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## National crisis and the challenge of education\*

**ABSTRACT.** The main objective of this article is showing that in USA is a crisis of meaning and values—one that leads to a debasement of human relationships, accelerating materialism and greed, and misplaced fixation on celebrity and glamour. In this context there is a compelling need to articulate a new bottom line for education—one that offers a different vision for educating our children that directly and cogently speaks to human purpose and meaning in the world that that they will inherit. In this article I try to describe that new vision of education—the pedagogy of peace.

**KEYWORDS:** crisis of education, pedagogy of peace, education in the United States

There is much talk today in the United States about a crisis of education. Yet what is pointed to as the cause of this crisis is confusing at best, and misleading at worst. There is, for example, the argument that our economy is in trouble because of poor education. Of course this seems preposterous when compared to the role of the banks in our current economic crisis. Irresponsibility and short-term considerations, lack of governmental regulation, and a culture of greed seem to be much more salient than education might be to this situation. Despite talk of demands for sophisticated skills and more educated workers, predictions are for an economy that will continue to employ high numbers of low and semi-skilled workers. Jobs that used to be done by high school graduates are now increasingly filled by those with college degrees. Elsewhere there is much talk about an educational crisis that is the result of kids performing poorly in comparison with students from other countries. This has resulted in the calamity of an education system more and more enthralled to a culture of testing which has sapped imagination, creativity,

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\* This essay draws on the author's introduction to his book *Education and Hope in Troubled Times: Visions of Change for Our Children's World* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

curiosity and critical intelligence from our classrooms. The crisis of accountability has become the springboard for rigid and mechanical forms of control over the teaching process in our schools.

Yet in all of this talk of crisis there is little that speaks to the profound moral and spiritual responsibility that is carried—or should be carried, by education. Beyond the usual focus of schooling (grades, test results, graduation rates etc.) is surely something of far greater significance. Education has the capability and the obligation, I believe, of speaking to the very issue of what it means to be human; of how we as human beings live and relate to one another; and how we relate to, and care for, the natural world that we share with all life forms. Today these issues rise to the very top of what is important to our very survival as a species. For us, and even more for our children, what needs to concern us is the very quality of human life on our planet. And central to this is the continuing problem of violent conflict and violent behavior among human beings.

In a letter of invitation written to the contributors of a recent book I wrote that its purpose was to help articulate a new vision and purpose—and begin to set an alternative direction—for our children's education at a time when, as I believe, there is an increasing delegitimation of the prevailing assumptions and orthodoxies that have shaped our public life over the past few years. There was, in addition, a deep hunger for the articulation of what Michael Lerner (2006) has called, a *new bottom line* for education—one that focuses on our children's lives as human beings who will assume the ethical, political and social responsibilities of our shared national and global communities.

I do not think I am being overly optimistic to believe that we are now witnessing the implosion of the neo-conservative 'revolution' in the United States. All signs point to our being in a transitional period in which the assumptions that have governed political life in recent years are in grave crisis. At the core of these assumptions has been the belief that the United States had a free and unopposed hand to make and reorganize the world according to the interests and inclinations of our governing elites. We can now see quite clearly that this arrogance of power has hit a resistant wall. The world cannot be re-made through our military muscle and economic power quite as easily as some may have wished. The lies and deceit that have brought us to this catastrophic moment have been laid bare. The belief that this country could act unilaterally on the world stage without much broader international support

has produced unparalleled anger and distrust towards the U.S. Many now see that terrorism is only one of a number of serious threats that confront us; global warming, lethal epidemics, poverty, violence and war, nuclear proliferation, racism, gender oppression and ethnic hatred. All are part of the increasingly pressing agenda for action in the world. And the severity and complexity of human problems will demand from us, and especially our children, inclinations, dispositions, and knowledge quite different from those which have shaped, and continue to shape, our social identities and ideological outlooks, moral preferences and attitudinal priorities. *This is a time of crisis, but also of renewed possibility—one that offers us the opportunity to radically reconsider what is the meaning of education for a generation that will bear the brunt of grappling with these extraordinary challenges and dangers.* What will it mean to be an educated human being in the 21st century compelled to confront and address so much that threatens the very basis of a decent and hopeful human existence?

