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Some Reflections on the Tenth Year Anniversary Issue of the Journal of Educational Controversy

Lorraine Kasprisin

Western Washington University, lorraine.kasprisin@wwu.edu

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EDITORIAL

Some Reflections on the Tenth Year Anniversary Issue of the *Journal of Educational Controversy*

Lorraine Kasprisin, Editor

Welcome to our 10th Year Anniversary Issue and the first issue to be published exclusively on our new website. We have now completed the transfer of our nine earlier volumes to this site. Unfortunately, our statistical data gathering on the journal's impact has begun anew, since the new website does not have access to the last ten years of data that were collected.

Over the last ten years, the *Journal of Educational Controversy* has created a dynamic conversation around some of the most challenging dilemmas and controversies that arise in the education of citizens for a pluralistic, democratic society.

We described our purpose and philosophy from the beginning in the following way:

Because many of the tensions in public school and university policies and practices are deeply rooted in the tensions inherent in the philosophy of a liberal democratic state, many of the value conflicts in public schools and universities can only be understood within the context of this larger public philosophy. In effect, the conflicting assumptions underlying our public philosophy frame our questions, define our problems and construct the solutions that shape our practices, policies, and research agendas. This journal will try to help clarify that public debate and deepen an understanding of its moral significance.

It is this clash of values that are represented in so many of our issues. I have added an appendix to this editorial where readers can view all the themes and controversial scenarios we posed in one place.

Because the journal is a conversation over time, it has an organic quality to it, and we were never sure where it would go. In Volume 2 we published an article by Curt Dudley-Marling titled "Return of the Deficit," that called attention to the way deficit thinking was beginning to once again enter into our conversations over education. Curt later engaged in a conversation on this topic with another author, Paul Thomas, in an exchange on our blog that extended from November 2014 to January 2015. In 2014, we thought that it was time to return to the topic and devote an entire issue on a subject that required a multi-dimensional, in-depth analysis. The original article appeared in 2007 in a special issue dedicated to Jonathan Kozol, on the theme, "Jonathan Kozol's Nation of Shame Forty Years Later." Although the issue focused on the re-segregation of American schools, it asked authors to think more broadly about the gap between the present realities of American schooling and a fulfilled vision of equal educational opportunities for all? In that issue we invited authors to examine various forces that impede or distract from the realization of this vision, whether structural, moral, political, or pragmatic. Hence, Dudley-Marling's article opened up a new line for examination for us. Later, when we returned to the theme of deficit thinking in 2014, we published articles around a new theme, "Challenging the Deficit Model and the Pathologizing of Children: Envisioning Alternative Models."

The journal itself has grown organically. It was conceived as a clash of ideas around the controversies and tensions that define education in a pluralistic, liberal democratic state. From the beginning, we started to provide introductory essays to provide a broader context for the articles, followed by articles that addressed the controversy. But we soon started to add special sections that explored related themes. Later we added video interviews with the authors who were able to discuss their articles in greater depth and within other contexts. And finally we brought several authors together to discuss and argue their points at our annual Educational Law and Social Justice Forums that we videotaped and embedded in the journal. We even added a blog as an extension to the journal. The aim of the blog is to promote a conversation among educational professionals and the general public in a pluralistic, democratic format. Its main purposes are to enable authors whose articles were published in the journal to update their ideas, to inform readers of current controversies in education, and to promote a conversation among the authors and our readers. Finally, we even experimented with a video book review engaging several reviewers in the discussion of a book instead of the typical printed book review.

In many ways, the journal is predicated on a certain view of learning and knowledge that frames our concept of understanding. What does it mean to come to understand complex and difficult ideas? Our goal was not to just produce a journal that would simply bring together a set of articles for each issue, but to provide opportunities to enter into a conversation at any point and return over and over again but with a deeper understanding. Ideas that appeared under one theme are illuminated when seen under

a different theme. Authors who reflect on their article in a videotaped interview bring a new background and context from their life's story. And authors who wrote articles in the solitary confines of their own study are suddenly seen in a dynamic clash with both other authors and an audience as they present their ideas in a videotaped forum.

