Retrieving the Language of Compassion: The Education Professor in Search of Community

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There are moments when many of us sense an odd distance between the ethos of teacher education and the lived lives of the publics to whom we hope the schools can respond. There are moments when I feel a similar gap between ourselves and many of the teachers in those schools. I have some of our normatives in mind, our styles of explanations, our ways of putting things. To be conscious of this cannot but raise questions about our purposes as educators and the relation between those purposes and what might be called public opinion in its diverse spheres and domains. Given the times we are living in, it may also stir up a set of questions respecting democracy and pluralism and community. At this moment of breaking walls abroad (and breaking windows), of calls for freedom and increasing supplies of consumer goods, we are surely obligated to reflect on what we mean by a free society — we who live and teach at the very heart of consumerism. We are obligated to ask ourselves what we have in mind when we speak of a good society.

How do we adjust community commitments to private loyalties or parochial faiths? How do we reconcile the demands of multiculturalism with the requirements of civic life? How do we relate spiritual longings to the desire for goods and more goods? How do we cultivate free expression in the glare of the media and in the shadows of technical control? What of equality and social justice? What of the workings of power? Not only ought our reflections feed into our collaborative choosing. They have much to do with what we communicate and how we communicate to parents, teachers, administrators, and (indirectly) to the young themselves.

An indifference to the poor and the needy is increased by what often appears to be official neglect. At once, growing economic uncertainty and a feeling of vulnerability bring prejudices and stereotypes into the open, atti-

tudes that may well impinge on us when we go to schools. Knowing how
threatened many people feel, we cannot be immune to or silent about exist-
ing inequities. We cannot turn our backs on the extremes of poverty, the en-
demic racism, the abuses of children and of the aged, the draining away of
authentic care. We realize at the same time that we have to show sympathy
for the unease and anger of those who feel themselves ignored or in some
manner demeaned, who look to their institutions to restore a traditional or-
der of things. Disturbed by dislocations in their own work places, family dis-
ruptions, eroded authority systems, they often feel personally threatened by
the violence of "others," by addiction, by the all too present crime. Shaken
by what they perceive as license and unprecedented immorality, many re-
treat into enclaves. They reject attempts at achieving with alien strangers
what Anthony Lukas calls a "common ground."[1] Variously frustrated and
troubled, such populations do not become members of articulate publics;
most of them do not vote. There are reports of an emergence of "an unhapy
consensus . . . that domestic politics has become so shallow, mean, and even
meaningless that it is failing to produce the ideas and leadership needed to
guide the United States in a rapidly changing world."[2] Individuals from dif-
ferent social strata talk cynically of what it means to be citizens. When we
contrast this with the recent affirmations during the Czechoslovakian "velvet
revolution," or in other parts of Eastern Europe, when we ponder what be-
comes possible when human beings deliberately choose themselves in this
way, we cannot but see implications for teacher education and the schools.
Can we accept the idea that citizenship becomes significant only to those de-
prived of it, those who are enslaved? Or can we, working with those legally
free, create situations in which diverse persons name what stands in the way
of their becoming and their community? Vaclav Havel, writing from prison,
said: "If I consider the problem as that which the world is turning me into—
that is, a tiny screw in a giant machine, deprived of human identity—then
there is really nothing I can do. . . . If, however, I consider it as that which
each of us . . . has the basic potential to become, which is to say an autono-
mous human being capable of acting responsibly to and for the world, then
of course there is a great deal I can do."[3]

Confronting charges with regard to "mediocrity" and valuelessness, we sel-
dom address people in terms like Havel's. We devise an institutional dis-
course in which to address one another, nearby bureaucrats, corporate in-
terests, state officials, writers of "reform" reports. The language is frequently
the language of efficiency, or technical rationality, or policy. Some of us,
perhaps especially in the foundations or in curriculum studies, are drawn to
communicate in the discourse of neo-Marxism or postmodernism. It is a dis-
course indubitably helpful in understanding the "administered society,"[4] the
irrelevance of the "metanarrative"[5] or any total framework that resolves all
differences or makes all contributions to a conversation "commensurable."[6]

More and more of us are finding it useful to refer to Michel Foucault and what he has enabled us to see with respect to the "technology of power" and "normalization."[7]

Of course this is important, as any critical inquiry is important, particularly when it provokes self-reflectiveness and something resembling a critique of ideology. It is important too because it challenges what Mikhail Bakhtin called the "monologism" in Western culture as he put his releasing emphasis on dialogue: "The single adequate form for *verbally expressing* authentic human life is the *open-ended dialogue*. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds."[8] Even those of us aware of this and of the significance of paying heed to multiple voices spend too little time thinking about how to engage in authentic dialogue with those outside our professional circles.

