

Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a Curriculum for Human Beings

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This is, in part, an effort to gain perspective on our constructs and our categories, to break through what Dewey once called "the crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness."¹ My reasons for wanting to make this effort have to do with a desire to communicate a sense of how haunted I often feel, how badly I want to break with the taken-for-granted, to see and to say. Like many in our field, I am preoccupied by the "savage inequalities" Jonathan Kozol describes.² My interest in coping with diversity and striving toward significant inclusion derives to a large degree from an awareness of the savagery, the brutal marginalizations, the structured silences, the imposed invisibility so present all around.

Listening to the continuous talk about the AIDS epidemic as an inexorably advancing plague, I have been touched by those who have reminded us of the ways in which marginalization can destroy a community. Excluding and demeaning great numbers of the population, we have not paid heed to what has been happening; we have not responded in time to a catastrophe that now endangers us all, no matter what our class or gender or ethnic origin. How can we not recall the long years in which we were corrupted by our distancing of African Americans in this country, by our institutionalized indifference and neglect? How can some of us not remember the narratives read by gay and lesbian adolescents in Colorado, confronting not only the law that erodes their civil rights, but constant fears of violence and violation? These are the narratives of young people often deprived of role models, sometimes thrown out of their homes, publicly defined as deviant, feeling wholly alone in the world.

I think of the philosopher's admonition (which most of us would say we believe in absolutely) that all persons should be treated as ends, never as means,³ and what that obligation entails. I think of what we say to one another about the dignity and integrity of each human being, and about how that relates to our conceptions of democracy. I think of Hillary Rodham Clinton and Marian Wright Edelman emphasizing the importance of children's rights—their rights to good education, corrective health measures, and (yes) to leave neglectful or abusive homes. That reinforces my conviction that the young people in Colorado, like many of those in New

York City today, are not only being violated in extremely personal ways. They are being deprived of certain basic rights—in this case, their right to an adequate education, if education is viewed as a consequence of relating to bodies of knowledge in such a fashion that meanings can be made. If the human being is demeaned, if her or his family is delegitimized, crucial rights are being trampled on. This is partly because persons marked as unworthy are unlikely to feel good enough to pose the questions in which learning begins, unlikely to experience whatever curriculum is presented as relevant to their being in the world.

Outrage at this interference with children's becoming and at the violence, the terrorism, the linguistic pornography that often accompany it drives me to try to do something in this domain, at the very least to understand it. We need only think of the pronouncements of the radical Right. We need only summon up the images of the "skinheads." We need only hold in mind the raging against multiculturalism, demonized as communism was not very long ago. Most of us are familiar with the warning that any one of us might well be the next to hear the knocking on our door at night. Recalling what happened in Nazi Germany fifty years ago (when many homosexuals were rounded up along with Jews and Gypsies and sent to concentration camps), I become somewhat obsessive about what diversity ought to signify in a democracy. At once, I keep pondering the meanings of inclusion and wondering how it can occur without the kind of normalization that wipes out differences, forcing them to be repressed, to become matters of shame rather than pride.

In addition to all this, there is my interest in the contemporary modes of thinking described as postmodern: responses to experiences in the shifting, multifaceted world that are more widely shared than ever before. There is the experience of multiplicity itself, what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls "the hallmark of modern consciousness."⁴ Another scholar speaks of an "irruption of otherness" with which we are still trying to come to terms.⁵ Others emphasize the diversity of thought in the realms of scholarship, the radical pluralization of what we think we know in the various disciplines. It becomes, for instance, increasingly indefensible to structure knowledge monologically. We can no longer set aside the ideas of vantage point, dialogue, conversation. We cannot forget the "heteroglossia" Mikhail Bakhtin has pointed to: the existence of many voices, some contesting, some cohering, all demanding and deserving attention.⁶

When we relate all this to the acknowledgment of the newcomers in our country, our cities, our classrooms, we come to realize (or ought to come to realize) that there cannot be a single standard of humanness or attainment or propriety when it comes to taking a perspective on the world. There can only be an ongoing, collaborative decoding of many texts.

There can only be a conversation drawing in voices kept inaudible over the generations, a dialogue involving more and more living persons. There can only be—there ought to be—a wider and deeper sharing of beliefs, an enhanced capacity to articulate them, to justify them, to persuade others as the heteroglossic conversation moves on, never reaching a final conclusion, always incomplete, but richer and more densely woven, even as it moves through time.

