

CRITICAL THEORY AND THE ART OF TEACHING

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When teachers are encouraged to develop attitudes and undertake actions emphasizing reflection and critique, tensions frequently arise between the prerequisites for such reflectivity and the institutional demands embedded in the workplace. While this is not a new problem, the difficulties created for teachers escalate as the distance increases between vocational expectations and more reflective approaches to teaching. These tensions are perhaps most evident in programs of teacher preparation, for it is here that the commitment to theoretical understanding, a foundational perspective, and critical reflection are most apt to conflict with the current realities of teachers' work.¹ In addition, preservice teachers frequently are caught in the collision of two apparently divergent institutions: the school (as an ongoing, pragmatic work site embodying extensive and detailed role expectations, cultural traits, and evaluative procedures) and the university (as a research center emphasizing scholarship, intellectual inquiry, and critique).

This article deals primarily with the tensions involved in trying to establish and carry out a program of teacher preparation based on a particular notion of critical reflection. For the most part it concerns the concrete problems, issues, and dilemmas experienced in trying to implement such a program, with some attention given to the theoretical issues underlying it. While my efforts here are aimed mainly at highlighting the predicaments of preservice teachers with whom I have worked, similar problems confront experienced teachers who attempt such an approach. In short, it is the tensions between two different ways of thinking about and implementing the activities of teaching that are the focus of this article, and not the specific status of the people involved.

TEACHER PREPARATION, CRITICAL THEORY, AND THE AGONIES OF PRACTICE

Teacher Education and the Liberal Arts

Much of the substance of this article is the result of my work in the elementary teacher education program at a small, private liberal arts college.

¹Landon E. Beyer and Kenneth M. Zeichner, "Teacher Training and Educational Foundations: A Plea for Discontent," *Journal of Teacher Education* 33 (May-June 1982): 18-23.

While on the faculty there, I was one half of a two-person Department of Education, existing within a liberal arts setting in which education was something of an anomaly. This context offered special challenges and unusual opportunities that have some relevance beyond their idiosyncratic curiosities.²

Upon my arrival there in the fall of 1981, I found an elementary education curriculum that included the more or less standard fare: coursework in educational psychology, child development, methods of reading, an assortment of other methods courses, student teaching, an introductory "Issues in Education" course, and so on. Moreover, as in other small, liberal arts colleges, several parts of the education program were taught by adjunct professors and others (i.e., someone from the natural sciences taught a mini-course on science methods, another person taught a section on social studies, etc.). These faculty members' primary affiliation was not in education, but in other academic disciplines. And although many of them enjoyed the teaching responsibilities associated with the education department and performed admirably, such additional responsibilities were extraneous to their primary duties within the college. At another level, the prestige of the department and its programs, again as in many other colleges of this type, was not all one might hope for. At least some academicians trained in other disciplines saw the education department as something like a vocational preparation program, where students who might not succeed in the more rugged, demanding disciplines had an opportunity to thrive. The academic respectability of the education faculty was, for some, also an open question, at least initially.

Least this picture be painted too bleakly, it is important to see that such an image was itself contradictory. One result of the relatively low status of education as a field was that members of the administration and faculty were almost completely open to any revisions in departmental courses and programs that were consistent with the requirements of the state department of education. Thus, the lack of prestige afforded education in practice actually made significant change more attainable. And since state requirements were

²In addition to this specific context, I would like to acknowledge the work of other scholars in education who have been involved in similar undertakings and whose ideas have helped shape my own. See James T. Sears, "Dare Reconceptualists Work Toward a New Social Order? Rethinking Teacher Education," presentation to the fourth annual Conference on Curriculum Theory and Practice, Airlie House, Virginia, October 1982; Mark Ginsburg and Kitt Newman, "Reproductive and Transformative Implications of Preservice Teachers' Views on Professionalism," presentation to the Comparative and International Education Society, Tallahassee, March 1981; Kenneth M. Zeichner, "Myths and Realities: Field Based Experiences in Preservice Teacher Education," *Journal of Teacher Education* 31 (November–December 1980): 45–55; Landon E. Beyer and Kenneth M. Zeichner, "Teacher Training and Educational Foundations: A Plea for Discontent," *Journal of Teacher Education* 33 (May–June 1982): 18–23. Especially within the curriculum field, the importance of seeing our work embedded in a larger tradition is not always realized. An exception to this occurred at the sixth annual Conference on Curriculum Theory and Practices in Dayton, Ohio, in November 1984, when several professors spoke in tribute to the late Professor James B. Macdonald. Comments made there by Professors Michael W. Apple, Bernard Spodek, Madeleine Grumet, Dwayne Huebner, Alex Molnar, and William F. Pinar appear in *The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 6 (1985). It is in this same spirit that I wish to recognize the place of my own work in its larger context.

