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Lorraine Kasprisin

Western Washington University, lorraine.kasprisin@wwu.edu

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EDITORIAL

Developing Dispositions: Professional Ethic or Political Indoctrination

Lorraine Kasprisin, Editor

During 2005 and 2006, Gary Howard, the founder of the Reach Center for Multicultural Education and author of *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools*, facilitated several workshops at Western Washington University. Gary's workshops provided the impetus for reexamining what it means to be a teacher in a multiracial society, and the kinds of dispositions that should be promoted in the education of a teacher (view video of the workshops from [Mar. 30, 2006](#) and [May 12, 2005](#)). We are dedicating this issue to Gary Howard, who has written a special prologue for this issue.

In his prologue, Mr. Howard asks us to think about the dispositions that are required to be an effective teacher in a pluralistic, democratic society. Consistent with the mission of our journal, we used this opportunity to explore the kinds of tensions, contradictions and perplexities that arise when we start to think about a topic like teacher dispositions. We asked authors, therefore, to consider the following dilemma:

Because teachers hold a very special trust in working with the young, public licensure and assessment have become part of the screening process in certifying new teachers for their roles. What makes up the qualities of a professional teacher and what should be legitimately assessed? Recently, schools of education and various accreditation bodies have begun to go beyond knowledge and teaching competences, and have begun to assess candidates for proper dispositions. In some colleges, conservative students have complained that these evaluations have discriminated against them for their beliefs and constitute a form of ideological indoctrination, amounting to a political litmus test. Conversely, educators of teachers argue that adherence to a professional code of ethics is expected of teachers as with all professionals. Furthermore, they argue that they have a responsibility to both their graduates and to the public to assure that prospective teachers will act in an ethical way in the classroom and are sensitive to issues of social justice and white privilege in this society. The Journal of Educational Controversy invites readers to submit carefully thought-out analyses on this conflict that will shed some light on the issues and provide a reasoned, tenable position.

As our "call for papers" went out, the major accrediting body for colleges of teacher preparation, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), qualified its use of the term, "social justice." During a hearing for continued federal recognition as an accreditor for teacher education, Arthur Wise, president of NCATE, denied that NCATE had a standard requiring social justice. Wise's statement stunned some in the nation's schools of education who had been trying to respond to the mandates stipulated by their accrediting body. Many felt betrayed. The editors of this journal decided to provide a supplement to this issue entitled *The Politics of "Social Justice"* in order to examine these related issues that were transpiring. As we have in the past, we are providing the reader with this special section on issues related to our controversy that are on the cutting edge of events.

This issue of the journal has several sections – a prologue, an introductory section, articles in response to the controversy, and a special section on the politics of "social justice."

PROLOGUE

First, we have a prologue written by Gary Howard. The *Journal of Educational Controversy* is dedicating this issue to Gary Howard, whose book, *We can't teach what we don't know: White*

teachers, multiracial schools, deepens our understanding of culturally responsive teaching through the lenses of privilege and power. In his prologue, Gary asks “what are the qualities of personhood that the adults in our nation’s classrooms must embody to be worthy of teaching our richly diverse students?” His prologue starts our thinking about this important question with an examination of four dispositions that he believes characterize good teachers in pluralistic schools.

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS

As we have in the past, we once again provide the reader with some introductory essays that will help place the controversy within a larger framework. In “Antecedents of disposition testing: Lessons from the history of the good teacher,” Jennifer de Forest, an educational historian, reminds us of movements in the past that have a similarity with the present. Although not necessarily the most remembered incidents, these three historical moments “employ a rhetoric that is strikingly similar to recent efforts to dictate a teacher’s dispositions.” How might the struggles of the past illuminate the present?

Athena Vongalis-Macrow’s article, “Teachers’ ethics: Education International and the forging of professional unity,” provides us with an international perspective on the question. A faculty member at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, Vongalis-Macrow describes for our readers an international movement of teachers comprising around 170 nations and 30 million teachers and education workers. Both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers here in the United States are members. In an age of increasing global interdependencies, Education International sees itself as an international voice of teachers promoting solidarity and humane values. Vongalis-Macrow focuses on the organization’s development of a professional code of ethics that would reclaim an ethical grounding for teachers’ professional authority and status in a globalized world of business and corporate influence. (To view the website of Education International, go to: <http://www.ei-ie.org/en/index.php> .)