This conversation continues in our 10th year anniversary issue. For this special issue, we decided it was time to let our authors select their own controversies rather than ask them to respond to our scenarios. We provided them with only this brief guideline:

In previous issues of the *Journal of Educational Controversy*, we have defined a contemporary controversy and asked our authors to examine the issue. For our 10th year anniversary issue, we have decided to have an open issue where authors can define their own controversy. We asked authors to use the following outline:

1. Define an educational controversy – formal or informal education, K-12, college or university, adult education, secular or religious education, or larger philosophical issues in the educational ethos of a society or a culture. The issue can be a contemporary one or a perennial one that is revisited.
2. Explain the significance of the problem.
3. Provide an historical and philosophical framework for the controversy.
4. Lay out the different arguments surrounding the controversy.
5. Examine the underlying assumptions and resulting implications of the different positions.
6. Provide suggestions to resolve the issues raised and provide supporting arguments.

We remind authors that we publish controversies that are deeply embedded in our conceptual frameworks. The journal tries to distinguish between surface controversies and latent or depth controversies. For example, schools engage students in controversies all the time and are embedded themselves in controversies. Most of these controversies engage us in disagreements on a surface level. That is not to say that these discussions are unimportant – only that they take place with assumptions that remain unstated and beliefs that remain largely hidden or submerged. The journal tries to go deeper by

examining the very frameworks in which all these surface controversies arose – to get at our underlying assumptions and beliefs.

We have divided the articles in this issue into two categories:

1. Articles that have continued a conversation that was first conducted in various past issues.
2. Articles that open up a new conversation.

Section 1: Continuing the Conversation

One of our authors, Nel Noddings, published an article in our very first issue and has followed up with her most recent thinking in an article for our 10th Year Anniversary issue. It represents the kind of continuing conversation we are seeking in this journal. In her earlier article, "Helping Students to Think," Nel responded to a very specific tension between liberty and equality that was captured in our controversial scenario that we created around a court decision by the Third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that ruled against a school district's anti-harassment policy as a violation of the first amendment. See <http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol1/iss1/>. Her later article returns to the topic by exploring more generally four facets of critical thinking and its purposes.

Leslie Locke and Ann E. Blankenship continue the conversation that was started in earlier issues by two different authors in two separate issues on the events in Arizona that resulted in the banning of the Mexican American studies program in the Tucson school district.

In 2011, we published an article by the Director of Student Equity at the Tucson Unified School District in Arizona. It appeared in a special issue on the "Schools and Education our Children Deserve." In his article, "The Hypocrisy of Racism: Arizona's Movement towards State-Sanctioned Apartheid," Director Augustine Romero provided an historical account of the state legislation (HB 2281) that banned Mexican American Studies. See <http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol6/iss1/>

We decided to continue that timely conversation with a later issue devoted entirely to the theme, "Who Defines the Public in Public Education," and invited teacher Curtis Acosta to contribute an article. His article, "Dangerous Minds in Tucson: The Banning of Mexican American Studies and Critical Thinking in Arizona," appeared in our 2013 issue. See <http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol8/iss1/>. We were able to continue the conversation within a different theme and context which helps us to see the issue from within multiple perspectives, thus, deepening our understanding. Indeed, the issue provided a multi-media approach to the topic. We invited Curtis Acosta to come to speak at Western Washington University in the fall of 2013, an event that was videotaped and

inserted on the journal's website, and followed up with a special skype session with the author in the spring after students had an opportunity to read his article. See http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/public_forums.html. Both events drew large numbers of faculty and staff who were able to discuss the article with the author through Skype. We have some very interesting student responses both before and after the event that we then wrote about on our blog at: <http://journalofeducationalcontroversy.blogspot.com/2014/05/notes-on-16th-annual-educational-law.html>

I also interviewed Curtis for our video series on "Talking with the Authors," which provided another opportunity and media for readers to explore his ideas. (Incidentally, we have both one-hour video interviews and ten-minute preview videos in order to meet the taste and inclination of different types of audiences.) See http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/authors_talk.html. The issue in which his article appeared also contains a video excerpt from the documentary, *Precious Knowledge*, a film about the events that occurred in Arizona. Following the video, we provide readers with a printed interview with the director of the film, Ari Palos, by a member of our editorial staff. Our blog continues to update readers on these events, especially, on the upcoming court case. Finally, we provided a printed interview with Curtis Acosta on the blog as well: <http://journalofeducationalcontroversy.blogspot.com/2013/10/curtis-acosta-interviews-with-nathaniel.html>