There is a heightened interest in what is variously called "choice" today, in school-based management, parental involvement, collaboration, and local control. Few of us, picturing ourselves in such contexts, have thought about what it might actually mean to bridge the gulfs and address ourselves to the felt concerns of persons who are different, now increasingly involved. We conceal our own life stories. We avoid dialogue by speaking through "professional" categories when we are not concentrating on issues of management or specific pragmatic problems. Despite our recognition of the damage done by racist exclusion, tracking, and humiliation in the schools, we are still likely to make members of minority groups "other," and to objectify them by doing so. We look at them through the lenses of altruism often, and that may be another way of distancing. And yet we know that (as Ralph Ellison wrote) the "invisibility" suffered by so many is due to "a peculiar disposition" of *our* minds,[9] *our* self-serving righteousness. If we cannot classify them as deviant, we turn our attention away from teenage mothers or children caught in the drug trade. Sophisticated, well-informed, benign, few of us have been face-to-face or in dialogue with sufferers from AIDS. When it comes to the children of immigrants, or to newly arrived parents uprooted from places we have never seen, we gaze in presumably benevolent detachment. When required, we assign; we arrange. We are like the caseworker in George Konrad's novel: "I question, explain, prove, disprove, comfort, threaten, grant, deny, demand, approve, legalize, rescind. In the name of legal principles and provisions I defend law and order for want of anything better to do." What he tries to do, of course, is to live with and feel with the idiot child of two clients who killed themselves. At the very end, he says, "Let all those come who want to; one of us will talk, the other will listen; at least we shall be together."[10]

To cross the distances, to come together in this way — that is one of the concerns of this article. The alternative, for much of the time, is to be part of what Robert Reich calls the "Benevolent Community" and, in doing so, experience a kind of "infectious" irresponsibility. For Reich, this is partially explained by the fact that any instrument of collective obligation gives individuals "a device for shifting the cost of their own irresponsibility on to others."[11] It is this that Konrad's character takes so seriously, this that Havel has resisted over the years. I am reminded of Michael Ignatieff writing of the "needs of strangers" and of how problematic it is to speak *for* the needs of strangers, how easily we can be deceived.[12] He talks of what persons need "to realize the full extent of their potential,"[13] and he reminds those of us who need reminding that there is a gulf between what human beings need and what "collective wisdom" is able to provide. Everything depends on compassion, feeling with, and on dialogue, an attending to the multiple voices of beings with a multiplicity of needs.

Among the voices, among the strangers are working-class individuals and certain members of the middle class to whom we seldom pay heed. They are the perfectly ordinary men and women we pass in the streets, sit next to in the buses, stand on line with in the supermarkets. They are the ones described by Don DeLillo at the end of *White Noise*, the people trying to find their way when the shelves have been rearranged, men "in Sansabelt slacks and bright knit shirts" and women "with a powdered and fussy look, a self-conscious air" preparing for an anxious event. "And this is where we wait together," says the narrator, "regardless of age, our carts stocked with brightly colored goods. A slowly moving line, satisfying, giving us time to glance at the tabloids in the racks. Everything we need that is not food or love is here in the tabloid racks. The tales of the supernatural and the extraterrestrial. The miracle vitamins, the cures for cancer, the remedies for obesity. The cults of the famous and the dead." Disturbed as we may be by this rendering of what might be called "cultural literacy," we are likely to identify with people afflicted by "white noise," by a "language of waves and radiation" few of them can comprehend.[14]