Another notion emerging from contemporary inquiries and talk has to do with the self, the subject, so long thought susceptible to predetermination, to prediction, to framing. There are, at least in recent times, psychologists eager to thrust children's observed behavior into measurable molds. There have been numerous people (mainly white men in power, I must say) hungry to maintain the old hierarchies. Atop those hierarchies, as they saw them, were autonomous, free-wheeling, deep-throated gentlemen (or generals, or corporation managers) who thought themselves entitled to be enthroned. And, of course, there are numerous interdependent, fragile, compassionate, sentimental, dreamy, inefficient people seen to be swarming at the bottom, never meeting world-class standards, never sufficiently efficient, or docile, or controlled.

In both instances, there has been a prevalent conception of the self (grand or humble, master or slave) as predefined, fixed, separate. Today we are far more likely, in the mode of John Dewey and existentialist thinkers, to think of selves as always in the making.⁷ We perceive them creating meanings, becoming in an intersubjective world by means of dialogue and narrative. We perceive them telling their stories, shaping their stories, discovering purposes and possibilities for themselves, reaching out to pursue them. We are moved to provoke such beings to keep speaking, to keep articulating, to devise metaphors and images, as they feel their bodies moving, their feet making imprints as they move toward others, as they try to see through others' eyes. Thinking of beings like that, many of those writing today and painting and dancing and composing no longer have single-focused, one-dimensional creatures in mind as models or as audiences. Rather, they think of human beings in terms of open possibility, in terms of freedom and the power to choose. They think of them, as many of us do, as creating themselves in resistance to objectness, in refusal of the abstract formulations presented by the media. They think of them identifying themselves in conscious rebellion against the convergence of masculinity and technology that infuses what may be called the technoculture of our time.

This, of course, arouses me as a feminist, knowing how much there still is to clarify, how much there still is to resist. I am aware (how could I not be?) of the gaps in history and literature where women's lives and ways of

knowing are concerned. I know how much had to be hidden and repressed in my life and in lives like mine, if there was to be acceptance by a profession long governed by masculinized and traditional norms. Quite obviously, this intensifies my desire to discover what can be meant by a truly inclusive society and a curriculum for human beings.

There is that; and there is a long commitment to the arts, to aesthetic education, to the life of imagination. It is not because I believe the arts necessarily ennoble or inspire (or can cure toothaches or solve the problems of marginalization). Even the most beautiful Matisse retrospective or the most exquisite American seascape can arouse existential doubts, can remind us of a mystery below the decorative surfaces of things. In all its lulling and thrilling loveliness, the classical ballet is complex enough to arouse an indignation with regard to women as objects or the chill forms of classical denial. Imagination, for me, cannot be counted on to summon up visions of the romantic, the celestial, the harmonious. It is because I believe that encounters with the arts can awaken us to alternative possibilities of existing, of being human, of relating to others, of *being* other, that I argue for their centrality in curriculum. I believe they can open new perspectives on what is assumed to be "reality," that they can defamiliarize what has become so familiar it has stopped us from asking questions or protesting or taking action to repair. Consider the advancing invisibility of the homeless or how accustomed we have become to burnt-out buildings or to the contrasts between a holiday-decked Fifth Avenue and a desolate "uptown." It may be that some of Beckett's work (*Waiting for Godot*, perhaps, or *Endgame*) might defamiliarize our visions of the lost, the disinherited. It may be that time spent with Edward Hopper's rendering of lonely city streets, of luncheonettes on Sunday mornings, might move us into seeing once again.

In any case, the very conception of disclosure, of perspective, like the possibility that encounters with the arts may overcome what Dewey called the "anaesthetic" in experience⁸ and help us break with the mechanical and the routine, feeds my argument for attentiveness to the arts. Equally important is the recognition that they can be opened to consciousness only by intentional imaginative noticing or attending on the part of those who come to them, by a bracketing out of the mundane and the taken-for-granted. I think of novels—Virginia Woolf's and Toni Morrison's and Maxine Hong Kingston's; I think of Jean-Paul Sartre writing of the ways in which the arts appeal to us in our freedom, to our sense that things ought to be, can be otherwise.⁹ And I wonder whether the curricula we devise can be of the kind that awaken, awaken sufficiently to move persons to fight the plague. The plague, of course, refers to the metaphor created by Albert Camus, who wrote of it as referring to—not merely a pestilence or

the German occupation of Paris—abstract thinking, indifference, depersonalization. Some of you remember how Tarrou in that novel organizes sanitary squads to fight the plague. Some of you recall his saying that, in every predicament, it is necessary to take the victims' side "to reduce the damage done."¹⁰ At the end, Dr. Rieux, who has been the narrator of the story and has tried to bear witness on behalf of those who were stricken, talks of the never-ending fight against terror and its onslaughts and what would have to be done again and again by all who, "while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers."¹¹ If pestilence in our time can be identified with exclusion and violation and the marginalization of certain human beings, I would hope to see more and more teachers willing to choose themselves as healers, if not saints.