SECTION 2 – ARTICLES IN RESPONSE TO CONTROVERSY POSED

Following our introductory essays, Section 2 publishes articles that were written in response to the dilemma and controversy posed for this issue. The articles offer diverse approaches to the problem. In “Ideological indoctrination and teacher education,”

William Hare, a Canadian philosopher, provides our readers with a helpful conceptual analysis of the concepts that frame the controversy.

Stanley Fish’s article, “Advocacy and teaching,” continues this conceptual exploration. We are reprinting this article from the *New York Times* because of its timeliness. *N.Y. Times* columnist and professor, Stanley Fish, looks at a current incident in higher education and raises questions about the call for “intellectual diversity” on college campuses by people like David Horowitz who has fueled much of the anti-leftist rhetoric before state legislators. Fish views these efforts as largely misdirected. What is the difference between teaching and advocacy, between political and intellectual diversity?

David Carroll offers a careful analysis of the concept of dispositions in his paper, “Developing dispositions for ambitious teaching.” As a response to the dilemma posed by the controversy, Carroll advances the argument by proposing we connect our concept of dispositions with professional standards. In this way, he argues, we avoid promoting political ideological ends in our development of teacher dispositions.

Thomas Misco and James Shiveley also argue against promoting ideological ends in teacher

education, but use a different strategy in achieving this goal. Basing their argument on a distinction between means and ends, their strategy to avoid political ends is to emphasize deliberation as the core of a teacher education program. In their article, “Making sense of dispositions in teacher education: Arriving at democratic aims and experiences,” the authors describe a deliberative process that allows students to arrive at their own substantive political positions. They argue that “deliberation does not indoctrinate or inculcate, but rather problematizes and complicates so that future teachers are aware of the possibility for instances of oppression, sexism, homophobia, and classism, but not assume their existence in particular situations *a priori*.” Still, the deliberative process that Misco and Shiveley describe presupposes certain dispositions that are compatible with democratic aims and experiences. Are these political ends, or have the authors succeeded in circumventing the controversy with their means-ends distinction.

Paul Tarc, on the other hand, argues that we should avoid trying to develop dispositions altogether. In his paper, “Teaching (for) dispositions? Old debates, new orthodoxies: Hanging onto a ‘knowledge approach,’ ” Tarc proposes that we provide instead an intellectual grounding in the complex issues that question our students’ most fundamental conceptions of self and the world. Tarc points out a difference often ignored in colleges of education between being a college student struggling with these ideas and being a professional teacher in the classroom. Judging our students by professional standards represses the debate, the questioning, the uncertainty, the contradictions that should arise in the classroom experience - the kind of experience that might ironically actually lead to the dispositions we value. It is a reminder of John Dewey’s cautionary warning that we do not necessarily hit the target by aiming at it directly. How might David Carroll’s recourse to standards respond to this challenge?

Tarc also contrasts the more traditional liberal pluralist pedagogy with the more radical oppositional pedagogy in challenging the students’ thinking and the kind of “double-bind” in which teachers often find themselves. Readers might want to think about which camp the previous authors, Misco and Shiveley, and their pedagogy of deliberation would fall in Tarc’s distinction of pedagogical methods.

Although coming from a different intellectual tradition from Tarc, Sheron Frazer-Burgess also points to the struggle of students as they wrestle with the conflicts, contradictions, and ambiguities that challenge their deeply held assumptions. In “The spirit of self-assessment: Critical engagement and moral agency in pre-service teacher education,” Fraser-Burgess looks at the ethical presuppositions underlying standards for dispositions toward diversity. If teacher education is to engage the student as a moral agent, what are the limitations on what we can intentionally do in shaping dispositions? For Fraser-Burgess, “the kind of view of the teacher candidate that is compatible with moral agency is one that encourages autonomy rather than conformity as an orientation in one’s education and future profession.” She then discusses the implications of this claim for promoting self-governance and critical agency in one’s reflection and struggle with the issues of diversity.