It must be recognized, however, that many of us feel estranged from those very human beings when we try to define our educational goals, diversify our curricula, introduce storytelling or interpretive studies into the classrooms, try to draw attention to the arts. As Barbara Ehrenreich makes us realize, we tend to think in terms of stereotypes (accurate or not) when we think about the blue-collar worker or the lower middle class. She quotes a textbook picturing of that stereotype: "In it, an overweight, middle-aged man wearing overalls, T-shirt, and a workman's cap stares dully into the middle distance, apparently at some point just above the Rheingold beer can wet in front of him on the table. Next to him, a thin-bright-eyed woman, who has no Rheingold can to consider, stares inquisitively at this 'worker' who is perhaps

her husband."[15] From the middle-class perspective (and, most likely, from many of our perspectives), the working class seems to be represented by white male workers, in part because work (manual labor, bricklaying, trucking) has been so long conceived of as a masculine activity. Working-class women, familiar from encounters in retail stores and restaurants, have not seemed quite so remote; and, in any case, they tended to appear as passive as Archie Bunker's wife until the coming (as Ehrenreich has recently pointed out) of Rosanne Barr and her ways of challenging "the deeper prejudices of the professional class."[16] The crucial point, again, has to do with the distance between working-class people as we tend to perceive them and a professional ethos that is liberal even as it is technically oriented, prone to find expression in an idiom of expertise. We still tend to believe, with Seymour Lipset, that the working-class person is a bundle of "deep-rooted hostilities expressed by ethnic prejudice, political authoritarianism, and chiliastic transvaluational religion."[17]

No longer a Joe Hill, a larger-than-life union man, the one we view as worker or lower class buys lottery tickets on the way home, bets (perhaps) at the Off-Track Betting Office, reads the New York *Daily News*, is somehow complicitous with racial outbreaks in parts of the city. More seriously, we think we see him in the audiences for the televangelists, or in right-wing meetings hailing the American flag. Ehrenreich may or may not be right when she says that all this refers to the working class "as discovered," a product of middle-class anxiety and prejudice:

> This discovery occurred at what was for many middle-class intellectuals a time of waning confidence and emerging conservatism. Professional authority was under attack; permissiveness seemed already to have ruined at least one generation of middle-class youth. And so, in turning to the working class, middle-class observers tended to seek legitimation for their own more conservative impulses. They did not discover the working class that was—in the late sixties and early seventies—caught up in the greatest wave of labor militancy since World War II. They discovered a working class more suited to their mood: dumb, reactionary, and bigoted.[18]

We are certainly aware of the hostility to the professional class on the part of many members of the working class and the lower middle class, as we are of the hostility on the part of the right-wing upper class. Much of this finds expression in the erosion of what used to be thought of as professional authority, with respect to parents and communities and with respect to the children. There are many groups in many schools similar to George Willis's "lads" in *Learning to Labour*, that account of British working-class boys ostensibly at war with authority.[19] Now we are likely to see a kindred resistance and disinterest among middle-class young people in the near suburbs, if they

happen not to be motivated by strong desires for status and for things. There are teachers who struggle to arouse them with critical talk or rebellious talk redolent of the sixties, just as there are teachers who work to appeal to a feminist consciousness among young women. Here too we discern a distance, different from the distance that still exists between white professors and black teachers or white professors and black students, but one equally extreme.

How, given such gaps and dissonances, are we to attain what Robert Bellah speaks of as community coherence, or a "civic friendship toward our fellow citizens"[20] that might provide a ground for the new decisions we are asked to make? How can we recapture what Walter Feinberg has called "the moral mission of American education . . . in light of the new American pluralism?"[21] In some degree, yes, it may involve efforts to bring into being conditions that permit what Clifford Geertz calls the kind of integration of cultural life that makes it possible for "people inhabiting different worlds to have a genuine and reciprocal impact upon one another."[22] Others, like Jurgen Habermas, still see the possibility of consensus if a philosophy of intersubjectivity can replace the philosophy of subjectivity, if people can attain a "communicative competence" as they speak from the ground of their own shared norms. We need, writes Habermas, to ground our institutions in "domination-free communication." He goes on to say that "communicative reason makes itself felt in the binding force of intersubjective understanding and reciprocal recognition."[23] Unlike others who are sceptical about rational orders and even about the whole idea of the human being as an autonomous rational agent, he stresses the harm that is done when the structures of rational life are violated. At once, he draws attention to personal expressiveness and to the ways in which the rational potential of speech is interwoven "with the *resources* of any particular lifeworld."[24]

