

Finding Our Way through Multiple Perspectives¹

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A door just opened on a street—
I, lost, was passing by—
An instant's width of warmth disclosed
And wealth, and company.

The door as sudden shut, and I,
I, lost, was passing by,—
Lost doubly, but by contrast most,
Enlightening misery.

—Emily Dickinson

What does it mean to be lost? I think of my son as a toddler escaping from my line of vision to wander around a crowded, yet blessedly sealed (*Code Yellow*), department store, as I and several employees searched the premises. Waves of what I should have done, could have done, and would do in the future to monitor my child's whereabouts battered my psyche but were soon quieted by the welcome relief of finding him safely engrossed in the self-appointed business of sweeping a dressing room in the "Juniors' Department." One moment he was safely at my side; the next he was gone. One moment my assumptions regarding that evening's priorities and purposes were intact; the next moment they were turned on their heads. My child's experience of being lost was very different from my own. For Jacob, slipping through "a door just opened" to enjoy the "wealth and company" of new experiences (i.e., running, chatting and "grown up" cleaning) yielded adventure, an opportunity to gather new perspectives. Perhaps I and others can learn from him. While the

terror of parents being separated from children is never desirable, some dispositions of “lostness,” such as a willingness to engage with ambiguity or to perceive as an outsider are not such a bad thing. Although uncomfortable, it is often during periods of cognitive and affective limbo that our unconscious assumptions emerge. Startled from a status quo slumber, we are more willing to entertain a need for change, better able to construct new possibilities when contrasts between our current realities and the perceptions of others are recognized and negotiated. Many of this issue’s authors require readers to step away from widely held assumptions within education and society—perhaps even to engage in moments of “misery enlightened” or spaces of “lostness”—for the benefit of the common good. While some ask us to re-envision particular priorities or resources for teacher education, others grapple with issues pertaining to core structures, values and assumptions within mainstream American educational mindsets and practices.

Within her thought provoking article “The Procrustes’s Bed and Standardization in Education,” Youngjoo Kim explains that although the idea that the standardization of teaching for purposes of holding teachers, students and schools accountable for academic achievement, might at first appear to act as an impetus for American educational progress, it carries with it a wide range of serious problems. Kim illustrates that the assumption that standardized curricula meets the needs of unique individuals is ludicrous when she likens our current reliance on high stakes tests to a myth studied during her undergraduate days, *The Procrustes’s Bed*. Within the myth’s storyline, a crazed monarch saws off the limbs of visitors who do not conform to the dimensions of a particular bed.

Expanding this idea, Kim reveals that our current insistence on educational conformity is as unsuccessful as the mythical king’s. Not only do our current practices fail to honor the contexts of non-dominate cultures, but they also hinder the development of critical thinking and neglect content that cannot be measured. As Kim rightly points out, teachers are spending increasing amounts of time on things they predict will be tested to the neglect of areas such as music, art, poetry, creative writing, social studies and cultural studies; all of which “make up the fabric of our society’s knowledge” and prepare students “to employ relational thinking in understanding their surrounding world.” Rather than rely on uniformity and standardization, the author suggests that school becomes more meaningful and learners become more involved when democracy and diversity are at the center of our curricula and its implementation. Kim’s reminders regarding the shortcomings of standardization call us to step away from the false security of business as

usual, in order to incorporate long forgotten and much ignored realities concerning the meaning and value of American public education.

Other authors ask us to consider new practices or to adopt alternative perspectives regarding what is needed within teacher preparation programs. Reflecting Kim's emphasis on critical and relational thinking, James Trier discusses some of the reasons and ways that the film *Half Nelson* could be used to effectively promote critical analysis and dialogue centered on teachers' roles within teacher preparation programs. Describing his approach to "reading" and analysis, Trier also explains the differences between this particular film and the plethora of trite "teacher as savior" movies that do not hold the same promise for pre-service education coursework. Also seeking a more contextualized approach, in "The Spiritual Dispositions of Emerging Teachers: A Preliminary Study," Mike Boone, Kathleen Fite, and Robert Reardon explore the role that teachers' perceptions of their spirituality play within their effectiveness and lives as teachers and leaders. The authors provide a well-researched discussion of diverse definitions of spirituality, citing that most agree that spirituality differs from religion or organized faith communities. Relying on Stiernberg's 2003 work, they further explain that for most theorists,

Spirituality encompasses such things as a recognition of the presence of a transcendent purpose or being; an awareness of the self as more than material; and an appreciation of the impact of the self on the lives and well being of others. Under these conditions, religious persons, secularists, and atheists can all be considered spiritual in some meaningful way.