All this—outrage, an interest in multiplicity and dialogue, feminism, concern for the arts, a hope for healing—leads me to curriculum and the problem of curriculum. Like Elizabeth Minnich, I associate some cultural meaning systems with the curriculum, no matter what the level.¹² She is particularly interested in women's scholarship and the emerging knowledge about women; and she warns against making such scholarship merely additive to what has been recognized as knowledge, or simply mainstreaming it. She says something extremely relevant to the question of diversity with which I am trying to deal when she stresses the need to transform the curriculum rather than merely adding to it. She calls for transformation because the curriculum "remains within a system built on principles of exclusion and characterized by the conceptual errors that those principles necessitate and perpetuate."¹³ Among those errors is the one associated with the connection between what has been presented as knowledge and the tendency of the dominant few (those powerful creatures I described) to define themselves not only as the inclusive kind of human but also as the norm and the ideal.

For all the exposure to difference in our world today, for all the increasing interest in multiple realities, for all the questioning with regard to the "canon" or the official tradition of what are considered to be the great works in the history of literature and ideas, we are aware of the persistence of patriarchal thinking where learning and the curriculum are concerned. We have only to read the persisting challenges to multiculturalism viewed as an effort to open the curriculum to works purportedly representing "lesser" cultures and ways of life, civilizations not yet capable of writing *King Lear* or painting the Sistine ceiling. There are still times when the challenge to multiculturalism is linked to attacks on what is called "P.C." (that evil orientation named "political correctness" by those who want things to stay as they have been). There are times when it is linked to the

kinds of argument raised by the late Allan Bloom when he lamented the loss of commitment to transcendent values, which he thought ought to ground as well as justify our Western civilization.¹⁴ He blamed the rise of ignorance, banality, vulgarity, and "the closing of the American mind" on rock music, feminism, the protests of the 1960s, and German philosophy, particularly existentialism. We may believe him to be extreme and not really representative of those worried about the disuniting of America¹⁵ or "illiberal education"¹⁶ or a withdrawal of acceptance of official truth in the wake of a reliance on interpretation, even interpretation by the stranger or the least among us. I believe, though, that his book and his argument are paradigm cases that illuminate the ways in which knowledge is and has been constructed and frozen into place.

The categories of sex, gender, race, and class are often thought of in terms of narrative practices today. There are ways of using language that lead to the invention of ethnicities or to the identification of certain kinds of being as undesirable.¹⁷ There are ways of speaking and telling that construct silences, create "others," invent gradations of social difference necessary for the identification of certain kinds of norms. (I have often wondered about the appeal of gradations or hierarchies or "stages" of development in our educational system. We tend so easily to forget that they are human constructions and cannot be found in nature any more than the perfect triangle can be found.)

What good would the patriarchal, rational standard be if it were not defined in opposition to the nonmasculine or the feminine, to the ostensibly irrational, dilatory, serendipitous, illogical, inefficient, playful person who prefers holding hands to staying at the computer, who likes to look at stars for no reason at all, who wonders and wanders beyond technocratic control? There are paradigms throughout our culture that function deliberately to repress, to belittle other ways of being, and sometimes to make those alternative ways appear threatening, requiring censorship or prohibition or even a violent demise. The response to the "Children of the Rainbow" curriculum is a sad example, especially in the way its linking of gay and lesbian families (presented on one page as "real people") to a range of atypical or minority families aroused fear and loathing, and a conscious distortion. Some even said that the very presentation of gay and lesbian families (a way of granting dignity to the children growing up in such families) was a disguised way of teaching sodomy.

Thinking of curriculum, realizing that it always emerges out of an interplay among conceptions of knowledge, conceptions of the human being, and conceptions of the social order, I want to lay stress once more on the way in which universals are structured (like the managerial or the military or the technological norm of what it is to be human), categories are invented,

and discourse is manipulated. Just think of the taken-for-granted assumption that heterosexuality is universal, or that the public space is (by definition) a patriarchal space available only to those who live by patriarchal norms. Think again of the dominating visions and prescriptions—if not those of Allan Bloom or the proponents of cultural literacy, the formulations of those who talk in terms of curriculum frameworks for curricula oriented to specified outcomes, outcomes spelled out in terms of competencies and proficiencies demanded by the technological society and by the competitive needs of an economic system evidently in decline. The preoccupation with standards, with mathematical and scientific superiority, is so great and so convincing that the old categories, the exclusive structures I have been trying to describe, are allowed to stand and to remain unquestioned.