minimal, there were few significant obstacles to such change. In addition, I was able early on to develop personal and professional relationships with faculty in other departments (especially sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and history) who had intellectual interests that overlapped my own. After both private discussions and presentations at public forums, several faculty members made a point of discussing issues of mutual interest. The discovery that there were substantive issues in educational theory and practice was a revelation to many. Thus, the originally rather anomalous picture of education began to change gradually, with the aid of a generally supportive or at least nonobstructionist administration and faculty.

Shortly after my arrival I began thinking about revisions in the elementary education program. The revamped program that emerged was the result of lengthy discussions with various faculty members, school people, and others who were involved directly or indirectly. Briefly, it consisted of the following courses.

1. "School and Society" was offered as the first course in the sequence leading to certification, and to noneducation majors interested in issues related to the content of the course. Significantly, this course was given "distribution credit" in the school sciences, which meant that the majority of people enrolling in the course did not do so necessarily because of an interest in the teaching profession per se.

2. "Philosophy of Education" enrolled mostly students interested in teaching as a career, and occasionally students majoring in philosophy.

3. "Education of Exceptional Children" was a special education course required by the state for certification in elementary education and taught by an adjunct professor.

4. "Educational Psychology" also was given distribution credit in the social sciences and drew students from outside of education, though in fewer numbers than "School and Society."

5. "Reading and Language Arts Instruction," taken exclusively by education majors, was created specifically in response to the mandates of the state department of education.

6. "Knowledge and Power. Perspectives on the Curriculum" also was given distribution credit in the social sciences, though few nonmajors enrolled, in part because it was a new, advanced level course.

7. "Curriculum Development and Elementary School Teaching," an advanced course for majors, included a substantial field experience component and was taken exclusively by elementary education majors.

8. "Student Teaching—Elementary" and "Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching" obviously were taken only by majors, almost always during their senior year.

One consequence of teaching in a small department is that, with the exception of the educational psychology and special education offerings, I taught all the courses that made up the elementary education sequence. This accomplished two things simultaneously. First, it meant that, to a greater extent

than may be possible in larger universities and colleges, general principles might be created that could shape the contours of the program. Since interdisciplinary disagreements could not arise, the freedom afforded the creation of such principles provided an important sense of personal and programmatic autonomy. Second, as a result, the sense of there being an overall coherence to the program was enhanced. Having the opportunity to teach the six primary areas of coursework in sequence made such coherence at least more possible than might be the case in larger, more diversified and specialized departments.

More important than the specific courses in the program is the general orientation or approach to education within which they were embedded. Essentially four principles guided this teacher preparation effort: (1) a recognition of the socially constructed nature of what counts as "knowledge" in general and "school knowledge" in particular, and educational institutions responsible for its distribution, (2) the ability to question commonsensical ideas and perceptions, thereby turning them into problematic phenomena, (3) the development of alternative approaches for educational theory and practice, and (4) the continual reminder that educational action is a part of large institutional frameworks and patterns of meaning. I have elaborated on the meaning of these principles elsewhere.³ Suffice it to say that the guiding ideas that flow from these basic principles are that students see the world of schooling as only one among many possible worlds, engage in critical dialogue over both the normative issues of classroom phenomena and their wider social consequences, and actively engage in the process of reconstruction within the extant framework of the school system. It was this last point, of course, that frequently gave rise to particular anxieties and frustrations, and which I will comment on shortly.

