of educational contexts and sources. Our plan is to continue speaking to the broader categories of educational thought in order to further generate ideas and discussion around a diverse spectrum of relevant educational issues worldwide. It is our hope that we can continue to put forth a deepening understanding of salient issues that are sensitive to both the history of the field as well as the present challenges facing the field.

As a way of furthering this endeavor we hope to bring to our readership at least one of the key lectures presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), sponsored and hosted by the Society of Professors of Education (SPE). This would involve bringing our readers at least one of the following keynote lectures: The Charles De Garmo Lecture to be delivered by Dr. Jeannie Oakes (University of California, Los Angeles), entitled, "Education for all on Equal Terms: Voices from 50 years of Struggle."; The Mary Ann Raywid Award Lecture to be delivered by Dr. William F. Pinar (Louisiana State University), entitled, "The Gender and Racial Politics of Contemporary School Reform."; and the lecture delivered on the occasion of the presentation of The Wisnieski Award for Teacher Education to the University of Maryland at Baltimore by Dr. Joseph Newman, entitled, "No Intro Course Left Behind?"

We are pleased, as well, to be able to reach a wider readership through our web site (http://profed.brocku.ca) which contains not only present and past publications, but also additional information pertaining to this publication and its parent organization (SPE). Visitors to this site will also find a link to our sister publication, The Sophist's Bane.

We wish you all a Happy New Year and we look forward to hearing from you.

Traveling the Path of Most Resistance: Peter McLaren's Pedagogy of Dissent (Part II)

Interview with Peter McLaren
University of California, Los Angeles

This is a continuation of our interview with Peter McLaren. The first half of this interview can be found in the June issue of Professing Education - Volume 2, Number 1. It is also available online at: http://profed.brocku.ca/

Kenneth McClelland: Democracy as a form of Government and democracy as an ideal for the guiding of one's conduct in life represent two different aspects of what democracy might be about and for. Can you speak briefly to what this means for Professors of Education, to the notion that teaching for intelligent and effective citizenship might involve criticism not only of the external political sphere, but also of one's own personal sphere of conduct?

Peter McLaren: Let's look at the epistemological and axiological basis of democracy, just for a moment. I very much oppose judging a society as more just or less just primarily on the basis of maximizing minimal well being for the poor and the powerless. Relative improvement in conditions for the subaltern, for society's poor and powerless, for the castaways, for *los olvidados*, does not cut the mustard for me. Nor did it for Marx, from whose work I draw my inspiration. Your question gives me an opportunity to explain why, in the main, I shy away from the concept of education as social justice when the concept of social justice generally is reduced to the redistribution of material wealth. I think to understand my position I need to address this issue.

My own work has moved away from a liberal, Rawlsian or Habermasian conception of social justice premised on the idea of a democratic society preoccupied by the logic of reformism, to, as I mentioned earlier, the idea of a socialist society actively engaged in revolutionary transformation. Let me give you the conceptual basis of the reason that my work has taken this shift. When the production of inequalities begins to affect the weakest, only then does capitalist society consider an injustice to have occurred. Daniel Bensaid (2002), following Marx, points out the irreconcilability of theories of justice —such as those by Rawls and Habermas — and Marx's critique of political economy. Liberal theories of justice attempt to harmonize individual interests in the private sphere. But Bensaid points out, correctly in my view, that you can't allocate the collective productivity of social labor individually; the concept of cooperation and mutual agreement between individuals is a formalist fiction. You can't reduce social relations of exploitation to intersubjective relations. In the Rawlsian conception of the social contract, its conclusions are built into its premises. Bensaid elaborates on his Marxian critique of Rawls by arguing that within political theories of justice, the concept of inequality is tied to the notion of creating a fair equality of opportunity and that these conditions of equal opportunity are to serve the greatest benefit to the least advantaged in society. It is possible for inequality to exist as long as such inequalities make a functional contribution to the expectations of the least advantaged. Bensaid puts it thusly: "This hypothesis pertains to an ideology of growth commonly illustrated the 'shares of the cake': so long as the cake gets bigger, the smallest share likewise continues to grow, even if the largest grows more quickly and the difference between them increases." The political conception of justice, be it Rawls or Habermas, doesn't hold in the face of real, existing inequality premised on the reproduction of the social relations of exploitation. The political theory of justice only makes sense in a world devoid of class conflict; in a world primarily driven by intersubjectivity and communicative rationality. Here, class relations and property relations are dissolved in a formal world of inter-individual juridical relations.

This viewpoint accepts a priori the despotism of the market; the whole question of production — and I would return you to the technical explanation of the labor theory of value in my previous question in which I start with Marx from production in order to ground reproduction — is displaced, in fact, is evaded. Let me quote Bensaid (2002) again, who writes: "Capitalist exploitation is unjust from the standpoint of the class that suffers it. There is thus no theory of justice in itself, only a justice relative to the mode of production that it proposes to improve and temper, sharing the old and false commonsensical view that it is pointless to redistribute the wealth of the rich, as opposed to helping them perform their wealth-creating role better, with a view to increasing the size of the common cake!" (p. 156). As long as you focus one-sidedly on distribution, you create a cover, an alibi in fact, for the social relations of production, for the exploitation of workers by capitalists. Privatization, denationalization, and schools subjected to the guidelines of the private sector — promoted by the OECD, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the European Union – are the logical result of the logic of profit maximization that drives capitalism. There is talk now of developing a world market of education in the framework of the General Agreement on Trade of Services (GATS). The privatization of education is becoming generalized to the degree that it is being perceived as fundamental to democracy.