I am not suggesting that we do away with liberal studies or with the disciplines. I am certainly not suggesting that we stop attending to the development of critical and reflective habits of mind. It seems to me, however, that we need to conceive the disciplines provisionally, always open to revision. They provide, after all, perspectives on the lived world; or, as others see them, they offer entry points to the great conversation that has been going on over time. They are, they must be responsive to changing interpretations of what it is to exist in the contemporary world—at the margin, in the center, or in between. Indeed, there has been a growing tendency to look at fields of study or bodies of knowledge contextually. They are cumulative modes of sense-making inevitably influenced by the discontinuous events in history. We need only recall how the work done in women's history has opened new vistas on the landscapes of the past, once wholly demarcated by powerful males. There are the changed ways of seeing identified with what many of us recognize as "women's ways of knowing"—concrete, transactional, narrative in form.¹⁸ There are the approaches to science affected, it is now realized, by gender: engagements *with* the objects of study rather than analytic work *on* them. We are likely to pose questions today that were unlikely before, simply because of the revising that has been going on. Lately, I have been wondering again about American education since the founding of the common school in the early nineteenth century. Such reformers as Horace Mann and Henry Barnard have always dominated the scene presented to us; and suddenly I find myself speculating about the lives of all the single women who taught in the schools. They could not get positions if they were married, you recall; and many were the lonely wards or "spinster" sisters in middle-class families, women and girls who "boarded out" with local families, who may have lived together. We know too little because their voices have been silenced, their faces kept invisible by the way the past has been structured. And, yes, pondering the insistence on universal heterosexuality, I wonder about the seminarians sent to the fron-

tier towns to distribute tracts; I wonder (recalling the "marriage scene" with Queequeg and Ishmael at the start of *Moby Dick*)¹⁹ about real life on those whaling ships on their two- or three-year journeys around the world. Leslie Fiedler used as a subtitle for a book called *Love and Death in the American Novel*²⁰ this presumably amusing phrase: "Come back to the raft, Huck honey." He gained a little attention with his suggestions relating to homosexuality, at least in fictional domains; today we might take it more seriously and impart a greater significance than before.

There is some agreement today on the need to reject single dominating visions or interpretations, whether they come from textbook publishers, school superintendents, local religious bodies, teachers, or even students. But we are only beginning to realize the importance of including, whenever possible, alternative visions on what is offered as historical truth or literary renderings or even certain empirical discoveries. We are beginning to learn as well what has to be done to counter the fixed and monological views. At the very least, we have to keep reminding those willing to pay heed that gay people and lesbian people or people from Caribbean islands or women of all races and classes or eastern or mideastern persons have distinctive ways of constituting reality, ways that have—for a decent stretch of time—to be granted integrity. If there is to be a truly humane, plague-free community in this country, it must be one responsive to increasing numbers of life-stories, to more and more "different" voices. Yes, many of the shapes are alike; there are tonalities that resemble one another, that merge. But there are differing nuances, shimmering contours; no one exactly duplicates any other. This is what ought to be attended to, even as we resonate to what is common, what is shared.

Democracy, Dewey wrote, is a community always in the making.²¹ If educators hold this in mind, they will remember that democracy is forever incomplete; it is founded in possibility. Even in the small, the local spaces in which teaching is done, educators may begin creating the kinds of situations where, at the very least, students will begin telling the stories of what they are seeking, what they know and might not yet know, exchanging stories with others grounded in other landscapes, at once bringing something into being that is in-between. As they do so, what Hannah Arendt called "webs of relationship" may be woven, webs overlaying the worldly things people normally talk about when they are together. It is when they begin disclosing who they are to one another that worldly things can be overgrown with such a web, "with an entirely different in-between which consists of deeds and words and owes its origin exclusively to people's acting and speaking directly to one another."²² It is at moments like these that persons begin to recognize each other and, in the experience of recognition, feel the need to take responsibility for one another. This means respond-

ing to one another as a sister or a brother being in the process of choosing, of becoming what that person (in the midst of others) is not yet.