Against this background of ideas and concepts, I was fortunate to have students who, in enrolling in a liberal arts institution, were probably less tied to a notion of education as vocational training than may be the case in other kinds of institutions. Faculty could presume that students attending the college had an interest in intellectual inquiry, academic involvement, and the like, and that the matter of job preparation was at least secondary. In general, I found this to be the case. Thus the fact that the courses in the new program had a strong theoretical component, and that "methods courses" in the traditional sense of that term had been eliminated, did not generate the sort of discontent that might have been manifested at institutions with a different orientation. I found students generally willing, and able, to engage the rather complicated arguments that the new courses embodied.

The Practice of Theory

One requirement for state certification was that students spend at least 100 hours in school before student teaching. This requirement, the student

³Landon E. Beyer, "Field Experience, Ideology, and the Development of Critical Reflectivity," *Journal of Teacher Education* 35 (May-June 1984) 36-41.

teaching experience itself, and the more general nature of teaching in contemporary society provided the backdrop against which the ideas discussed above were to be implemented.

The basic difficulties students experienced in this regard were threefold. First, as student teachers and earlier as observers, researchers, and participants, they had to accommodate somehow the ideas they were exposed to, the values they held, and the perspectives they developed, to the world of practice as embodied by the public schools. This was especially difficult in the context of the program under discussion since the local school system tended to be rather conservative in its educational policies and practices. For example, corporal punishment was not an uncommon occurrence, despite parental objections. In addition, the school board had mandated the use of one basal reading series for the entire K-6 school system. And in at least one elementary school where student teachers worked, the principal required monthly reports on all pupils, in terms of their progress in the current reading unit, skills area, and so on. Such strict accountability measures constricted what was considered educationally appropriate in the local school district.

Second, the schools in which students were placed had developed characteristically standardized, systematic, and deskilled practices.⁴ While the resulting system was typical of many American schools, the degree of standardization and deskilling may have been uncharacteristic. At the level of classroom phenomena and architecture, a fair generalization is that the typical classroom was one in which teacherproof curriculums were continuing to dominate more and more (the basal readers were but one example of this), manufactured and stylized displays typified what attention to aesthetics there was, classroom discipline was strict with attention paid to time-on-task measures, teacher-student interactions were mostly teacher initiated, and classroom schedules were relatively rigid and carefully adhered to. In many ways these classrooms were not too dissimilar from what Sirotnik describes as the "modal classroom" in his summary of Goodlad's *A Place Called School*.⁵

Third, what developed within the general confines of the teacher preparation program is a rather deep-seated antipathy between the critically oriented, foundational perspective embodied in the principles of this program, and the particular work context with which students were faced.⁶ While

⁴See Michael W. Apple, *Education and Power* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), Hazel Downing, "They Call Me a Life-Size Meccano Set: Super-Secretary or Super-Slave?" in *Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story*, ed. Angela McRobbie and Trisha McCabe (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), and Kenneth M. Zeichner, "The Deskilling of Teachers and the Phenomenon of Teacher Stress," unpublished paper, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1983.

⁵See Kenneth A. Sirotnik, "What You See Is What You Get: Consistency, Persistency, and Mediocrity in Classrooms," *Harvard Educational Review* 53 (February 1983): 16-31, the complete study is found in John I. Goodlad, *A Place Called School* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1984).

⁶It should be noted that students had the option of going to a metropolitan area in the region to do their student teaching. This area provided more diversified school settings from which to choose a site for student teaching, and in some cases permitted more flexibility than the local school district. Yet, as I discuss later, the major problems encountered in developing this program

frequent attempts were made throughout the program to remain mindful of the current realities of curriculum, teaching, and the professional ethos of schools, and to occasionally insert the sort of distance from these that could allow for critical reflection and analysis, the actual contours of schools and the work of teaching were always something of a cultural shock for students. Perhaps a short vignette will illustrate the difficulties and contradictions embedded in the operation of this program.