If you want to talk about the distribution of objects of consumption — and education certainly has become one of them — then I would, after Marx, urge you to talk about the distribution of the conditions of production, and, of course, we could now enter into a conversation about NAFTA, and the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, and development and underdevelopment. But these arguments are now significantly established in the radical educational literature so let's stop here.

K. M.: Some have proposed a new paradigm for the left that is much more Darwinian in its approach to understanding and changing those conditions that afflict the poor, the oppressed, and the otherwise disadvantaged within society. It appears to maintain the core of those things that are and have been integral to a genuine left bearing (fighting unnecessary suffering of the weak and poor, of the exploited and the cheated), yet offers a Darwinian rationale for cooperation that takes seriously both competitive self-interest and altruism. Peter Singer's short, but provocative book dealing with this theme is a case in point, and it offers a kind of counter-narrative to Marxism. For those who profess education from a traditionally left perspective, but who recognize that a certain ennui and impotence has befallen the left in recent times, what is your take on the possibility of a revitalized cooperative left emanating from a more genuinely Darwinian perspective? Is there a real, and perhaps more realistic, alternative here to Marxist and neo-Marxist thinking or will it just become the plaything for old fashioned social Darwinist demagogues?

P. M.: Well, you are referring here to the book, *A Darwinian Left*, by Peter Singer. I'm familiar with that book but not especially familiar with left Darwinism as a contemporary movement. Let's look at Singer's conception of left Darwinism for a moment. On the one hand, I like the fact that Singer condemns the dangers of a reactionary sociobiology but on the other hand, I seriously question Singer's notion of utilitarianism as the basis of the principle of human nature. Not to mention that Singer really has presented an underdeveloped and in many respects misguided critique of Marxism. His notion that Marx got it wrong because of the history of failed communist governments is puerile. It's too silly even to debate this notion. Singer also goes on to claim that Marx's most serious sin is his idea that there is no fixed human nature. Human nature supposedly changes with every change in the mode of production. And Marx supposedly committed another serious sin when he worked from the perspective of the perfectibility of humankind.

According to Singer, Marx and Engels claimed to have discovered the laws of human historical development that would lead to communist society and that according to these laws, the victory of the proletariat was ensured. Singer is critical of Marx's notion that social existence determines consciousness. Whereas a Darwinian sees greed, egotism, personal ambition and envy as a consequence of our nature, the Marxist would see these as the consequence of living in a society with private property and the private ownership of the means of production. Without these social arrangements, Singer believes that, according to Marx, the nature of people would be transformed such that people would no longer be concerned with their private interests. Darwinians believe that the way in which the mode of production influences our ideas, our politics, and our consciousness is through the specific features of our biological inheritance, and that if we want to reshape society, we need to modify our abstract ideals so that they suit our biological tendencies. According to the Darwininan perspective, all those who profess to be guided by motives other than self-profit — what Marx would call 'gross materialism – are the unwitting victims of an idealist illusion.

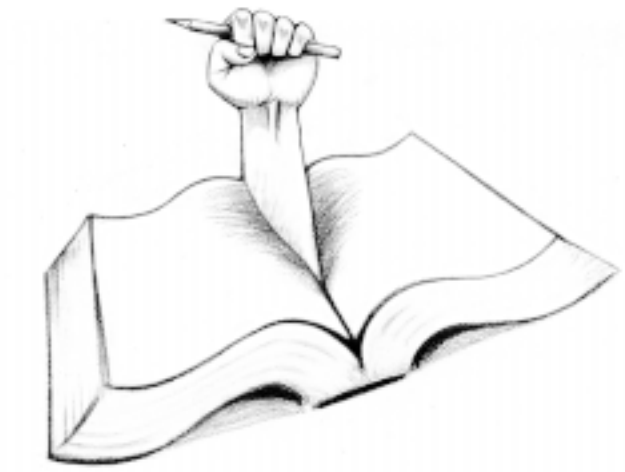

Illustration by Marcelo Layera

Prescinding from this enfeebling yet all-too-familiar interpretation of Marx, let's examine that famous sentence of Marx's (in Marx's Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*) of which Singer is so critical: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." As far back as 1980, Jose Miranda pointed out that Marx's notion of determination must be understood in a way that is not deterministic because the German verb *bestimmen* is all too often translated as "to determine" and this verb means a lot of things unrelated to determinism. (Miranda notes that this major mistake in translation can be linked to translations into languages derived from Latin, where the basic word appears as a form of *determinaire*.) In Marx's use of this term he in no way excludes the concept of human freedom or contingency; in fact, he uses the term dialectically. Marx makes a fuller explanation of what he meant by consciousness in *German Ideology*. Marx never forgot that just as circumstances help to form human beings, human beings also help to form circumstances. In contrast to what many critics of Marx claim, human beings for Marx are far from the passive actors of historical processes. Marx did not believe that there was no such thing as human nature. He argued that humans are biological, anatomical, physiological and psychological beings. He argued that an individual's human nature must be