The arguments go on, largely among scholars, about Habermas's "modernity,"[25] about the insufficiency of his notion of "distorted" communication, about the unlikelihood of his mode of intersubjectivity leading to identification with community. On all sides, nevertheless, there is a preoccupation with plurality and multiplicity, with the distinctiveness and incommensurability of lived worlds, with the necessity for dialogue — and consensus, and freedom, and resistance, and some renewal of community. Richard Rorty speaks, as educators often do, of shared beliefs and commitments; he writes of "solidarity" in what he calls "a community of the liberal intellectuals of the secular modern West."[26] Saying that, he is articulating what we in teacher education generally take for granted when it comes to liberal culture, toleration, free inquiry, and the notions we associate with pragmatism. To realize this, all we need do is to hark back to the horror we feel at the sentencing of Salmon Rushdie to death because of his authorship of *The Satanic Verses*, or the outrage we experience at the memory of the massacre of the Chinese students not very long ago. At the same time, we recognize on some level

that it is difficult, if not impossible, to justify our beliefs by referring to something objectively existent in the universe—some Law or Word or concept of the Good above and beyond all differences. Reading Rorty, we have to acknowledge sadly that we cannot even justify much of what we most deeply believe to our own constituents. Like him, some of us might have to say, "This preference is not built into us by human nature. It is just the way *we* live now."[27] But then we might have to deal with what the philosopher Cornel West says in the same collection. He writes that Rorty's ethnocentrism "solicits critiques from those victimized by the North Atlantic conversation which often excludes them and by the North Atlantic societies which usually oppress them."[28] In his view, it is the structures of our society and the mechanisms that support them (class exploitation, patriarchy, racism) that reproduce and reinforce marginality. If that is indeed the case (as it probably is), how are teacher educators to communicate what they presume to be the liberal, democratic, pragmatic ideal (in the face of close-mindedness, fundamentalism, the regressiveness of malaise) and at once narrow the margins? How are we to break through the restricting categories, strive toward some coherence, *and*, following Foucault's advice, "prefer what is positive and multiple, differences over uniformity, flows over unities, mobile arrangements over systems?"[29]

   Confronting the meanings of plurality and dispersion, we can still seek a language of compassion or a way of communicating to concrete persons in their differences and mobility. We cannot communicate if we insist on fixities and certainties. We have to allow for a sometimes unimaginable diversity among the narratives of those we address. We have, as Dewey suggested in another connection, to cooperate "with the force of events" and make "clear and coherent the meaning of the daily detail."[30] The questions being raised about the "individual" in everyday life are multiplying today; and we are slowly realizing that the individual (once viewed as atomic, self-complete) has to be viewed as contextualized, enmeshed, perhaps produced by overlapping disciplinary technologies of power.[31] Trying to *re*-view what we have long conceived as the individual, I find a kind of paradigm when I *re*-read the so-called realistic novel as it emerged in Europe and the United States.

PARADIGMS IN FICTION

One of the high moments in the nineteenth century came with the rise of that approach to the writing of fictions, fictions suddenly having to do with ordinary people living banal and seemingly commonplace lives. We no longer decontextualize such works, as once we did. We no longer see the characters in them in the light of some human "essence," defining them in advance of their being in the world. Moreover—and this is equally important—we realize that those characters can be summoned into contingent life only by

intentional acts of reader consciousness, and that the texts opened up are as much the texts of readers' lives as they are of the invented lives of characters in the texts. I shall be saying something similar with regard to lives in our communities.

Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* was one of the first and best examples of a break with the stylized, highly conventionalized text — the aristocratic, the moralistic, the genteel. Flaubert brought into being a housewife heroine with a devoted and suffering bovine husband. What distinguished her from any other bourgeoise was the intensity and the vastness of her self-regarding dream. That sort of figure, caught in the exigencies and concreteness of the everyday, was soon appearing over and over in Western literature. The allegorical figures of the past, like the courtly gentlewomen and gentlemen, gave way to persons like George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke, who wanted so much to be a St. Theresa in the midst of the provinces, imperfect and down-to-earth as they were. Suddenly, readers of the same class were enabled to see a new dignity and a new pathos in farmers, tenants, publicans, doctors, shopkeepers, blacksmiths, seamstresses, parsons, all transacting in the dailiness of a Middlemarch, interconnecting, clashing, weaving in and out, constituting overlapping worlds. There were the clerks and bureaucrats and students and prostitutes and innkeepers in Dostoevsky's "topsy-turvy" towns, revealing faces never envisaged before. There was the crew of Herman Melville's whaling ship, the *Pequod*, subordinated in their grand diversity to their captain's "manic will," as there were the pallid women operatives in a factory Melville portrayed in "The Tartarus of Maids," where powdery byways and dusty corridors came to visibility for the first time, along with the faces of the "girls." River people and riverbank inhabitants in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* surround the raft trying to aim for freedom; and the particularity of a black man, slave and sage and father surrogate, breaks through systems, breaks through frames. It continued, of course, into the present century, as we were brought into startling contact with Frank Norris's working men, Theodore Dreiser's struggling figures showing their profiles as they felt themselves to be cogs in a vast machine, Sherwood Anderson's otherwise faceless "grotesques" leaving their small midwestern towns, Edith Wharton's women tossed and trampled in a currency-ridden, class-structured social life. I could go on, as anyone could, to F. Scott Fitzgerald's transfigured farmer's son, Jay Gatsby; to Harriette Arnow's mountain woman, the dollmaker named Gertie Nevels; to Steinbeck's Okies and cannery workers; to Bernard Malamud's grocery clerks and baseball players; to Saul Bellow's wandering businessmen and teachers and broken-hearted poets. I could summon up, at least for a moment, Tillie Olsen's woman ironing, responding to the social worker talking about her daughter so: "Let her be. So all that is in her will not bloom — but in how many does it? There is still enough left to live by. Only help her to know — help make it so there is cause for her to know — that she is more