The unraveling of this consensus is likely to bring in its train many questions about our public policy priorities. Already there is a growing populist resentment towards the increasing concentration of wealth in the US. There is increasing disillusionment with the effects of free trade agreements on the lives and economic security of working and middle class Americans which includes the anxiety felt by many towards the influx of migrants from these free trade areas. For many Americans there is an inability to meet the basics of a decent existence through the absence of affordable health care or dependable retirement income. Hurricane Katrina exposed us to the harsh realities of poverty and racism that continue to disfigure American life. Catastrophic weather patterns have ignited concerns about humanly influenced climate change. Continuing war is resulting in increasing disillusionment with government's failure to respond to our dependence on oil and the development of alternative energy sources. At the same time a right wing authoritarian Christianity has led the nation down a path of intolerance, discrimination and religious chauvinism. Its constricted moral rage has been blind to questions of poverty, social injustice and environmental degradation. Meanwhile there is an increasingly pervasive sense that there is a crisis of meaning and values in America—one that leads to a debasement of human relationships, accelerating materialism and greed, and misplaced fixation on celebrity and glamour. *In this context there is a compelling need to articulate a new bottom line for education—one that*

*offers a different vision for educating our children that directly and cogently speaks to human purpose and meaning in the world that that they will inherit.*

### **The no child left behind debacle**

Of course any such attempt will need to start with the failures of recent national education reforms with their deleterious effect on schools in the United States. These have been well documented by researchers and include the failure to significantly reduce the racial achievement gap; the penalizing of immigrant children and special needs students; increased drop-out rates; the narrowing of the curriculum and the shallow reductionist form of learning; the increased stress and anxiety among students resulting from the obsessive focus on standardized tests; the diversion of public funds to private tutoring sources and for-profit schools; the deskilling of teachers work and the delegitimation of the teaching profession. All of this points to a bankruptcy of public policy in education. And as the failures and unpopularity of these reforms gather steam there are increasing calls to tether education even more closely to the human capital demands of big business, as well to intensify the measurements of accountability in public schools (and in higher education). Little is heard in the public discourse about education's responsibility to nurturing the knowledge, attitudes and dispositions of a democratic polity. Short shrift is given to the value of developing the imagination and creative aptitudes of the young. There is little attention afforded to the capacity of education to enhance the ability of young people to critically interrogate popular media or the sources of public information. Intellectual and creative activity as a joyful human act, not simply a vehicle for instrumental advantage, comes to be regarded as frivolous waste. And it is taken as axiomatic that the moral context of the classroom and school is one that emphasizes individual achievement, competitive advantage, and willingness to subordinate authentic interests and passions to the compulsive quest for college and career success. It is fully understandable that parents are concerned about the capacity of their children to achieve basic literacy and numeracy. These skills are, after all, fundamental to the ability to negotiate the modern world. Yet the emphasis on these to the exclusion of all else produces a sadly limited form of education devoid of any larger human vision—one that speaks to the quest for lives of meaning and purpose. Sep-

arated from the latter and focusing only on the transmission of skills and technical competencies the classroom quickly becomes a site of boredom, stifled curiosity, and joyless learning.

Yet, as I have suggested above, the growing political crisis holds out the possibility of change and hope. The Republican Party has exhausted its armory of chauvinistic aggression and its agenda of hateful moralism and demonization. The Democrats have failed, so far, to articulate a courageous path of political, ethical and social renewal for our national community. This is a moment of uncertainty but also opportunity to reshape the public language of education. There is the opportunity to participate in the articulation of a shared vision of what it should mean to educate a new generation who will have to contend with increasingly perilous social circumstances, but also extraordinary possibilities for transforming our world into one that is social just, compassionate and environmentally responsible. In many ways, as my long time colleague and collaborator David Purpel (2004) has argued, there are no educational problems, only social issues that get played out on the terrain of education. The magnitude of the human and ecological crisis we confront demands more than the often arcane and ego-inflating exegesis of academic discourse. Can we really doubt that our situation today calls for a language and vision that is bold, courageous and resonant to the fears, concerns and hopes of the broad majority of human beings.