Locke and Blankenship decided to further this conversation for our anniversary issue by "addressing the gap in the literature" that has been published about this highly publicized event. While recognizing that most of the articles written have been around the political events surrounding the banning of the curriculum, Locke and Blankenship remind us that a "federal desegregation case still pending in Tucson is rarely mentioned and never discussed in depth." Their article, "Keeping the Flames at Bay: The Interplay between Federal Oversight and State Politics in Tucson's Mexican America Studies Program," fills this missing gap in the narrative of these events by presenting two stories.

Locke and Blankenship write,

First, we look at the story of the TUSD desegregation case originally filed in 1974 and its progress toward unitary status. Next, we look at the story of political scheming and maneuvering in Tucson and Arizona aimed at eliminating MAS. Finally, we discuss the impact of federal court oversight in the face of highly oppositional political forces and how equity and equality may be protected after TUSD is granted unitary status.

Finally, Ethan Ris offers us an historical and conceptual look at the concept of grit in his article, "Grit: A Short History of a Useful Concept." This concept first appeared explicitly in a study on resiliency in our 2014 issue under the theme, "Challenging the Deficit Model and the Pathologizing of Children: Envisioning Alternative Models." In her article, "Surpassing Sisyphus: The Tenacious and Promising Struggle to Push and Support a Strengths-Based Ideology and Practice in Education," Sara Truebridge shares her ideas about the role of beliefs and resiliency in moving from a deficit-based ideology to a strength-based ideology and practice. We also provided a review of her book, *Resilience Begins with Beliefs: Building on Student Strengths for Success in School* as well as a review of Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*. See <http://cedar.wvu.edu/jec/vol9/iss1/>.

With her focus on strength-based practices, Truebridge concentrates on the development of resiliency as a dynamic, relational process rather than simply as a trait one possesses, and the role of beliefs and the use of language that undergird it.

Ethan Ris enters into this conversation in our anniversary issue by problematizing the concept that he calls "grit." Tracing the historical roots of the concept for over a century, Ris writes, that looking at this historical context reveals that it was a concept that had been a "focus of anxiety from middle and upper-class parents and educators," a point often missed in current discussions on the relevance of the concept for the education of more disadvantaged students. Writes Ris, "Grit functions as a proxy for a type of character-building that privilege prevents. When poor children appear in this discourse, they are not the problem but rather the romanticized solution." His paper enters into our conversation about this concept by revealing the way this "similar pattern is emerging today."

Section 2: Engaging a New Conversation

Many of our authors have decided to break new ground by opening new lines of conversation.

Three of the articles focus on higher education, an area that has not been explored in our journal very much in the past. They cover issues in universities around the world: the United States, Denmark and Iran.

In "Open Access Publishing in Higher Education: Charting the Challenging Course to Academic and Financial Sustainability," Mark Greenberg provides us with an in-depth look at the open access movement and the crisis in university publishing. The article is indeed very fitting for our journal that is deeply committed to the idea of open access.

In “Visiting the Neo-Liberal University: New Public Management and Conflicting Normative Ideas. A Danish Case,” Asger Sørensen uses a highly publicized incident as a case study to examine the crisis of the university in Denmark as it confronts the neoliberal entrepreneur model that has arisen in our century and the problems it poses.

Finally, following a screening of the film, “To Light a Candle,” at our university, we invited author Mina Yazdani to contribute a paper on the plight of university faculty and students of the Baha’i faith in Iran who face oppression and persecution by the State. The film was shown worldwide on February 27, 2015, and was part of the “Education is not a Crime Campaign” that was started in November of 2014. We thought it was an important topic to bring to the attention of our readers.

We also have three earlier posts on these events on our blog. One of the posts on May 7, 2015, contains an interview with Professor Michael Karlberg on the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education’s resistance to Iranian oppression. Dr. Karlberg is Professor of Communications at our university and was a speaker on a panel following the screening of the human rights documentary. As a response to the denial of university education, the Bahá’ís have established the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education, a network of educators from around the world working to provide an alternative access to higher education. Dr. Karlberg himself teaches online courses for the Institute from the United States, but as he points out, participating in these online courses poses many risks for the Iranian Bahá’í students.