than this dress on the ironing board, helpless before the iron."[32] Or I could evoke Toni Morrison's Pecola Breedlove desperate for the "bluest eyes" and destroyed, "a winged but grounded bird, intent on the blue void it could not reach—could not even see—but which filled the valleys of the mind."[33]

My argument is not so much that we should rediscover singularity and involvement through encounters with fiction. It is that we see in such encounters something analogous to the connections we hope to have now and then with those across the distances. Apart from the need to teach the young in their diversity how to conceptualize by means of the disciplines, how to move beyond the skills and rudiments and use those rudiments in teaching themselves, there is the challenge to engage them in community building, in a search (as Dewey put it) "for the Great Community."[34] As Dewey saw it, learning to be human means developing through "the give-and-take of communication an effective sense of being an individually distinctive member of a community."[35] If we extend this by taking into account the technologies of power Foucault describes, the connection between power and the "regime of truth" or truth as the object "of immense diffusion and consumption" through the apparatuses of education and media,[36] we may pay more attention to creating conditions under which people can resist what is called "normalization." This can best be done by making it possible for them to speak in accord with their own needs and desires, to avoid grouping and categorization. It is with this in mind that I find analogies in the novel, especially when we make an effort to perceive each novel within the contexts of a moment of social life, to see each character as part of a network or a series of networks. We can see now when we engage with Melville's characters or Toni Morrison's or Don DeLillo's that power, as Foucault said, cannot be viewed as a superstructure that succeeds in homogenizing individuals. There are different mechanisms of power, he suggested, loosely coupled, arising from local conditions and particular needs. They work through the disciplines on board a ship or the differentiations in pay or the influence of what Captain Ahab called "Cash, ay, cash." In Morrison's universe, there is the complex play of racist practices; there is the impact of film and children's books and language. In DeLillo's, there are electric circuits and toxic clouds and the semiotics of popular culture, all requiring a desperate opening of spaces so that people can understand enough of what is happening to break free. Where children are concerned today, Foucault said that the interplay of family, school, and justice does not homogenize; it establishes "connections, cross-references, complementarities, and demarcations."[37] What follows for us is an attentiveness to multiplicity, even within each person that we meet, and an opening to the diverse voices in situations of dialogue.

What I have thought of as a language of compassion has been usurped over the last decade by the monological formulations of the Right, those who speak (as we have done too seldom) of the family, of home life, of mother-

hood, of the young. Much of it has been machine-made and inauthentic. Much of it has become what Milan Kundera calls "kitsch." At one point, in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, he describes a senator pointing to some children running on the grass and telling the refugee Sabina, "Now, that's what I call happiness." Behind what he says is some notion that he understands the plight of a refugee from Communist Czechoslovakia, where there were (he was sure) neither grass nor children. Sabina can imagine him on a reviewing stand in a Prague square, smiling the smile Communist statesmen beamed to the smiling citizens below their reviewing stands. The senator had only one argument in his favor, writes Kundera,