addressed, but must also be understood in terms of how it has been modified in each historical epoch. In fact, Marx went so far as to contrast constant or fixed drives (such as hunger and the sexual urge) which are integral and can be changed only in form and cultural direction and the relative appetites (which are not an integral part of human nature and which owe their origin to conditions of production and communication). Humans were species-beings whose natures were clearly trans-historical and relatively unchanging in many respects (see Fromm, 2000). Marx distinguishes clearly between the laws of nature and the result of humans making a choice. Clearly, human beings produce their social relations just as they produce material goods; they are their own products as well as the products of history. And of history, it is quite clear that Marx did not view history mechanically, as if it was some wind-up sequence of causes and effects. Marx is interested in the laws of tendency within economics, not history's predictive capacity or laws of historical inevitability. History for Marx was always pregnant with possibility.

Marx did not reject the notion of human nature so much as a universal and timeless concept of human nature. Marx clearly could identify human characteristics that are universal and historically invariant and which set limits to the plasticity of human nature. This contrasts with the view of Rorty, who believes there are no biological or metaphysical limits on human plasticity. My friend Richard Litchman presciently notes, "the very notion of human nature as a *tabula rasa* is self-contradictory. Even a blank slate must have such properties as will permit the acceptance of the chalk, as the wax accepts the stylus, the inscribing tool. The issue is not whether there is a common nature, but what precisely that nature is" (cited in Sayers, 1998). When human beings make themselves their own creator by producing their own means of subsistence, then this signals the beginning of human history. The act of production creates new needs, something that Marx referred to as the first historical act. It is important to see Marx's understanding of human nature within the dialectical relationship of needs and productive powers. New needs are created through the productive activity we engage in to satisfy our universal needs, and this activity has to be seen in terms of the social relations which are themselves ultimately determined by such needs (Sayers, 1998). New forms of productive activity may result, and, indeed, new productive powers. Needs never arise in a vacuum. That is why in concrete conditions, human nature, in general, does not exist. Marx is interested in the social development of needs, beyond those necessary only for biological survival.

Singer's left Darwinism is not very helpful as a ground for social explanation without understanding, for instance, how jealousy, or selfishness has been realized in social individuals who are the products of a specific mode of production or a particular historical period. From a historical materialist point of view, nature is a precondition of human development and not an explanation of it. You can't explain the social in terms of the concept of the natural. The laws of natural evolution can't be transferred to social evolution. For Marx, social and moral developments are judged on how they impact on the growth of human nature in terms of the creation of powers and capacities. The stress in Marx is the development of new needs. As Sean Sayers notes: "Paradoxical as it at first seems, the ideal is the human being 'rich in needs'. For on Marx's view this is equivalent to the development of human powers and capacities, the development of human nature" (1998, p. 164). True wealth, for Marx, lies precisely in the development of human nature. That is why I prefer Marx's Hegelian historicist approach to human nature over Singer's utilitarian and consequentialist approach to human nature. When Singer claims that the Russian revolution failed because the revolutionaries failed to consider the invariant need on the part of human beings for power and authority, such an argument is as specious as Yak dung. Now what I like about Singer's work is his interest in the evolution of human co-operation. And he claims that most

human beings won't co-operate unless it serves their own interests to do so. His notion of reciprocal altruism based on an evolutionary view of human psychology certainly is worth investigating. I like the fact that he wants a less anthropocentric view of our dominance over nature, and to cease our exploitation of non-human animals (something that appeals to my commitment to animal rights), and his commitment to stand on the side of the weak. My commitment is that the development of new and creative vital powers will be best served in the struggle for socialism.

K. M.: I just finished a book on American Progressivism by Roberto Unger and Cornel West, and in it they make what might seem a few radical suggestions. One is that voting should be made mandatory (much like jury duty) with the penalty of a fine to those who do not vote. The other is that the major commercial television networks should be required to grant ample and equal free time to candidates campaigning for office. This would be a condition of their licensing rather than a service paid for by taxpayers. Certainly, one might anticipate grumbling about protection of rights from the 50% plus of the population who presently do not vote, and from CEOs of the television networks who might deem such a measure unfair market interference. Is there a broader democratic good that might be served by enacting such measures, that might lead to more genuine education of and for the people?

P. M.: At some level, ensuring that all the people will vote, that the entire *vox populi* will be heard, could be beneficial—I would like to think that if more Americans voted in the last election, that we wouldn't have the Bush administration. But of course, we have voter fraud in the United States, and what happened in Florida with the Bush mafia is a good example. What happened there — especially to ensure thousands of African-American votes would not be counted — was a shameful moment in U.S. history. But what good is voting — except as a mere formalist gesture — when the options are so perversely narrow? When you are really making a choice between a hard neo-liberalism and a harder neo-liberalism, between a benevolent imperialism and a more pernicious one under the imperial imperative of the Bush Doctrine of endless and boundless war. Tens of millions of protesters expressed throughout the world, for example on February 15th, with the rejection of the war on Iraq. It was the most unpopular war in history. And yet elected officials ignored the will of the people. It takes a fortune to win elections and they say the United States has the best democracy money can buy. It has the best media money can buy, too. And moneyed interests are linked to the military industrial complex – just take a look at who owns the major television stations and then see what else is produced by these companies — well, you can trace it all to the killing machines used to support the genocidal activities of Latin American dictators and of White House administrations who have carried out military strikes throughout the world fairly regularly, ever since the end of WWII. Of course, there are some real differences between the Republicans and the Democrats, and some important ones, such as a woman's right to choose, etc. And, yes, I don't want to trivialize that. So having two options I guess is better than having none, even though the two options you are given are still cut from the same imperialist cloth.