## **Education and the crisis of democracy**

In my own writings (see for example Shapiro, 2006) I have tried to describe the contours of such a vision and the educational agenda that can be drawn from it. There is surely little doubt that we face a deep crisis of meaningful citizenship in this country. And in this regard education has abdicated its responsibilities. Indeed schooling contributes in important ways to the evisceration of civic culture and the erosion of identities that are capable of seriously enacting democratic citizenship. Meaningful citizenship—what Stuart Ewan (1988) refers to as a ‘democracy of expression’ is more and more replaced by what he calls a ‘democracy of consumption’. For many people—young people especially, choice, power, and freedom are increasingly reduced to ones capacity to buy. The marketplace defines ‘democratic’ action more than the polling booth or public engagement and advocacy. The credit card defines one’s eligibility as

a citizen. That critical aspect of democracy—the capacity to exert power over one’s circumstances is reduced to the ability to shop from the ever-expanding, dizzying array of available products. Advertisers have appropriated the language of democratic life so that change, innovation, renewal, and the energy of public life are concentrated and distilled into the excitement of fashion, automobile ownership, the latest upgrade in the technology of communication, or the promise of optimal experiences offered through travel, drink or sex. The question of how much fulfillment or meaning is ultimately available from this culture of consumption and its preoccupation with glamour, fame, and money, is certainly something we must return to below. What is clear is how far this focus is from Ewan’s democracy of expression. If democracy is about a shared search for better society then consuming is all about what *I have acquired or experienced*. If democracy is about improving our common wellbeing then consumption relentlessly offers the prospect of ‘getting an edge’ and being one-up on our neighbor in looks, acquisitions, opportunities, and style. A possessive and competitive individualism is at its motivational core. In sharp contrast to this a democracy of expression concerns the capacity to name and articulate the circumstances that enable or limit a full and satisfying human existence, not just for oneself but for all of us who are members of our shared polity.

Yet it is a rarity when schooling offers students the opportunity to develop that capacity for expression that enhances democratic life and citizenship. School for most students is primarily about the process of domestication and conformity as they learn the grammar and syntax of test-taking skills and become adept at the search for the single correct answer on the test sheet. Creative thought, critical questioning, the articulation of ideas and insights about students’ lives and concerns have little place in the classrooms of most young people. The suffocating regimes of educational reforms squeeze out any possibility of educating young people so that they develop genuine curiosity about their world, a passion to pursue and understand life’s purpose, and the will to challenge accepted truths and conventions. Most of all schools now develop accountants of test scores and grade point averages, and adept manipulators of college resumes through the accumulation of curricular and extra-curricular experiences. Little here can contribute to a mind that is alert and awake to the challenges we face as a human community, and is imbued with the desire to question deeply and boldly those social, moral and epistemological assumptions and categories that shape our dangerously divisive, wasteful, and materialistic world. After Abu Ghraib and the abuses of Guantanamo

and elsewhere we must be concerned again with the propensity towards an unthinking conformity—a readiness to do or say whatever is deemed necessary in order to oblige those in authority. As we know so well the path towards what Hannah Arendt called so aptly the ‘banality of evil’ starts in school with the message about doing what one is told to do without question or reflection. When success in school comes to mean rote memorization, the search for the single right answer, and intellectual conformity or timidity, then we have created the conditions in which human beings learn that it is right to abdicate their capacity for moral autonomy and ‘wide-awake’ thoughtfulness and decision making.

The shrinking ability to see knowledge as having any transformative power other than as the crass instrument of individual advantage is also the consequence of the world of spin that engulfs political and corporate life in the United States. This is a point well made by Bernard Cooperman (2007) for whom our culture is one that induces cynical, disbelieving attitudes towards any claims about truth or judgment. Whether it is about the deleterious effects of tobacco or the crisis around climate change someone can always be found (backed up of course by powerful vested interests) to refute whatever claims are made. People are taught, first and foremost, to see themselves as consumers who choose sides as a matter of temporary and shifting taste or convenience. Intellectual conviction and ethical commitment are replaced by cant, spin and short-term interests. And this, says Cooperman, is reflected in our classrooms where students have lost the ability to think critically about the world because they do not believe in knowledge itself. These difficulties however should, of course, only strengthen our conviction as to the need to understand education’s crucial role in revitalizing a democratic culture. In the face of the extraordinary and intensifying power of elites—corporate, political, military, to structure the language and set the limits of public debate in this country, any significant new educational vision must be one that includes the prospect of a critically reflective, boldly questioning, and imaginatively creative citizenry.