> his feeling. When the heart speaks, the mind finds it indecent to object. In the realm of kitsch, the dictatorship of the heart resigns supreme. The feeling induced by kitsch must be a kind the multitudes can share. Kitsch . . . must derive from the basic images people have engraved in their memories: the ungrateful daughter, the neglected father, children running on the grass, the motherland betrayed, first love. Kitsch causes two tears to flow in quick succession. The first tear says: How nice to see children running on the grass! The second tear says: How nice to be moved, together with all mankind, by children running on the grass! It is the second tear that makes kitsch kitsch.[38]

REFUSING THE MONOLOGICAL

What we in teacher education need to resist, I believe, is (first) the monological, the unidirectional address and the assumption of the single voice of "all mankind." We have to resist as well the "basic images" and, surely, "the dictatorship of the heart." Compassion signifies a feeling *with* as another human being concerned to sustain the fulfillment of the other. The language of compassion, as I view it, may be what Michael Ignatieff calls a "language adequate to the times we live in." He goes on to say that we need to see how we live now and to do so with words and images that do not allow us to escape into nostalgia:

> We need words to keep us human. Being human is an accomplishment like playing an instrument. It takes practice. The keys must be mastered. The old scores must be committed to memory. It is a skill we can forget. . . . Our needs are made of words: they come to us in speech, and they can die for lack of expression. Without a public language to help us find our own words, our needs will dry up in silence. . . . Without the light of language, we risk becoming strangers to our better selves.[39]

In Ignatieff's case, it is the problem of finding words with which to speak in the name of the strangers at the door. In our case, it is the problem of finding

words with which to speak to those who can tell us something of themselves if we create releasing situations and open ourselves to them as well.

The asymmetry that exists between ourselves and our students, like that which exists (or will exist) between our students and their students, will continue to exist, and it has to be named. Paulo Freire talks about the challenging that is required on the part of the critical educator if she or he wishes to enable students to question the incidence of constraint they experience, and to help them come to understand how they are in and conscious of what they know as their world.[40] To overcome the vantage point of the outsider, it may be particularly important for the teacher educator to ponder the role that might be taken if she or he avoids the detached or marginal position whenever possible and takes on a role of insider or "connected critic" like the one Michael Walzer describes. He or she is someone who earns authority (or fails to do so) by talking with those around, protesting insistently some of the time, interrupting, remonstrating, arguing for another point of view. Such a critic is "one of us," says Walzer. "Perhaps he has traveled and studied abroad, but his appeal is to local or localized principles; if he has picked up new ideas on his travels, he tries to connect them to the local culture, building on his own intimate knowledge; he is not intellectually detached. Nor is he emotionally detached; he does not wish the natives well; he seeks the success of their common enterprise."[41] If this may be taken as a model of a sort for a teacher educator, it suggests a certain doubleness of consciousness. We are asked to reach out to those around us in the complex meshes of relationship and power that entangle us as well as them. At once, we are asked to consult the "new ideas" and perspectives picked up while traveling or studying or reading or being with larger circles responsive to less local norms. If we experience ourselves involved in a common enterprise, however, it may be easier to notice the variations among persons entering that enterprise from different locations, just as it may be easier to become aware of the norms or principles to which they respond. Surely, on some level, we are more likely to attend to the darting and hungry dreams, the desires for possession, the fears of loss, the boredom of daily life, the pleasures of dining room tables, the stringent delights of running in the park. These are the concrete details, the dispersed details sometimes in a polar relationship with the habits and orientations presumably defining the aggregates we create when we make strangers out of those around. When we do this, quite obviously, we are also making them "subjects" of a power education professors always have at hand.

There are no guarantees that we can bridge some of the distances, not in a society so torn apart by self-regard and lack of care and violations of all sorts. Trying to make our ethos meaningful and responsive to a confusion of contesting needs, we can at least help people say what they desire, what makes them hurt, what makes them want to repair. Listening to them, hoping they will listen to one another, we might sometimes be able to bring

some of our teachers-to-be, for example, into a version of Dewey's "articulate public."[42] This happens when there is a recognition that the consequence of a transaction somewhere is having an impact on many people beyond those involved in the original transaction. If, say, an ostensibly private decision is made by a landlord to gentrify some buildings, if that then leads to the closing of a day-care center or a store-front school, something has occurred that reaches far beyond the private. Children and mothers are affected; a whole neighborhood may be undermined. Certain persons, paying heed, may come together in their indignation and take a kind of responsibility for what is happening—by picketing, perhaps, demonstrating, or contacting their representatives who are expected to be answerable to them. Doing these things, they are choosing themselves as an articulate public; they are bringing into being, in their particular neighborhood, a public sphere. Similar things can happen in institutions (when tuitions go up, when minority scholarships are cut, when women are harassed, when newspapers are unreasonably censored); they can happen in and around local schools.