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This interview is also published in its entirety in Correspondence (2003), No. 3 - Indian Institute of Marxist Studies (Delhi Chapter).

How I Survived my Education

Wayne K. Spear
Gatineau, Quebec

We are all deeply indebted to our education system, for despite it, and maybe even in rebellion against it, we have become educated persons. Education like birth is something that simply must be done, and however much you may have benefited from it, you'd hardly wish to do it all over again.

I remember peculiar details whose significance today escapes me. I was once forced to stand in the hall for something I'd done, or hadn't done; I had to go to the bathroom but I feared interrupting the class, so I pressed my legs together and danced until the pressure was more than I could bear, and then I wet my pants. This sort of unpleasant experience is unusual only in particulars. Most of my memories of school involve the themes of crime, authority, fear, and punishment. I suspect any other student could tell comparable tales. Nothing, which could be construed as a 'lesson', remains afterward. I remember only the punishment, and the rest might as well never have happened.

The grammar school I attended had a long tradition of military-style education. The principal, as late as the 1950s, was typically a retired sergeant, or some similar figure. 'Stern, male, and authoritarian' seemed to be the chief requirements of the job. The yet-surviving Victorian model of the teacher was vanishing, but examples were still plentiful enough. The awkward phrase 'Victorian model of the teacher' is my own, and if I had a better phrase I would use it. It designates the educated middle-age woman who, having raised her own children, is thrust upon the children of others only to keep her busy. Behind the practice were some ugly assumptions about women and children, which I suspect are familiar. Even today the assumptions inform our education system, which is why tenured university professors tend to be male and grammar-school teachers female. One assumption, which applies to other professions as well, is that work done with children really isn't important enough to command the respect and wages of work done among adults. Thus the school was a dumping ground of sorts, and though inspired and gifted teachers could be found, they were accidents. Deviation from the norm was an unfortunate condition to be beaten back, and the creative teacher faced, then as now, a host of opponents.

To appreciate the character of the education I'm describing, you've got to consider the sort of things one was expected to learn: spelling, penmanship, punctuality, respect for authority, and obedience. All of these involve conformity to standards, whose justification is taken as self-evident. One learned to spell 'correctly,' with the help of a British dictionary. The authority of the dictionary was taken for granted, as if there were only One True Dictionary. I was also taught there was a correct way to make a lower-case 'p' – with the vertical stroke rising above the curved, much like the Old Norse thorn, þ. Regarding punctuality, never my strong point, I was reminded that I'd never get a job if I couldn't learn to be on-time. Here the clock was the authority, and there could be no questioning the exigencies of the schedule (correct pronunciation: 'shed-jewel'). Regarding respect for and obedience to authority, no matter what subject was ostensibly under consideration,

these were the lessons. I suspect they were ultimately all that we were meant to learn.

In my case the system failed; I somehow learned *not* to respect and obey, as a matter of habit, authority. School showed me that our leaders are not self-justified, and that they indeed often behave far from justly. I learned these lessons while reflecting on my experiences. As an adult I could see clearly that the function of the system was to produce moderately competent middle managers and docile proles. That is what the industrial capitalist system of my childhood needed, and that is what it mostly got. The system was designed to produce people who would show up for work on time and do what they're told, how they're told, no matter how demeaning, pointless, or even stupid it may be. The system produced these folks the way it produced everything else: in mass quantity, according to specification. In such a world it's inconvenient to question the structures and dictates of work, just as it's awkward to ask why 'fill-um' is the correct Canadian way to say *film*. Such questions were discouraged. In both cases one was expected to do as one was told, period. Authority, I discovered, is often a mere matter of expedience. Education standards, for instance, may serve the interests of education bureaucrats more than they do students, and the function of the authorities may be to ensure that the standards always triumph. In my opinion, you're not educated if you've never had this suspicion.

When you start to ask questions, a curious phenomenon occurs. Things begin to unravel. You learn that authority stands on shaky ground. The teacher is not all knowing and in fact only says fill-um because she was told by someone (another authority) that it is proper to do so. Behind every authority is only another authority: the Oxford dictionary, the CBC, the Queen, and so on. Question any individual authority and there is nothing in principle stopping you from questioning authority itself. How frightening such a state must be for teachers whose insufficient training and meager resources make them entirely dependent upon the teaching guide. Their authority is all that they have. At least the bureaucracy offers them the conditions they need to do their job. One person's hell is another's heaven, and I know today that mindless fill-in-the-blank work is a blessing if you've got the right temperament. Bureaucracy, after all, serves a useful and even civilizing function. You need only do and think as you're told; the system will then propel you along toward your pension.