Having become dissatisfied with the profession in which she was working, Sally (fictitious name) had decided to return to college and obtain a teaching certificate. Sally was a more mature, self-assured, and committed student than many with less extensive experiences. She was hardworking, friendly, and open to the kinds of issues covered in the teacher preparation program, though, like most students, she found such issues new and requiring of a good deal of effort and time. Sally had taken some teacher education courses at another college several years previously, but the bulk of her preparation was received in courses in the program under discussion.

Sally's warmth, sense of humor, and dedication were reflected in the approach she took with the 3rd grade students in her student teaching experience. She wanted to treat the students with respect, to get to know them as people who could make important contributions to their own learning, and to refrain from being the traditional authority figure in the classroom. The class Sally taught was representative of the local school district, with a relatively small number of minority students (mostly black, with a few Hispanics). The morning schedule consisted of reading, recess, math, and "special" classes—learning center, art, music, or physical education (twice), on alternating days. The afternoon consisted of reading, spelling, English, and either social studies or science (though the latter was pursued only sporadically). On one of my visits to Sally's classroom, about midway through her student teaching experience, I observed the following reading and mathematics activities.

- As part of the day's reading lesson, Sally distributed a worksheet on following directions. She played a record that accompanied the worksheet, as prescribed for that particular lesson. The voice on the record asked the class questions about following directions, after which there was a short pause, and Sally turned the phonograph off. After the pupils wrote their answers on the worksheet, Sally turned on the phonograph, and the voice on the recording provided the correct answers. Then, the students checked their responses against those supplied by the disembodied voice on the record. Sally's only responsibilities were to introduce the lesson (by following the printed instructions in the teacher's manual) and to turn the phonograph on and off at the appropriate times. Sally's final activity was to distribute another worksheet on following directions to be completed as homework. The entire lesson took about 20 minutes.

- The subsequent activity was another reading lesson, this time to a different group, in the same classroom (at least two reading groups always met simultaneously). During this activity, the class checked problems they had worked on during the first part of the reading class. Individual students read selections aloud, while the rest of the group checked their own workbook pages. Sally spent this lesson calling on individual pupils, telling them how to score each page, and exhorting the other reading group to get to work, be quieter, and the like. At the end of the lesson Sally asked each

are not technical ones, to be solved exclusively through the provision of more adequate field placements, and the like. In addition, I wanted to offer a "slice of educational life" within this program with which I am most familiar. Therefore, I chose as an example a student whose teaching experiences I personally observed.

student to report the grade he or she had gotten on each of the pages. As the students announced their numerical scores, Sally used a "computer wheel" to calculate letter grades for each page, which she then recorded in the grade book. This activity took about 20 minutes from beginning to end. Then came recess.

• From the end of recess until lunch break, Sally read problems from a mathematics text, illustrating them with a short problem she had composed herself, and then helped individual pupils who had problems with the homework assignment for the next day. The math activities lasted about 30 minutes, after which the class was given time to work on their homework. Throughout the morning, Sally was uncommonly patient with the pupils, and her sensitivity and caring attitude were obvious.

I offer this vignette not to disparage Sally's teaching but to illustrate what were in many ways typical classroom phenomena. I could sense that Sally was frustrated and bored by these activities but nonetheless felt compelled to carry them through. During my observations I noted several pupils having difficulty paying attention, keeping on-task, and understanding the meaning of classroom activities.

It is important to realize that, within the teacher education sequence, the notion of deskilling of teaching had been discussed at length, as had the history and consequences of teacherproof curriculum, the trivialized and impersonal knowledge often taught in schools, and the values that become manifest through the social relations sanctioned by the hidden curriculum. And, as I intimated before, Sally was more able than many to understand such issues and had developed alternatives that might diverge from current practice. The fact that Sally changed little from the prescribed program of this classroom, in short, was not due to a lack of enthusiasm on her part, nor to an absence of conventional methods courses in the teacher education program. Rather, her actions were motivated by a desire to "fit in" to the established patterns and routines of the school—to become, in brief, an *accepted professional*.

