

Pondering pedagogy, I think of becoming--teachers becoming, learners becoming. And, yes, I think of making and perceiving works of art, actions that are always incomplete. Certainties, fixities, final solutions; they are yearned for much of the time. On some level, no matter who we are, there is always a desire, a quest for certainty; and numbers of people, at a time like the present, are convinced that they have found it. There has always been a tension between those who depend upon some invisible authority for answers and sanctions and those who have learned to exist in uncertainty, with notions of unrealized possibility rather than the comforts of assurance and predictability.

In my view, education today must confront such tension, as it must take into account the contradictions of this moment in history. In earlier times to call questions unanswerable or problems insoluble was most likely to be viewed as ignorance, ignorance to be remedied by careful thinking, examination of assumptions, the consideration of relevant consequences. The exercise of intelligence would lead to effective problem-solving; and that in turn might lessen the need for a single Truth. Moreover, there was a firm belief in the efficacy of dialogue and the attainment of consensus among those with conflicting opinions and points of view. Confidence in all this was linked to faith in a free society in which everyone had a right to speak for her or himself, to be granted respect, to be spared humiliation. A recognition of the number of human beings condemned to 'invisibility' was (in the 1950s) just beginning to dawn. The fact that this was America, still the site of the "heavenly city" meant that even the neglected, the scorned and degraded, could rely on democratic principles for relief, if not the moral law. In some fashion, this was the foundation of faith in what was thought of as our democratic society--and of the pride and confidence to be nurtured by the public school.

What of today? I am not alone in thinking that pride and confidence in our country are ebbing away--among the young as well as the old. Media overwhelm us all with images of an inexplicable war, exploding car bombs, blood-soaked stretchers, weeping mourners, battles in which no heroes are named until the lists of casualties are named on CNN or WNET.

There is no avoiding talk about or pictures of tortures we inflict, even as we fulminate against terrorists and foreign torturers nor can there be a blotting out of persons (be they 'detainees' or insurgents or presumed terrorists; sealed away in prisons without trial or seized and sent home to countries taking torture for granted. And, clearly, there can be no obliteration of children and adults stranded in the floods, ignored, trudging through the water, jammed together in the so-called 'domes'.

Of course this is familiar to all of us; but I want to make the point that the young people in our schools have been as exposed to all this as we have been; and that, in some way, we are bound to find a mode of teaching that equips the young to deal with often unrecognized ideologies, provides some sense of agency, some consciousness of beginnings rather than closures. At once, we need to enhance our capacity to make sense of our own experiences, to enable those we teach to pursue meanings as they shape their

own life stories, as they are aroused somehow to look through new eyes upon the world around, to listen for new frequencies, to heed shapes and nuances scarcely noticed before.

John Dewey spoke long ago about facts being dead and repellent things until imagination opened the way to intellectual possibilities; and indeed imagination has been called a passion for possibility. It signifies a summoning up of heretofore unsuspected alternatives, of roads not taken, of unwritten letters to the world. It signifies a new kind of authenticity, perhaps the return of a lost spontaneity--an ability to retrieve meanings funded over time. I think of the philosopher Merleau-Ponty saying we are "condemned to meaning"; and I think of our students confronting endless ambiguities and negations--and seeking (if we share their ardor and anxiety) some way of translating this into a search for and, perhaps, a recapturing of meanings. It may be an almost inevitable response to the crowding of contradictions, to what appears to be unanswerable. Engaged in this search, many of us turn to the several arts, not because Goya or Virginia Woolf or Toni Morrison or Mozart or Michelangelo holds solutions the sciences and the social sciences do not, but an encounter with an art form demands a particular kind of interchange or transaction between a live human consciousness and a painting, say, or a novel, or a sonata that becomes a work of art or may be realized as art depending on the reader's or perceiver's willingness and readiness to grasp what is being offered. And to grasp it may mean a transformation of a sort--a changed perspective, a new mode of understanding.