Although this may sound cynical, it describes the way most of us live. Consider the realm of opinions. Even if we don't believe most of what we read, we at least have read most of what we believe. We couldn't possibly have first-hand knowledge of all that goes on in the world. We *have* to believe something to function. I don't mean 'belief' in the religious sense of 'faith,' as in the phrase 'to believe in God.' Instead I mean belief in the sense that we concede the world is pretty much what the experts say it is. Though the meanings overlap, they differ in the sense that the expert describes something you could see for yourself, like an atom, if you made the effort. Experts pretend to describe objective facts, in relation to which blind faith is not only not required but is inappropriate. If you doubt the descriptions, you are free to examine the matter for yourself and to form your own opinion. Most of us however haven't the time or inclination to do this, and so we acquire our opinions second-hand. This is not an argument against the media, but merely a description of the way in which opinions necessarily operate in the real world. We can only go so far in challenging conventional wisdom, if we challenge at all, because beyond conventional hearsay there is conventional heresy, and beyond that little more than regions of fire and dragons. The conventions, whatever their shortcomings, serve a function.

One of the great and overlooked paradoxes of the education system is that it is blamed for all social ills and called upon to remedy them. The possibility that it is neither the disease nor the cure offers little opportunity to the polemicist and so is rejected. Civilization has its discontents, but this is

not entirely the fault of the education system. Even if we restrict the discussion to learning, the education system can be shown to have a doubtful role. Einstein's genius did not flower as a result of his contact with the University; he was at best a mediocre student. There's no doubt in my mind that the education system of my childhood tended toward stupefaction, but stupidity was not always the outcome. Yes, school inoculates the young against intellectual curiosity – but this is only merciful, so long as the adulthood to which the young may look forward consists mostly in mindless work, endless sitcoms, and cajoling advertisements. When's the last time you heard an education reformer observe the obvious, that there's almost *nothing to do* with intellectual curiosity except make a pest of oneself. The corporations do not want it, despite their talk of the knowledge economy; the government does not want it; the TV does not afford it; and your boss will retaliate at its first appearance. In short, intellectual curiosity is as useful to social success as bad breath. Nothing is cultivated at such cost, with such pains, only to be met by such perfect indifference. That is why the education system works the way it does. And it *does* work, by rooting out intellectual curiosity and replacing it with 'workplace skills,' lest a peaceful and gainfully employed existence be forever precluded.

Any system will fail at least some of the time. Intellectual curiosity may survive prolonged therapy. In my case the education system was indispensable to my efforts, like the floor against which an athlete must push in order to leap. I began my life as a critical thinker when I first discerned what the education system is really designed to do – and how far this reality is from what education spokespersons claim it is designed to do. Reformers insist they want to make the education system a place of critical thought. Think about it: a generation of critical thought would pretty much put an end to the advertisement and PR industries, not to mention a good many political careers. The whole culture would have to be remade to suit the thinking and tastes of clever, skeptical people. Critical thought would pose a larger technical challenge than the Year-2000 bug. Our dullness is a national treasure. It is an industrial lubricant; without it the wheels of progress would grind to a halt. No more blockbusters, no more bad newspapers, no more trickle-down economics, and on and on. Do we really want to end civilization as we know it?

I *would*, but that is only because I am a pest who's survived the education system.

Wayne K. Spear was born in Buffalo, New York and grew up in Fort Erie, Ontario. His published work includes a collection of short fiction, Real Things Real People Are Really Doing. Wayne Spear currently lives in Gatineau, Quebec.

A Few Thoughts About University Education

Kenneth A. McClelland
Brock University

THOUGHT #1

I must admit to a certain fascination when I recall those exemplary (or is it scholarly?) teachers who managed for whatever reason to have an impact on my life and my thinking. But the fascination rests not only in what these exemplary individuals taught me, that is, the content of their lectures, but also, and perhaps more importantly, from the fact that I even remember them at all. Now certainly the content of their lectures cannot be severed from my general recollection, but it is not primarily that content that feeds my memory. Rather my recollections retain something of their qualities as teachers — their unique styles. I recall, along the timeline of my life, certain poignant moments of quality (can I call it wisdom?) in which relationships were formed, in which important meanings evolved. I'll describe them, then, as moments of transformation, transformation being a suitable enough descriptor for what occurred.

THOUGHT #2

In his essay, "Context and Thought" John Dewey makes some intriguing observations about the strange relevance of the background in a picture or a painting.