### **Education and the struggle for community**

The crisis of democratic citizenship is also the crisis of community. The withering of what Cornel West (2004) refers to as *parrhesia*—the capacity for bold and courageous thinking, is also the erosion of social

cohesion and communal interdependence. And in each case schools are an important (though certainly not the sole) factor in this decline. School is after all that place where children first learn the 'culture of separated desks'. It is the place where they are first formally introduced to a worldview in which life's rewards—material and symbolic, are seen as the product of an endless struggle with one's neighbors. The mentality of the bell-curve instructs them that scarcity of affirmation, recognition and reward is part of the very DNA of human existence. It is a social imperative, they learn, to acquire those skills, manners, dispositions and knowledge that give them an advantage over the next individual. Whatever is said about friendship, sharing and caring in our schools and classrooms, the real effect of the curriculum is to teach the centrality of competition and individualism in our social relations. In this world, children learn, not everyone can be someone; some of us are inevitably destined for failure and invisibility. To be 'somebody' rest on the capacity to classify another as being 'no-body'. It is a lesson relentlessly emphasized through schools' constant attention to the markers of success and failure, validation and rejection. It is a message that deeply penetrates students' understanding of human existence. The world is a predatory place. The fear of failure hangs over all of us and with it a distrust and suspicion towards those who appear to have acquired something more than we have. It is a world in which envy, dissatisfaction, and an incessant drive towards invidious comparison permeate our lives. From the gold stars of kindergarten to the status hierarchy of college selection schooling is an insistent socialization into the world of hierarchy, status and human separation. We are, through this process, driven apart not together; led to see ourselves as working against one another rather than acting cooperatively; and primed for an aggressive egoism rather than an open-hearted generosity.

Those who would argue that the root emotion of our competitively-driven, aggressively self-oriented culture is fear make a convincing argument. There is the anxiety that what we have must constantly be protected from those who jealously desire to take it from us, resent our hard won gains, or wish to diminish our success in some way. Such pervasive *resentiment* produces what Barbara Ehrenreich (1990) refers to as the constant 'fear of falling'; the sense that in a ferociously competitive world someone is always just behind you on the ladder waiting (hoping) you will slip. The encircling arms of young children as they protect their assignment from the eyes of other children so aptly embodies the world

view of a fearful and suspicious individualism. Their answers dare not be shared with other children for that would diminish their special claim to success and recognition. For those whose arms and hands are used to hide what they know is an inadequate response, the body language manifests the shame and vulnerability of failure in that painful world in which worth is always contingent on success and achievement.

In this landscape of painful human fragmentation and separation the hunger for connection, genuine friendship, closeness and camaraderie find expression—but often in ways that still bear the marks of a hostile and fearful environment. Our preoccupation with the flag and the military speaks to a desperate desire for some unifying focus of a shared community. Sadly such a focus invariably becomes a fetish that carries the insistence on patriotic conformity. It comes quickly to stand for that nationalistic sense of togetherness which leaves little room for dissent. It is a community in which the price of membership is an unquestioning allegiance to governmental authority or the belief in the perennial rightness of one's cause. Not surprisingly such patriotic belonging is underpinned by triumphalism and an uncritical celebration of always being on the right side of history. This sense of connection with others is marked too by a Manichean view of the world in which the ties that bind us to some, situate others as our inveterate enemies. We are locked into a constant struggle between ourselves—the forces of light, and others who represent the side of evil. It is hardly surprising that this kind of patriotism seems always to find, or construct, a threatening force in the world which we are required to oppose with a uniformity of ideological and political support. The construction of community here is rooted in a zero-sum world of enemies; connection among us is predicated by our hostility towards, and fear of, those who appear to threaten our way of life. It is easy to see how young people are socialized into this kind of world-view. The school pep rally and varsity athletics rivalry inculcate a frenzied support for one's own team. Pride and loyalty towards one's 'own' side come together with a demonizing of the opposition. The celebration of our shared identity is always one side of a coin whose other face is fierce competition and the will to superiority or dominance. The poison of a community constructed through invidious comparison with others who are viewed as inferior, immoral or bent on our destruction has very deep roots in our culture. We do not have to look far to see a politics built around the contrast between those of 'us' who inhabit the normal, safe and hygienic world of heterosexuality and those who appear to threaten