After my observation, I had a rather long conversation with Sally, during which we analyzed and critiqued the morning's activities. I asked about her thoughts and feelings regarding these activities and shared my own observations. We discussed at length the reading lessons during which she acted basically as an appendage to the phonograph, followed by her duties as a record keeper/accountant, while trying to retain order in the classroom. We talked about these things in relation to the deskilling of teachers' work, the tendency for administrative, record keeping, and technical activities to prevail in schools, and the hidden curriculum fostered by the "teacher as keeper of order." Sally felt guilty (for herself and, especially, for her students) about having to do those kinds of lessons but believed there was really no effective alternative. One of the reasons for Sally's sense of "being caught" had to do with the very sense of caring, desire to be open and responsive to her class, and genuine fondness for teaching that had characterized her initial interactions. She found that, quite predictably and understandably, her students had in some ways taken advantage of her openness and good humor by failing to do the work, and being disruptive, occasionally rude, and generally unre-

sponsive. Indeed the students used the opportunities Sally provided as an opening to resist the structures, activities, and interactions that the regular teacher, and the school culture generally, sanctioned. While we might see such resistances as provocative or even valuable,⁷ they made Sally's life more complicated, agonizing, and personally painful. Indeed, at one point during her student teaching experience, Sally had contemplated leaving the profession, an idea she later rejected.

The dilemma Sally faced was real. She understood a good bit of the critical literature on schooling and teaching, had explored alternative teaching and curricular practices, had a genuine fondness for students, and wanted to do what she could to intellectually stimulate and challenge both herself and her students, but she felt trapped in a situation that was uninigorating for all concerned. While I think she did understand why certain things were being expected of her, and at least some of the social and professional reasons for this, her perceived limitations made that understanding less than helpful for changing the experiences of her classroom.

While Sally's frustrations were perhaps more intense than was the case with other students, her experiences reveal contradictions that were present in virtually all the situations I observed. I attempted to deal with these in three principal ways. First, I tried to involve teachers who would be supportive of student efforts, and who would allow them to create materials and activities of their own design, question accepted classroom practices, and engage in intellectual dialogue about teaching, curriculum, school policies, and the like. Whatever support could be offered in these ways added greatly to the quality of students' experiences. Second, I tried to emphasize the collegial nature of the student teaching experience, and to discuss my own expectations before the field placement was begun. This helped alleviate, to some extent, problems of communication and divergent expectations. Third, I made it clear that I valued highly (and therefore evaluated quite positively) attempts at creative divergence that were thoughtful and well conceived, even when they "failed." In fact, I emphasized that I regarded such activities more favorably than "successful" instruction that required little independent or creative thought. Still, the contradictions remained, though in somewhat attenuated form because of these three factors. Clearly, one of the most troublesome aspects of the tensions identified here is the personal disillusionment and pain they caused Sally and others. Whether she will ever teach is an open question; she decided not to teach following the end of her student teaching experience and to work at home caring for her new baby.¹

⁷See Michael W. Apple, *Education and Power* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), Robert Everhart, *Reading, Writing, and Resistance* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), and Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Farnborough, England: Saxon House, 1977).

THE ETHICS OF TEACHER PREPARATION

It may well be that the problems and dilemmas experienced in the program sketched above, and those encountered by Sally, are unavoidable. The tendency for administrative and technically oriented tasks to dominate in schools, and for the creative role of teachers to be sacrificed in the movement toward standardized curriculums, places constraints on teaching that make the dilemmas just reported not at all surprising. Yet how are we to understand and react to these problems—especially given some commitment to school reform that emphasizes critical reflection?

To begin with, the difficulties resulting from the tensions between the constraints of the workplace and the commitments of the program are not technical ones. Much of the current literature on the reform of teacher education is centered on technical solutions: adopt higher admissions standards for students, create better courses, find better field placements, or attract brighter students to the field. For practicing teachers, there are similar recommendations: increase teacher salaries, establish career ladders, offer special incentives to teachers in chronically under-supplied areas, and so on. While such correctives may have some relevance for changes in teaching, they do not address the fundamental issues involved.