> That which is looked into, consciously scrutinized, has, like a picture, a foreground, middle distance, and a background — and as in some paintings the latter shades off into unlimited space….The contextual setting is vague, but it is no mere fringe. It has a solidity and stability not found in the focal material of thinking. The latter denotes the part of the road upon which the spotlight is thrown. The spatial context is the ground through which the road runs and for the sake of which the road exists.[1]

Every situation has a subconscious intelligibility, a pervasive quality. Perhaps that is what feeds my memory of those exemplary teachers. You see it is hard for me to put this quality into exact words. I think my actions now speak louder than the words I'm struggling to find. But how would you explain my actions? Precise explanation takes precise tools, but the painter's brush paints the background and elicits its overarching vague relevance and perhaps the vagueness is just the thing it is and is the thing it should be. Reading John Ralston Saul I convey to you his suggestion to perform a kind of meta-cognitive exercise — try to remember important people you've forgotten. Why have you forgotten them? Is there something wrong with your memory? Or is it, perhaps, that their importance is ill-conceived, eliciting a kind of forgetfulness? Saul asks us to name a manager or an administrator from the Renaissance? There were many. Why do we all know Leonardo da Vinci then? It cannot simply be publicity or celebrity. Well-paid CEOs seem to find the public eye far more readily than artists, but in time we seem to have a memory for the important artist. "It seems that memory does work. It retains what is central and filters out what is tertiary or marginal. Leonardo remains because he is an expression of our shared knowledge. The manager does not. He has a role but remains marginal to society's sense of itself, even to the manger's sense of himself."[2] To return to those exemplary teachers in my life, then, what were they — managers or artists? I think I'm beginning to find my focus.

THOUGHT #3

So, what makes for a scholarly teacher? Perhaps it is that the scholarly teacher reflects about those finer-grained details that compose the artfulness of exemplary teaching. This is the kind of reflection that transforms one, and even transforms future modes of contact with students. But to reflect is always also to situate oneself in that larger context — that taken-for-granted whole, the 'ground through which the road runs [or teacher teaches] and for the sake of which the road [or teacher] exists.' So let us consider the teacher as researcher.

I've never liked the pure separation of teaching from research. The poet Wallace Stevens said:

Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
On one another, as a man depends
On a woman, day on night, the imagined

On the real. This is the origin of change.
Winter and spring, cold copulars embrace
And forth the particulars of rapture come.

Music falls on the silence like a sense,
A passion that we feel, not understand.
Morning and afternoon are clasped together

And North and South are an intrinsic couple
And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
That walk away as one in the greenest body.[3]

There is inter-dependence here — 'cold copulars embrace' — teacherresearcher! Yet, what a measurable history the researcher has, what an amassing of measurable (and fundable) accomplishments. But this is a particular kind of research is it not? It meets the *dictates* of an ever-

changing society. Yet, surely there is much research that defies easy quantification. Be it measurable or immeasurable, measurable and immeasurable both, it can lead to an exemplary teacher. It is the content that fills out the canvass of a good teacher's artful expression. Whether the content comes from publishable research or perishable research, I cannot imagine a scholarly teacher who has done no research. And yes, transformation will occur. On that we can rest assured. But what kind of transformation, and transformation for what, and how to measure such transformation — there's the rub. Perhaps outside of the teaching act itself (but never really outside), scholarship is measured by long hours of disciplined study and thought. If this difficult rigor is an utter joy for the individual it forms part of a scholarly life. If it is drudgery then perhaps scholarship is not of the essence. I suppose there are many different reasons one would endure it. But for the individual to actually love it, love the labor of it, and for the individual to feel part of a community of others who also love it, that seems to me scholarly. You cannot pretend such a labor of love, or its communal resonance. It is a life-work. However, I am convinced that quality (scholarly) transformation will somehow escape absolute measurement (do I need to provide measurable evidence for this?).

THOUGHT #4

What kinds of students we choose to transform makes a huge difference. Is the teacher a teacher of undergraduate students or graduate students? Should there be a distinction in how we approach each group? I think, surely there must be. Just what is beginning for the undergraduate student? A career? Well, perhaps, but surely a career is a kind of end, and its beginning, if it is to result in a productive end, must be potted in something more *generally* nourishing. There is ample time in graduate school for fine-tuning the end, that measurable outcome (or product) of a supposedly good education — that career! But up front, it is a kind of death of the spirit, is it not? Ends do not always mean justified means and different ends call for different means. Bruce Wilshire said: "One may know how to make money, transform the earth and ourselves in indefinite numbers of ways, and not know how to live."[4] Transformation is a weighty concept indeed! And it seems there is (or should be) a reciprocal element as well. Teachers act on their students, to be sure, but students also act on their teachers — reciprocal transformations, vital community. It seems to me that undergraduate education must be of paramount importance, and the entrenched expert or specialist must reopen themselves to the imaginative energy of youth. Education is most enlivened then. The eventual background 'through which the [career] runs and for the sake of which the [career] exists' is vaguely but powerfully conceived if all goes well. Alfred North Whitehead said many years ago:

> Youth is imaginative, and if imagination be strengthened by discipline this energy of imagination can in great measure be preserved throughout life. The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imaginations. Fools act on imagination without knowledge; pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task of the university is to weld together imagination and experience.[5]

To be a graduate student and a teacher of graduate students, then, is to be, in a way, already in a career. My sense is that part of determining whether or not the career is dead-end depends on the nature of the transactions that occur along the way, what happened when the graduate was an undergraduate and the graduate teacher a teacher of undergraduates. For putting our undergraduates on the fast track of graduate school or into early career mode is, as I see it, a kind of spiritual robbery. It is the tail wagging the dog. The Cartesian split sees its contemporary expression within the university, as the graduate faculty mind split off from the undergraduate student body. As Wilshire says, "to be cut off from others, especially those whom we

generate, our [undergraduates,] is to be cut off from ourselves as adults and teachers, and from a possibility of our own regeneration."[6] Clearly the implications for transformative learning (for both teacher and student) are enormous. We must be cognizant of what begins at the undergraduate level and feeds into the quality at the graduate level. Perhaps, after all, it is not the destination, but rather the journey, not the formed, but rather the forming. A healthy university, then, embodies a healthy democracy — reciprocal transformations, vital community.