its acceptance. Our world is riven by religious claims as to who speaks with the one and only true voice of God and those who are heretical pretenders. Migrants from other countries seeking a better life for themselves and their families are made to appear as a dangerous threat to the national culture and language. Modernity with its drive towards unceasing change, dislocation and uncertainty produces a world of extraordinary alienation and anxiety. Unprecedented movements of people across borders, disruption of settled ways of life through the cultural 'invasion' of TV, movies, and the internet, and economic upheavals caused by rapid technological innovation and global movements of capital and finance all add to the transitoriness and flux of everyday life. It can hardly be surprising that such conditions are a catalyst for attempts to forge stable identities around what Zygmunt Bauman (1997) calls 'neo-tribalism'. Such identities are often ones that are turned in on themselves—absolutist in their thinking, resistant to any outside influences, and rigidly hierarchical (usually aggressively patriarchal). These communities of resistance to the destabilizing effects of modernity and globalized capitalism provide a sense of connection and meaning in an atomized and disrupted world.

Fierce assertion of communal identity reflects also a spiritual and physical resistance by those whose ethnicity, gender, religious traditions, and national identity have been degraded, repressed and submerged. These allegiances are formed from the pain and humiliation dealt to oppressed groups. Such communities are both political and therapeutic attempting to assuage the wounds of humiliation, invisibility and marginality while demanding redress to the social injustices they have had to constantly endure. Such communities frequently demand schools of their own where the pride of heritage and identity can be transmitted to a younger generation. We see this in schools that emphasize an Afrocentric curriculum, Jewish day schools, schools for Indian and other indigenous groups, in Muslim schools, the gender specific education of women, and in some kinds of Christian schools. There is an understandable wish among communities whose history has been one of exclusion and oppression to provide for their young an education that reverses the pattern of marginality, humiliation and invisibility. Such educational goals are integral to a vision of a culturally diverse democracy. Yet there is a tension here that should not be ignored between democracy's promise of the affirmation of plural cultural, ethnic, and religious communities, and the need to ensure a *universal* human ethic and a global civic culture.

The enormous challenge in the 21st century is to allow and facilitate the genuine recognition and flourishing of all those communities that have hitherto been made invisible by the exercise of hegemonic cultures and, at the same time, to ensure that fierce allegiance within these communities does not preclude a sense of wider human connection and interdependence. *It is I believe the task of education to both facilitate the former while also encouraging the latter.* This means that education has a double role around the issue of community. Schools need to provide the space in which particularistic identities can be nurtured. They need also to build and encourage communities of a much wider span in which a universal human ethic and consciousness flourishes. It is surely necessary to assert as never before the connectedness of the human species (and of course the interdependence on earth of all life). We face as a human community threats to our very existence as a species from pollution, climate change, water shortages, nuclear armaments, the spread of disease across national borders, and violence that makes no distinction between combatants and innocent civilians. Education will have to be a part of a process that asserts and supports identities that are a complex weave of the particular and the universal, the local and the global, the partial and the whole. We know enough now about the meaning of identity to understand the importance of rootedness and place to human wellbeing. But we also are increasingly aware of the malignant and dangerous consequences to others when such identity refuses to acknowledge the bonds that connect all of our species as social, ethical, and spiritual beings. Citizenship education today must be one that is concerned with our plural identities *and* the social cohesion stemming from our common concerns and needs as human beings (Maalouf, 2000).