This brings me back to the ways there are of conceiving learners, those living beings we hope will come to learn by means of what the curriculum presents. Again, it is not a matter of determining the frames into which learners must fit, not a matter of having predefined stages in mind. Rather, it would be a question of releasing potential learners to order their lived experiences in divergent ways, to give them narrative form, to give them voice. Above all, the silencing that takes place in many classrooms must be stopped, as must the blurring over of differences. There is relevance for this in what certain feminist writers have been saying, especially where identity is concerned. Luce Irigaray, for instance, speaks of how important it is to interpret the ways we are determined by and through discourse: as good children, perhaps, or naughty ones, or deviants, or as inverted reproductions of the one who is doing the defining. This can be particularly important for gay and lesbian young people, who may have to be helped to understand the reasons others are defining them as they do, especially when they are too young to see. Irigaray and others today ask girls and women to view themselves as plural, multiple, willing to break with "normal" definitions, sometimes to break up what is generally called the "truth" with laughter.²³ For some it may mean the acknowledgment of desires and fulfillments others deny. For most it should mean a rejection of measuring rods, a refusal to "grade" anyone's story against a standard norm.

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, beginning as it does with a treatment of the first paragraph of the "Dick and Jane" basic reader, shows the power of such official stories (or "master narratives") in dominating consciousness. Morrison's Pecola Breedlove is demeaned by the story, since her world ("at the hem of life") is quite the obverse of the one described. She wants desperately to have blue eyes like Shirley Temple, since the culture has imposed on her the idea that only someone blue-eyed partakes in the human reality.²⁴ We are only now becoming fully aware that it is only when persons are enabled to shape their own experiences in their own fashion, when they become critical of the mystifications that falsify so much, that they become able to name their worlds. At once, they may orient themselves to what they conceive as the good.

I can only say once more that situations have to be deliberately created in order for students to break free in this way. Coming together in their pluralities and their differences, they may finally articulate how they are choosing themselves and what the projects are by means of which they can identify themselves. We all need to recognize each other in our striving, our becoming, our inventing of the possible. And, yes, it is a question of acting in the light of a vision of what might be—a vision that enables peo-

ple to perceive the voids, take heed of the violations, and move (if they can) to repair. Such a vision, we have found, can be enlarged and enriched by those on the margins, whoever they are. The fine feminist African-American writer bell hooks has written what it is like to be on the margin but at once part of the whole:

Living as we did—on the edge—we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin. We understood both. This mode of seeing reminded us of the existence of a whole universe, a main body made up of both margin and center. Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of the whole. This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world view—a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair, strengthened our sense of self and solidarity.²⁵

I would hope to find that oppositional world view somehow incorporated in or oriented to dimensions of our curriculum. Not only does it offer an alternative perspective. It creates a dissonance, a necessary dissonance between what is taken for granted at the center and what might, what ought to be. It is such dissonance, like the sense of obstacle, that gives rise to the questioning that may move the young to learn to learn. I am reminded by bell hooks of Michel Foucault when he examined the likelihood of a culture without restraints. He said that the point of a system of constraints is whether it leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. The restrictions that exist, he said, have to be within the reach of those affected by them so they at least have the possibility of altering them.²⁶ It would appear to me, in an emerging society marked by a rich range of differences, that restrictions do indeed have to be brought within reach so that persons of all sorts can come together to change them. There must be a deepening consciousness of the plague and the need for healing. There must be a confronting of the contradictions, the instances of savagery, the neglect, and the possibility of care. We require curriculum that can help provoke persons to reach past themselves and to become. We want to see them in their multiplicity linking arms, becoming recognized. We want them in their ongoing quests for what it means to be human to be free to move. We want them—and we want to enable them—to exist.

Notes

- 1 John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1954), p. 183.
- 2 Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1991).

- 3 Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue* (Part II of *The Metaphysic of Morals*) (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), pp. 42ff.
- 4 Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), p. 161.
- 5 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 17.
- 6 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 288-93.
- 7 See John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1916), p. 408; and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 91.
- 8 John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, & Co., 1934), pp. 53-54.
- 9 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Literature and Existentialism* (New York: Citadel Press, 1963), pp. 62-63.
- 10 Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), p. 230.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 278.
- 12 Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, *Transforming Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 11-13.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.
- 14 Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).
- 15 See Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992).
- 16 Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* (New York: Free Press, 1991).
- 17 See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). Note, especially, Part II, "Nature, Culture, and Writing," pp. 95-192.
- 18 Mary Belenky et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
- 19 Herman Melville, *Moby Dick* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), pp. 27, 28.
- 20 Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960).
- 21 Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, pp. 148ff.
- 22 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 182.
- 23 Luce Irigaray, *Towards a Culture of Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
- 24 Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1972).
- 25 Bell Hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p. 149.
- 26 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977). See, especially, "Two Lectures," pp. 78-108.