Citing the importance of spirituality in matters of social justice, self perception and effectiveness with students, Boone, et al. incorporate Palmer's (2003) argument that "pre-service teachers need to be taught both how to understand their own spiritual inner terrain and to assist their students in the development of their individual spiritual state" in order to improve their teaching of and relationships with students. Significantly, the authors also touch on why educators avoid the reality that their students are spiritual beings, which provides guidance for navigating the ambiguities and contrasts inherent to this topic as it applies to public schools and teacher education.

Aaron Cooley addresses another issue—justice education—that while familiar to most curriculum and instruction graduate students, it is most often pushed to the margins within teacher education programs and public school classrooms. In "Political Pedagogy towards Democratic Education: Educating Students to Care about Local and Global Injustice,"

Cooley primarily uses Nel Noddling's writings on the ethic of care as a theoretical lens from which to explore some of the ways, in which those of us in teacher education can provide instruction that awakens and equips students to care about the myriad of injustices existing within our world. Emphasizing Noddling's assertion that simple knowledge about a particular injustice is not enough, Cooley unpacks his perspective regarding ways, in which students might become more engaged at a personal level in caring for needs that are both near and far removed from their immediate lives. Once again, an invitation is issued to readers to broach possible moments of ambiguity, to walk through periods of "lostness," in order to explore diverse perspectives and to share our commitments within the contexts of our classrooms.

Negotiating the tensions between individual and community rights in light of the common good is another way that authors within this issue invite us to recognize and to benefit from grappling with diverse perspectives. In "Public-Private Partnerships, Civic Engagement, and School Reform," Theodore J. Kowalski explains that in spite of their popularity, public-private partnerships are potentially detrimental to school reform initiatives due to the fact that citizen involvement is limited and the possibility of exploitation exists. The role of democracy, which historically has been the backbone of public education, is threatened when reform needs are not met, when volunteerism is forced, or when financial benefits gleaned from private entities lead to impositional relationships. Throughout the article, Kowalski asserts that when any of these characteristics is present, so, too, are "democratic deficits," which weaken the philosophical foundations and practical purposes of public schools. Not only does the author challenge readers to reconsider the prudence of public-private partnerships as they currently stand, but he also invites us to help construct what he describes as "a new perspective that casts public-private collaboration as both a democratic and a practical process."

Reflecting Kowalski's concern for the central role that public schools play in exemplifying and maintaining democracy within American society, Kurt W. Clausen's "Alternative Education versus the Common Will: A Legal Challenge" explores the tensions surrounding the place of alternative education within a democratic society committed to both popular sovereignty and individual liberty. Within his study, Clausen questions how to "balance the rights of individuals who do not wish to participate in public education with the reality that common education has been protected as a necessary prerequisite to the continuation of democracy over generations." Recognizing that the practice of popular sovereignty is never unanimous and always complex, he works to de-

termine the “application and limitations regarding the maintenance of both the letter and spirit of democracy” as it relates to alternative educational options.

Richard A. Brosio’s review of Peter McLaren and Nathalia Jaramillo’s *Pedagogy and Praxis in the Age of Empire: Towards a New Humanism* not only celebrates McLaren and Jaramillo’s relevant theory, but it also illustrates that the authors “know a great deal about kids and schools [and] are not just armchair theorists.” Citing the authors’ interest in Latina/o education in both the United States and in Latin America, Brosio points out that their book reveals the need for a new internationalism that incorporates humanism, cultural studies, and liberation theology. In addition, he makes the significant point that multiple lenses such as these are potentially compatible. In the spirit of the other authors within this issue, Brosio utilizes his review to invite readers to engage in new perspectives and work towards new possibilities within education, and he emphasizes McLaren and Jaramillo’s belief that the success of a world liberation movement is dependent upon a refocusing on global youth. Certainly such a perspective presents a unifying starting point for any reader willing to engage with differing perspectives or periods of “lostness” or purposeful growth and the common good.

Note

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Reference

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