The central problem has a peculiarly political and social face. The routinization and deskilling of work (especially of characteristically women's work⁸), lack of opportunity for reflection and critique, and separation between those who create and organize activities and those who carry them out are not limited to the domain of teaching. These are broad-based social, economic, and political problems, caused in part by a commitment to various forms of technical rationality, hierarchical control, gender discrimination, depersonalization, and bureaucratic forms of organization. As a society we have embraced patterns of institutional and personal practice that deemphasize participation and involvement in favor of efficiency, standardization, and control. The contradictions between critical reflection and the ongoing patterns of school practice, thus, reflect other problems in American culture. In this sense, we may say that the issues identified here have a social or ideological dimension, as they are part of more general phenomena whose reality we cannot afford to ignore. This is not to say that schools merely reflect other situations or that educators are powerless to bring about significant change in their work. Rather, it is to suggest that since the problems we face may have causes that go beyond our classrooms, schools, and individual predicaments per se, we need to build alliances with other individuals and groups, to form networks within schools that lend support to people like Sally who seek to implement alternative practices in the face of institutional resistance, and to ally more closely the work of university researchers and classroom teachers. Several issues are implicated in these realizations.

⁸Nancy Hoffman, ed., *Woman's "True" Profession* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1981).

First, one of the ethical issues growing out of this analysis concerns the extent to which teacher educators and teachers who want to foster critical reflection, a political consciousness, and a sensitivity to social issues in our students, can expect such tendencies to flourish in their teaching practice, in ways that do not jeopardize them professionally or psychologically. The duplicity involved here is extensive, and since the curriculums, pedagogy, and evaluative practices that currently predominate in schools do, in some way, have to be reckoned with, students may be unfairly compromised at times. I do not think we should refuse to put students in positions in which they are challenged, critiqued, or even emotionally strained. Such situations can be professionally and personally gratifying for students and for those whom they teach. Yet there does seem to be a point at which they also become counter-productive and ethically questionable.⁹

Second, I want to reject the notion that effective action and change in schools must await transformations of a more general sort. While this is the view of some analysts of educational policy and practice—not surprisingly, especially of those whose primary affiliation is outside the educational arena¹⁰—it is not a tenable one. It misconstrues the nature of social change, I think, and insists upon a mechanistic model of alienation and its extinction that is overdetermined and a-cultural. Insofar as schools are fertile ground for cultural practices of one sort or another, there may be no more important forum from which, along with other institutions, social change may spring. In addition, such an attitude fails to recognize the plight of students, teachers, and others caught in a network of interactions that are frequently injurious. We cannot wait for broader social changes before acting.

I am left with a series of not very tidy paradoxes about the sort of work that I think must go on within programs of teacher preparation and in schools themselves. While these paradoxes do not offer the kind of straightforward, progressive direction that we all want, perhaps such desires are illegitimate in the first place. And if I understand correctly the master dialectician—Socrates—it is only through paradoxes that we learn anything in the first place. In any case, here are the paradoxes regarding teaching that result from my experiences.

1. *Teachers are reflective critics and initiators of action.* It is common to regard personal reflection as something to be done leisurely, after attending to more pressing concerns. Yet as practicing theoreticians, teachers must be able to overcome the dualism embedded here, and to value equally action

⁹This does not diminish in any way, of course, the equally difficult ethical questions involved in teachers' and student teachers' treatment of their pupils. I emphasize the ethical dilemmas involved in our work as teacher educators and supervisors because they have not been highlighted, at least in the terms of this analysis, in the literature.

¹⁰See Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Richard delOne, *Small Futures: Children, Inequality, and the Limits of Liberal Reform* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979); and Henry A. Giroux, "Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education. A Critical Analysis," *Harvard Educational Review* 53 (August 1983): 257–293.

and critique—indeed to see one as implying the other. The image of educators as armchair speculators on the one hand, or committed pragmatists on the other, is to be shunned.

2 *Professionalism in teaching embodies the liberal arts* Frequently it is assumed that a liberal education provides only the necessary site on which professional preparation may be built—for example, when liberal education becomes the basis for pursuing more specialized forms of knowledge through graduate education. When this happens “knowledge” becomes perceived as dislocated from the interests of people engaged in other contexts, and useful only for realizing distant aims. On the contrary, knowledge and the ability to resolve the conundrums of personal and occupational life are to be seen coextensively.¹¹

3 *A love of philosophical analysis and a joy in being with kids are necessary for effective education* The alleged abstractness of philosophy is often pitted against the reality of responding to the concrete demands of students. If we can understand how each of these activities can enliven and enlarge the other, we will come closer to realizing what is central to being a teacher: the unity of human contact and philosophical insight.