Endnotes

1 J. Dewey, "Context and Thought," in R.J. Bernstein, *John Dewey.* Atascadero: Ridgeview Publishing Company. (1966). p. 4.

2 J.R. Saul, *On Equilibrium.* Toronto, Canada: Penguin Books Canada (2001). p. 41.

3 W. Stevens, "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction," in H. Stevens (ed.) *Wallace Stevens: The Palm at the End of the Mind.* New York: Random House, Inc. (1972). p. 218.

4 B. Wilshire, *The Moral Collapse of the University*, cited in W. Cude *The Ph.D. Trap Revisited*. Toronto: The Dundurn Group (2001). p. 84.

5 A.N. Whitehead (1955), *The Aims of Education.* New York: Mentor Books (1929) p. 98.

6 B. Wilshire, cited in W. Cude, 84

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How Education Has Failed Democracy

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The imperative of survival drives every society to teach their young the knowledge, skills, and values appropriate to their way of life. For modern, complex societies formal public education serves this purpose.[1] Western governments continue to spend considerable amounts of their GDP on education[2] but increasingly measure the success of their investment through students' performance scores in areas such as math and science and in valuations of the earnings of graduates. Results are then used as leverage to determine public spending on education and to justify increased control on school activities. It is ideology rather than idea that has dominated the North American approach to education reform for more than a decade. While publicly supported schools battle conserving forces, education for democracy continues to struggle against the dominance of education for and by the marketplace.

Many and varied philosophies of education compete for the public purse and professional attention, but the primary struggle is embodied in the tension between education and training. Ungerleider (2003) says of the choices we are making, "it is about *training* students for the future, rather than about *educating* them for the future" (p.109). The former has a narrow application and scope, and is limiting, while the latter "involves the acquisition of knowledge and its application to issues and problems both familiar and unanticipated"(210). Education is more appropriate to preparation for democratic living because living in association with others inevitably produces continual challenges. Such challenges require insight into experience and the environment and call on a quality of imagination that can suggest approaches to living in ways that present training-oriented approaches inhibit.

Such collective imagination as is required for fuelling healthy democratic participation in education, is presently difficult to find, and as such, fails the

[1] Barrow (1981) and Holmes (1986) were able to list educational purposes as functions schools perform.

[2] According to OECD, Canada ranked first among the G-7 countries in 1999 with respect to the percentage of the GDP allocated to education, followed by the United States. In 2001, governments as a whole in Canada spent 15% of their total expenditure on education compared to 17% for health. Until 2000, they had spent more on education than health. Stats Can. data.

fullness of Dewey's idea of the free individual in a free society, and also the implications of his ideas for democratic education. An individual maturing in personal authority and authenticity learns to solve problems of living primarily through moral learning[3] or what I am inclined to call a common sense kind of wisdom, or what Barber would call education for liberty. This includes learning associated with emotion, deliberation, creativity, and ethics, and denies neither a knowledge base nor standard literacies. Quite the contrary, if we are to live in association with other individuals it is necessary to share at least some common ground. Democratic and educative community, in the absence of anything common to communicate about, cannot really be called community or educative at all. Under such circumstances there is little more than geographical proximity. To this extent it is necessary that students receive training in basic skills and cultural knowledge as tools to living fuller with others. To have common ground should never preclude difference, but should make differences between individuals more richly and democratically meaningful. This, I would argue, was Dewey's intention and an idea expressed even earlier by de Toqueville (1848/1969): He said, "In democratic countries knowledge of how to combine is the mother of all other forms of knowledge; on its progress depends that of all the others" (p. 157).

Instead, contemporary educational reform emphasizes basic skills as a means to achieve only a limited conception of democracy. Literacy, skills training, standardization, high stakes testing, charter schools, choice, and accountability, all mask efforts to control and actually limit participation in public education. The value behind many educational changes is market competition and domination, not democratic association and participation. Even postsecondary education has succumbed to an academia-for-careers approach. These schemes emphasize a slight-of-hand approach to citizenry and democracy. In other words, what is actually a bureaucratic form of structured participation is cleverly cloaked in the rhetoric of strong citizenship and democratic conduct. This also tends to favor private interests over the public good. When even teacher education programs are virtually devoid of foundational studies, it becomes more and more difficult to put our hopes in ground-level reforms based in teacher action, because they too are increasingly becoming deskilled in programs that are more careerist and training-based, rather than programs that are immersed in a richer and more deeply meaningful professional and democratic sensibility. It is a matter, as Bode (2002) says, of becoming aware of the dangers of "being nurtured in habits that are incompatible with a genuinely democratic philosophy" (p. 92).