### Schooling and global justice

Of course it is impossible to address the pressing question of community in our lives if we do not acknowledge its inseparability from issues of social justice. Community is after all that mode of being in which each of us is visible and recognized within the circle of human presence. Each of us takes our place within this circle as a presence of inestimable value, equally empowered and responsible for what is collectively undertaken, and fully supported and secure in the care of ones neighbors. The evidence points to a deep hunger for community among human

beings yet the practices and reality of our daily lives constantly contradicts its possibility. We are in school and elsewhere constantly subjected to a process that creates a world of winners and losers—a hierarchy of worth and recognition in which, as John Holt once noted, a few learn to get what they like, and many learn to like what they get. School is, in the words of educational historian Joel Spring, first and foremost a ‘sorting machine’ that socializes the young into a world of inequality. The primary and most insidious lesson of education is the legitimacy of unequal treatment and differential human value. School is nothing if it is not a vehicle for the transmission of hierarchical distinctions of respect, worth, ability and economic expectations. It is the seeding ground for a society in which we accept astonishing inequalities in the circumstances of our lives—access to health care, decent housing, availability of food, opportunities for rest and recreation, security of employment, dignity and respect in the community and on the job. Of course such hierarchical ordering stands in sharp contrast to our vision and desire for a community that is something more than the clichés of a Hallmark card. The classroom itself, as we have already noted, is a place in which the ethic of mutual caring and support is undone by the relentless process of competitive-individualism in which students learn and are urged ‘to get ahead’ of one another. And talk of a national community is mocked by the extraordinary differences in children’s lives consequent upon differences of race, wealth and gender. All talk of ‘no child left behind’ is pure obfuscation in a society where social and economic inequalities bear down heavily on children’s lives hopelessly blighting the possibilities for success or achievement among so many. And talk of a shared national interest is much of the time a cover for glaring and increasing inequalities in the lives of citizens. Hurricane Katrina provided a window onto the horrifying world of racial and class discrimination in the United States where the lives of thousands of poor and working class citizens were subjected to a callous disregard by their government at an hour of overwhelming need.

In the wider world the new global economic order has been a prescription for increasing inequalities in the shape of people’s lives. Nearly 3 billion people on the planet live on less than two dollars a day; 850 million people go hungry and, according to UN estimates, 20–30,000 children die every day of starvation or preventable diseases related to malnutrition. More and more power accrues to gigantic transnational businesses that undermine any notion of a democratic polity where or-

dinary people have a real say about the kind of world in which they live. Talk of community when such extraordinary disparities exist in the distribution of wealth and in the exercise of power becomes emptied of any real meaning. In a world in which elites have such a disproportionate capacity to influence our culture, economic well being, social policy around matter like education and health care, and how we deal with our environment, the general interest of the many is supplanted by the greed and self-aggrandizement of the few. When community is understood as one of shared social and economic concerns, mutual human respect, and the pursuit of our common wellbeing then the present course of national and international development belies any such vision. Our nation and our world are suffused with the images of environmental toxicity and degradation that fall hardest on the poorest among us. The security of working people is undercut by the callous and indiscriminate search for more profits. The underdeveloped places of our planet are ruthlessly plundered and exploited by those with political and military power. Millions die from the lack of medicines withheld because of the greed of the drug industry. And thousands of young women are the exploited commodities of sexual 'tourism.' An education that is to nurture the sense of human connectedness within both our nation and within the larger global human family is an imperative of our time. It is the only alternative to a world of increasing and unnecessary suffering, more cataclysmic war and violence, and lives not blighted by a dehumanized existence in which people are treated as throwaway and expendable items of little enduring value.

To educate towards the now pressing vision of human community cannot be separated from the need to move human consciousness away from the impulse to sort, select, and rank, and to find and to legitimate winners and losers. In our schools this will be no easy task since education is almost unimaginable today when it not about such a process. Yet we need to be reminded that, despite the power and influence of such ideas, other ethical, political and spiritual visions persist. These visions speak to the continuing possibility of a world in which all are affirmed in their worth, respect and autonomy; in which all deserve to live with decency and security; and in which meaning is found through the sharing of our earthly resources. Such a vision must surely infuse what Raymond Williams once referred to as the long revolution that we are called upon to make both in our schools and throughout our social institutions.