4 *Complex social and ethical debates are congruent with “thinking on our feet”* The importance of ethical debate lies chiefly in how it enables us to act in those situations that mandate a morally just response. We may have to relinquish both a portion of the esoteric aspects of such debates—a concern, say, with the formal elegance of the arguments that are constructed in support of some position—and the rush to act without considering fully the ramifications of our actions.

5 *The specifics of pedagogical excellence are part of the process of global change* Much has been written of late regarding the possibility that schools can promote wider social changes (in reducing inequalities, ending forms of discrimination, promoting liberation, etc.). The debate has tended to center on whether or not school reform can alter current unpalatable realities. This question requires two responses, which reflect its inadequate formulation. (1) altering forms of pedagogy in isolation are bound to be ineffective as the vehicle for such change, and (2) there is nothing more vital in working toward alternative futures than revisions in pedagogy.

6 *The principles of morality and our everyday lives are continuous.* The dichotomization of clear and thoughtful moral principles and decisions regarding proper conduct that daily confront us must be overturned. There are numerous choices that must be made regarding seemingly trivial matters that have pointedly moral consequences (involving our families, colleagues, and community members, for example) The tendency to bifurcate principles of moral-

¹¹For a good example of the kind of perspective I urge here, see Walter Feinberg, *Understanding Education: Toward a Reconstruction of Educational Inquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), and Landon E. Beyer, “The Parameters of Educational Inquiry,” *Curriculum Inquiry* 16 (Spring 1986)

ity and everyday choices reflects the ability to rationalize actions, leading to hypocrisy and denial of personal responsibility.

7. *All of these paradoxes are insightful within a setting where mystery and uncertainty have been all but banished* A major obstacle in utilizing the insight of paradoxes lies in the very sort of rationality now common in schools. The efforts at standardization, control, and certainty embedded in schools can prohibit the very occurrence of such insights. Thus, our work must be aimed at legitimating the emergence of unplanned insight, metaphorical understanding, and uncharted exploration in schools by examining more closely the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are appropriate in a democratic order.¹²

Clearly, the perceived dichotomy between educational theory and school practice is deeply entrenched in our culture. It typifies most attempts at teacher preparation, a number of proposals for educational change, and, perhaps most significantly, something central about the material nature of our own work lives. Because of certain dominant ideas, values, and material constraints, there is a rather disturbing tendency to oversimplify what is required for substantive school change that leads to more global transformations.¹³ The peculiarly human, ethical, and interpersonal dilemmas that coincide with substantive change can be oversimplified at our peril—and at the peril of the ideas and commitments we strive to promote.

In the end, we may need to recognize more fully the eclectic nature of teaching as an artistic, political, and human act. As art form, the transformation of teaching—and, more generally, of the social and political realities that ground it—requires bold forays, tentative retreats, successes that are often temporary or even illusory, and defeats that may appear insurmountable. Finally, perhaps nothing more helpful can be said about this state of affairs than that we need to recognize the extent to which our own work as teachers, students, and researchers needs to be seen more on the model of constructing a poem or creating a painting than on a notion of devising instrumentally useful political strategies. We may have a vision of the future we seek—as the poet does of the images compelling the pen—but the exact outline of the forms by which it is to be accomplished must, in the nature of things, remain somewhat mysterious and uncertain before that vision is fully realized. Along the way we may expect confusion, setbacks, unglamorous compromises, and agonizing conflicts, together with occasional successes. Such is the nature of artistic and political work.

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¹²See Landon E. Beyer and George H. Wood, "Critical Inquiry and Moral Action in Education," *Educational Theory* 36 (Winter 1986).

¹³See Seymour B. Sarason, *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change*, 2nd ed (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), and Landon E. Beyer, "Educational Reform: The Political Roots of National Risk," *Curriculum Inquiry* 15 (Spring 1985): 37–56.

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