

Invited Paper: AERA 2008

**FROM BARE FACT TO INTELLECTUAL POSSIBILITY:
THE LEAP OF IMAGINATION**

by Maxine Greene

I believe I was given the honor of speaking with the idea that, since I am an educational philosopher and an 'aesthetic educator', I might identify some connections between educational research and the arts and humanities. We are all aware of the challenges to dualisms since the age of Descartes. We no longer posit the mind or consciousness in separation from an objective 'reality'. We are aware of the importance of perspective, of point of view, of situatedness, as we are of the contingencies involved when it comes to the influence of culture or community. Still, there remain apparent dichotomies. There is the sense of what is felt to be an immovable facticity when it comes to freedom of choice, a kind of implacable necessity standing against possibility. It is associated for some with what has been empirically described by the social scientist; for others what is grasped by what is called the 'natural attitude' by the phenomenologist, or (metaphorically) the "flatland" by a novelist like Thomas Mann.

John Dewey, responding to the consequences of research in psychology and the social sciences did not equal the quality of the effort expended. "It was due," he wrote, "to the lack of imagination in generating leading ideas." Having speculation in mind, he went on to say "Because we are afraid of speculative ideas, we do over and over again an immense amount of dead specialized work in the region of 'facts'. We forget that such facts are only data; that is, are only fragmentary, uncompleted meanings; and unless they can be rounded out into complete ideas--a work that can only be done by hypotheses, by a free imagination of intellectual possibilities--they are as helpless as all maimed things and as repellent as needlessly thwarted ones." Then he protested against the borrowing of thoughts from outside or from the past and made a plea for a casting off "of that intellectual timidity which hampers the wings of imagination." He asked for more "speculative audacity, more faith in ideas. And, at length, he asked his readers to slough of a cowardly dependence "upon those partial ideas to which we are wont to give the name of facts."

Imagination, as Emily Dickinson wrote, "lights the slow fuse of possibility." It opens to what might be, to alternatives. It suggests what might follow a train of thought.

(PAPER INCOMPLETE - TO BE CONTINUED)