In a recent issue of *The Nation*, Ralph Nader and Mark Green offer examples of what must be attended to if we are to alter what they called the "legacy of shame" we have inherited in this country over these past ten years of neglect. They speak of infants, children, single mothers; they bring poverty to the fore and homelessness. They write of racism, of broken bridges and collapsing streets, of unnecessary arms buildups, of a "regressive redistribution of wealth."[43] If we can connect such public issues to private yearning and desire, we might well provoke certain of our constituents to speak as Vaclav Havel did about responsible action.[44] We might move some of them to reach out to and to dream in accord with others about a more humane, more caring world. If this were to occur, there would be the beginnings of a community; there would be the grounding of a public, if we could somehow enact what we are doing together as a common enterprise.

There will be diverse, untidy dreams. The perspectives will differ dramatically; and what they disclose will sometimes be in conflict. (We need only consider what might be revealed through lenses of fairness or entitlement used by different viewers.) The vantage points will never perfectly cohere. No one will ever gain a total view of a consonant, harmonious whole or hear the "grand canonical ensemble" Lewis Thomas imagined as the musical term that might best describe the "chancy kind of order" in our universe, "always on the verge of descending into chaos, held taut against probability by the unremitting, constant surge of energy from the sun."[45] The metaphor illuminates: Whatever order there is will always be chancy; our society is always, in some sense, on the verge. The surge of energy may well have to do with our democracy, or at least the potential of democracy that we in education have so much to do with keeping alive. If there is to be a music of the human sphere, it will have to be dissonant in many of its movements.

It will challenge the chromatic scale; it will shatter the bland calm of the normal and the normalized. It will sound — it will have to sound — as persons find more and more occasions for coming together, in "speech and action," as Hannah Arendt said, to constitute, from their differing perspectives, a "common world."[46]

We have, however, to keep searching for a language of compassion, if only to enable persons to speak with us and with one another about the dissonances they feel, the gaps, the voids, the consciousness of what is not yet — and what might be, what ought to be. We need to imagine the Emma Bovarys striking out helplessly against the windowblinds of the ordinary, the Dorothea Brookes trying to find their ways through the maze of conventional pieties, the Huck Finns beaten down by the children's games and groping toward a territory that no longer exists, the Gertie Nevelses battling the clatter and constraints of the murderous machines in wartime Detroit, the nameless women ironing and pleading for their children to move through the interstices, to find their paths to being. To attend to persons in that fashion is to attend to them in their freedom and in their existential possibility. It is to act upon compassion; it is to teach for the sake of bringing them together to speak together, to project together, to move together — always restlessly — in a dance of life.

Since there is only becoming, since there is no ending, I choose to conclude with a verse from Adrienne Rich's *The Dream of a Common Language*:

> The rules break like a thermometer,
> quicksilver spills across the charted systems,
> we're out in a country that has no language
> no laws, we're chasing the raven and the wren
> through gorges unexplored since dawn
> whatever we do together is pure invention
> the maps they gave us were out of date
> by years . . . we're driving through the desert
> wondering if the water will hold out
> the hallucinations turn to simple villages
> the music on the radio comes clear —
> neither Rosenkavalier nor Gotterdammerung
> but a woman's voice singing old songs
> with new words, with a quiet bass, a flute
> plucked and fingered by women outside the law.[47]

The point is that we are in a new country as we education professors try to recreate our purposes and find new words for the old songs. We will be outside the law until we find our language of compassion; and then we will write our new maps and keep exploring, gorge after untapped gorge. And there will be norms we can agree on, principles we can freely make our own in a

sphere of compassion, a sphere of care. We will be inside; and we will be challenging. The enterprise will be shared.

Notes

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6   Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 316ff.

7   Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p. 159.

8   Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 294. Emphasis in original.

9   Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Signet Books, 1952), p. 7.

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11   Robert Reich, *Tales of a New America* (New York: Times Books, 1987), p. 177.

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15   Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989), p. 108.

16   Barbara Ehrenreich, "The Wretched of the Hearth," *The New Republic*, April 2, 1990, p. 28.

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31   Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, pp. 109ff.

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