Our final paper falls somewhat outside our immediate controversy, but the editors thought that a look at a paradigm outside the mainstream teacher education model that gave rise to this controversy might be illuminating. Keith Whitescarver and Jacqueline Cossentino give us a view of an alternative approach to teacher education that has “for nearly a century... placed the cultivation of teachers’ attitudes and values at the center of the process of becoming a teacher.” In “Lessons from the periphery: The role of dispositions in Montessori teacher training,” the authors describe the philosophy behind the pedagogical approach known as the Montessori method. We thought we would end this section by looking at this alternative model. We leave it to the reader to think about the kinds of controversies this model might generate.

SECTION 3 – SPECIAL SECTION ON THE POLITICS OF “SOCIAL JUSTICE”

Section 3 is a special section on the politics of “social justice.” While many of our authors who

responded to the controversy above alluded to actions taken by NCATE, the authors in this section address them directly. Many colleges and universities incorporated the concept of social justice in response to the standards that had been proposed by NCATE, only to feel perplexed and dismayed when their accrediting agency suddenly removed “social justice” from its standards. That sense of betrayal is expressed with passion in the article by Bonnie Johnson and Dale Johnson. In “An analysis of NCATE’s decision to drop ‘social justice,’” the Johnsons start by examining the transcripts of the testimony given by Arthur Wise, the president of NCATE, before the U.S. Department of Education’s National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity.

The editors of this journal invited Dr. Wise to contribute an article articulating his position and he agreed to do so. In his article, “Setting the record straight,” Dr. Wise offers the reader an explanation for his and his organization’s decisions and actions. Having asserted that “NCATE does not expect or require institutions to inculcate candidates with any particular social or political ideology,” Wise defines NCATE’s standards as simply “ideals of fairness and the belief that all children can learn.”

Finally, in “Dark times indeed: NCATE, social justice, and the marginalization of multicultural foundations,” Dan Butin wonders where the educational foundations scholars were during this debate. As the one group of specialists whose expertise and training is uniquely positioned to illuminate the deeper social and educational problems our society faces today, Butin finds that they have become largely “marginalized in [their] ability to impact educational policymaking.” Butin demonstrates this marginalization on three levels – “a national-level analysis of influence, a state-level analysis of coursework requirements, and a classroom-level analysis of syllabus construction.” That this marginalization comes at this time Butin finds deeply ironic. “It is ironic,” he writes, “exactly because so much of educational practice and policymaking has become centered on issues at the heart of multicultural foundations - e.g., urban education, cultural competence, structural inequities, and the performative and organizational limits of testing and accountability” – the very issues that foundations scholars can help us analyze, interpret and understand. Placing NCATE’S decision in this larger global argument, Butin sees NCATE’s action as the “singular...example of multicultural foundation’s current inability to, in Maxine Greene’s....terminology, challenge mystification in ‘dark times.’ ”

With this issue of the journal, we are also publishing three rejoinders to articles published in our Volume 2 Number 1 issue. Sherick Hughes offers us a theoretical framework for viewing the classroom described in Brian Schultz’s article, “Living savage inequalities: Room 405’s fight for equity in schooling.” In “Toward a critical race pedagogy of hope: A rejoinder to Brian Schultz,” Hughes uses Friere’s pedagogical theories along with Critical Race Theory to better interpret the events taking place in Schultz’s classroom.

In our last issue, we also published a special section on the upcoming U.S. Supreme Court case, *PICS v. Seattle School District*. On June 28, 2007, the High Court issued its decision. We invited two authors (one who also wrote an article for the previous issue) to contribute their analyses of the decision for our Rejoinder section. Both Sonya Jones and Brett Rubio spoke at a forum last spring at Western Washington University where they presented their views of the case to a live audience. We are providing a link to the video of that event on our Rejoinder page so our readers can both view the authors speaking about the case prior to the decision, and then read their analysis of the court decision that followed. We have also put up a link to the U.S. Supreme Court decision so readers can read the decision themselves.

Our [Rejoinder](#) page now contains responses to the first two issues of our journal. We invite readers to continue to respond to the articles in both of the earlier issues as well as to our current issue. We will continue to put up responses to articles for all of our issues as long as the conversation continues.