## Towards a pedagogy of peace

All of this rests on the belief in a universal human ethic. It is an ethic rooted in the concept of the infinite value and preciousness of each and every human life. Its first imperative is to refuse violence against others. We cannot separate a vision of education centered on the quest for democracy, community and social justice from the need for an education that negates the violence that pervades our culture. The third great responsibility of education today is to cultivate a culture of peace. But in the end this goal cannot be separated from the need to cultivate the bonds of universal human community and a culture of democracy. The first challenge of educating for peace is overcoming the dualistic and Manichean thinking that shapes so much of human consciousness in our world. At every turn we learn to understand our world as one constructed from rigid and binary categories; black vs. white, male vs. female, gay vs. straight, disabled vs. able, native vs. alien, Europe vs. Africa, our country vs. their's, and so on. We learn to view all things through a prism that separates and opposes one side from another. And to this separation we add the qualities that give 'our' side its supposed superiority. This is a way of constructing reality that ensures not just a world of immoveable divisions but one in which we come to see our attributes, allegiances, and preferences as the stuff that makes us better than, more deserving, more enlightened or even genetically superior to all others. This polarized, us/them world is the recipe of inevitable and certain prejudice and hatred. Fear and anger corrode all relationships. Resentment of mistreatment and the ache of dehumanization fill the lives of those distinguished by their supposed failings and pathologies. And fear of the encroachment of the other shapes the psychology and politics of those who hold themselves as superior. If we don't act with force to restrain and contain the other, it is held, we might succumb to their influence. In this view security comes through the domination and suppression of others.

Educating for peace works within what appears to be a paradoxical world view. It asserts on the one hand the ancient spiritual wisdom that all human life is of inestimable value. In this view all people have unconditional or infinite worth. It asserts that all our distinctions and separations obfuscate the fundamental oneness of existence and the endless recycling and regeneration of our common origins within the elemental stardust of the universe. From this perspective education means to em-

phasize the precious value and meaning of all life. It shifts our focus from the qualities that separate us, and polarizes us, to those that connect us and speak to our similarities. Security in this view depends not on our capacity to dominate or exclude, but on our willingness to show generosity and open-heartedness towards others. Our well-being, as Michael Lerner suggests, depends on the well-being of everyone on our planet.

While educating for peace requires that we see the essential humanity of all people it also requires that we fully recognize the way in which our lives have been conditioned and shaped through the particularity of our language, history, gender, culture and class. What has the experience of living meant for this person and those who share that particular experience? It has been said that one's enemy is someone whose story you have not heard. Peace education certainly demands the possibility of dialogue in which one's life can be shared with others. It means cultivating a hermeneutical approach to 'truth' in which the emphasis is less on whose view is right than on simply hearing what it means to grow up and deal with a particular set of circumstances. A process that emphasizes sympathetic listening rather than the impulse to quick judgment. It means to struggle with one's own immediate assumptions and prejudices in order to truly hear the challenges and obstacles in the life of the other. Such dialogue breaks down or deconstructs—the simplistic and damaging binary view of identities. In its place emerges a more complex and fluid understanding of one's neighbor. Someone who is different in some respects from oneself yet so similar in others; a person whose being is not solely defined through a single characteristic of religion, race, nationality, disability, etc. And a person who is not fully formed and complete but someone whose life is evolving and changing.

Of course the sharing and naming of experience can only be a part of what it means to educate for peace. There must also be exploration of the culture of violence—the social conditions that predispose us towards the harming of others on the macro scale we now witness. We have to look at what Zygmunt Bauman has termed *adiaphorization*—the tendency, so pronounced in our world, to become desensitized to the pain and humiliation of others. We have to look here at the way violence becomes entertainment; the way wars are depicted through the mass media as video games; and the overall consequence of the barrage of violent images and themes on our sensibilities as human beings. We have to consider how poverty and unemployment sap human beings of hope for a better future and open the door to a nihilistic rage. Or the way

domination—cultural, economic and political, humiliates and dehumanizes people and can become a catalyst for suicidal revenge. And we must recognize the way that so much of the violence in the world is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. Here we have to consider the way masculinity is constructed around the axis of power and dominance. Vulnerability, dependence and the desire for nurturance are regarded as signs of human weakness (read femininity) that evoke hostility and disgust and are an incitement to violent suppression whether in oneself or in others.