Certainly, the challenge becomes ever more prescient that we continue to learn to live together on a shared, but shrinking planet, and that we continue the struggle of educating our young in a democratic spirit. We must pursue literacy and disciplinary knowledge because they are as necessary to the development of individual authority and authenticity (opposed to purely external mandates) as they are to living commonly with others who are also "free and equal" (Dewey, 1916/1985). Education is indeed the moral enterprise that many before me have acknowledged. Our reform efforts must attend to the intellectual and moral forces to change the system(s) of education that we are a part of if we intend education to have the impact on life that is its potential.

[3] Not to be confused with some current conceptions of moral education or character education that emphasize external authority and are more training than education.

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Book Review: Pragmatism and Educational Research

Authors: Gert J. J. Biesta and Nicholas C. Burbules (2003).
Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD

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Every once in a while you get a book and say "Wow." This book got two "Wows" from me-one when I opened it and one when I closed it.

I had awaited the arrival of *Pragmatism and Educational Research* for sometime. It is the second in a series on "Philosophy, Theory, and Educational Research," and I had enjoyed the first in the series: *Postpositivism and Educational Research*. When the book came, I eagerly turned the cover and, to my surprise, found page 128 followed by 127 all the way to the beginning. Wow! Somehow the book made its way to me backwards. Some may say that pragmatists have always gotten it the wrong way around and they might say that this book just demonstrates that point once again. Our friendly bookstore bookseller offered to send the book back, but I insisted that I wanted to read the book now. Several days later, after rearranging my life schedule and reading habits, I reached Wowdom for the second time. This is a wonderful, insightful, and incisive book that should be read by anyone wanting to get a better understanding of the subtle workings of educational research seen from the perspective of John Dewey's pragmatism.

In five chapters Biesta and Burbules (1) clarify what pragmatism is; (2) pragmatically move from experience to knowledge; (3) elucidate the process of inquiry; (4) explore the consequences of pragmatism; and (5) skillfully link pragmatism and educational research. Each of these points deserves some elaboration so readers can get a better feel for the pragmatic project and its educational implications.

Pragmatism is a philosophy of action. The Deweyan variation of this tradition sees nature as an interacting whole of moving parts that reveals itself as the result of doings. In other words, we are not spectators in a finished universe but active participants in the evolution of reality. The method of knowing that comes from this perspective is experimental and fallible and is refined through self-correcting and open social inquiry.

For the pragmatist, "in the beginning was the transaction, and, in the present and future the transactions continue. May the thoughtful transaction be with you." The transaction is the most general process in nature. What else would we expect in a universe of moving parts. Sometimes my students tell me that they know that education involves transmission and transaction but they really care about transformation. I tell them, as a Deweyan pragmatist, that transformation comes about as a result of the quality and quantity of transactions that take place and that a good way to go about the transformation business is to examine and develop thoughtful transactions that deal with problems we

face in our shared life. The practices they engage in, to fit into a pragmatic perspective, should be experimental and fallible and be refined through self-correcting and open social inquiry. Transformational zeal without pragmatic prudence can lead to sloganeering, dogmatism, and less than desirable experiences.

Experience, from a Deweyan perspective, involves the totality of ways that a living organism transacts with its environment. This emphasis on the organism transacting with its environment enables pragmatism to get beyond objectivism and subjectivism, the ideas that reality is either out there in the world or else in here in the mind. As an alternative to the mind-matter dualism, the Deweyan perspective posits a transactional realism, one in which reality only reveals itself as a result of the activities of the organism (pg. 10). From this point of view, we do not know the thing-in-itself and knowing is just one, albeit an important, mode of experience. This knowing mode of experience involves doing something with experience so as to understand the relationship of actions to their potential consequences. It is about the reflective transformation of experience so that we can have a more coordinated response to a situation. We are a part of a moving whole and we are working to respond to disrupted or disturbing relationships. Thus, to return to an earlier point, we should see the knowledge we develop as experimental, fallible, and capable of being refined through self-correcting and open social inquiry. Perhaps it could be said that in some ways social inquiry is like trying to hit a moving target while going up and down on a merry-go-round that is being rebuilt. It is bumpy, changing, and uncertain, but is something we can get better at. Social inquiry, however, is even more complex than this.

The process of inquiry deals with conflicting habits of a person or persons in an indeterminate situation. It is about the transformation of a situation because our present habits of transacting are not working. The conceptual outcome of an inquiry is a warranted assertion. The existential outcome is a unified or determinate situation for the organism in its environment. From this point of view, knowledge is not a picture of reality but something we use in order to meaningfully act in a world-in-the-making (pg. 69). Educational inquiry begins and ends in educational practice. Educational research is about and for the improvement of what goes by the name education. The results of this research are not recipes to follow on the way to perfection but information about possible directions and consequences to consider. Educators become informed by understanding, using, and doing research individually and collectively. By doing so, they become intelligent participants in the world-in-the-making.

For Biesta and Burbules, the practice of education is an art that can be informed by research. They have written a short but powerful book that shows both the consequences and limitations of taking seriously pragmatism and educational research. I think that readers will get more than two "Wows" from this book.

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As 2004 is an election year, this will be our focus in June 2004 issue.
Please visit our web site for details:
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