Without this kind of critical social reflection we run the risk of approaching the issue of violence as simply a manifestation of individual or even collective pathology. The mass murders in our schools are approached only as a matter of psychopathology requiring more efficient mental health systems. Suicidal bombings by Muslims are disconnected from the history of colonialism, the trauma of Palestine, or current western domination of much of the Arab world. Rape and brutality directed against women, or homophobic violence, are not seen within the context of aggressive and authoritarian forms of male identity. And war is somehow disconnected from the multibillion dollar economic interests that enthusiastically encourage militaristic resolutions of social conflicts.

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A fuller and more radical expression of democracy, a culture of peace that teaches us to practice non-violent means of resolving human conflicts, and relationships between people that celebrate and affirm the bonds of community and interdependence among us are some of the great challenges before us in this century. Their failure to be seriously addressed confronts us with threats to the very possibility of a desirable human future. And all these challenges will require efforts and interventions in a multiplicity of ways within both our individual lives and across the landscapes of our public institutions. There can be no doubt of the extraordinary importance of education to making these changes. Education is after all that sphere where reason, reflection, imagination, and the capacity to act with thoughtfulness and creativity is stirred and nurtured. Yet it is clear that this far from where the present discourse of education has taken us. Schools have become instruments of conformity and passivity. They are enthralled to the language of management and controlled outcomes, measured by their usefulness to the state as the

means to supply trained workers, and for parents schools mirror all of the fears and uncertainties of an unsafe and rapidly changing world. For the latter, education can, perhaps, provide their kids with an edge, or at least the minimum set of skills and aptitudes that will enable them to survive in an increasingly competitive society. Yet even within a culture so dominated by fear there is still hope. Out of the frozen ground we see shoots of possibility. There are moments of recognition by parents and citizens that our children's education should be a joyful, creative and thought-provoking experience, not the dull grind of endless tests. Teachers are becoming more vocal about their frustrations as to the lack of opportunities for dialogue, critical reflection and meaningful learning in the classroom. Members of the community are voicing their concerns that schooling seems to provide little that prepares young people for active and thoughtful participation as citizens of a democracy. Among students there is increasing criticism of the drill and test variety of education with its resulting boredom and alienation. More students are demanding a curriculum that is relevant to their lives and to what is happening in the world. Still it might be that in the end the awesome and terrifying events that now confront us as a species will provide the powerful catalyst for change in how we view the task of education. More and more we see that the fate of the earth itself is now in the balance. We will have to confront the fundamental challenges to the way we have constructed our social world or face the dangerous consequences of inaction. We will need to teach our children to think deeply and critically about the costs of a consumer culture and how human wants are manipulated into an endless desire for more with all of its devastating consequences for our resources and the flow of pollutants into our environment. We will need to teach our children to think in ways that are holistic—understanding that human life and nature do not stand opposed to each other but are seamlessly connected in an interdependent web. We must be stewards not violators of our natural world. We will need to teach so that our children see themselves not as isolated and self-contained beings, but members of an interdependent community with common needs and shared responsibilities. And we will need to emphasize that a sense of social justice must be present in all of our human actions so that the privileged lives of some do not depend on a callous disregard for the lives or fate of others.

In this time of great danger and also extraordinary possibility educators are called towards a prophetic role. They must insist that in the

conditions that now confront us the present educational agenda only reinforces and even compounds our problems. To educate today must instead be an act that helps transform human consciousness and conscience. The vision that animates our work as educators must be rooted in the ancient quest for *Tikkun Olam*—the effort to repair and heal our world as a place of generous and loving community, in which there is a just sharing of rewards and obligations, where human differences are mediated by respect and recognition, a world of ecological sanity and responsibility, and where there is the widest diffusion of opportunities for human beings to participate in shaping the world they live in. No matter how far-fetched or unrealistic such a vision may appear to be in relation to the present concerns of schooling, this is no time for timidity. The immense dangers and the extraordinary suffering within which we are now engulfed, demands from us a bold, daring and imaginative kind of thinking. Anything less is an irresponsible negation of our obligations to coming generations.

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