For our anniversary issue, we asked author Mina Yazdani to talk about the Bahá’í Institute for Higher Education against the broader cultural and political context of the Iranian State. In her article, “Iranian Baha’is and Higher Education under the Islamic Republic,” Yazdani points out that the conflicting actions and statements that Iran makes in response to international attention and pressure is part of “the dilemma it faces as an ideologically founded government on the one hand and a modern state fulfilling its function to provide the means of well-being and progress for all its nation, on the other—the dilemma of religious versus national identity.”

Although there is much to celebrate in our 10th year anniversary issue, one sad event occurred over that time. My mentor, Maxine Greene, passed away. Maxine wrote a prologue for our very first issue that introduced the journal to a new audience. A line from that prologue is featured permanently on our introductory page. Maxine wrote, “This journal opens and reopens spaces for thoughtfulness and concern.” We later dedicated an entire issue to Maxine’s life and work in 2010 in an issue on the theme, “Art, Social Imagination, and Democratic Education.” We included a slide show depicting the evolution of a child’s artistic themes as well as a salon that brought together music, art and poetry framed within a broader social and political discussion.

In her prologue to our first issue, Maxine reminded us that we must bring more to the pages of our journal than analytical reasoning if we indeed want to embrace the uncertainties, tensions, and controversies of our time in ways that maintain our humanity and avoid falling into simplistic answers that give us a comfortable but illusionary certainty. We have tried to live up to her expectations.

Rather than closing this issue permanently, we have decided to continue to publish some additional articles incrementally for a while longer.

APPENDIX

The Journal of Educational Controversy

Volumes 1 to 10

2006 – 2015

Volume 1, Number 1, 2006: Liberty and Equality: Conflicting Values in the Public Schools of a Liberal Democratic Society

Many of the tensions in public school policies are deeply rooted in the tensions inherent in the philosophy of a liberal democratic state. For example, while we seek to promote values like equality and liberty, there are times when these values conflict. In a recent court decision, *Saxe v. State College Area School District*, the third U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against a school district's anti-harassment policy as a violation of the First Amendment. The policy was intended to provide a safe, secure, and nurturing school environment for all students, including gay and lesbian students, to achieve equal educational opportunities. The plaintiffs in the case argued that their religion compelled them to speak out against what they considered the harmful and sinful nature of homosexuality, and argued that the school policy was a constitutional violation of their free speech and free exercise of their religion.

Volume 2, Number 1, 2007: Jonathan Kozol's *Nation of Shame* Forty Years Later

Jonathan Kozol reminds us that this country's schools are more segregated now than at any time since 1968. The moral imperative driving the public schools is found in the language of the nation's ideals as well as in the rhetoric of its political slogans, but that imperative has not been able to be realized.

What is the nature of the gap between the present realities of American schooling and a fulfilled vision of equal educational opportunities for all? In this issue we invite authors to examine various forces that impede or distract from the realization of this vision, whether structural, moral, political, or pragmatic.

Volume 2, Number 2, 2007: Developing Dispositions: Professional Ethic or Political Indoctrination?

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.

Volume 3, Number 1, 2008: Schooling as if Democracy Matters

In this issue, we consider how we are to fulfill the traditional moral imperative of our schools -- to create a public capable of sustaining the life of a democracy. How do we do this in an age of the Patriot Act and similar anti-terrorism legislation in other countries, NSA surveillance, extraordinary rendition, preemptive wars, enemy combatants -- all likely to involve violations of civil rights and liberties and a curtain of government secrecy? What story do we tell our young about who we are, who we have been, and who we are becoming? How do we educate children about their identity in this global world? What sense are they to make of the "imperial" democracy they are inheriting? Is our new political environment a fundamental break with the past or an extension of longstanding trends? What are the implications of these forces for the education of the young on the foundations of our democracy and our collective identity?

Volume 4, Number 1, 2009: The Hidden Dimensions of Poverty: Rethinking Poverty and Education

In an earlier issue of the *Journal of Educational Controversy*, we published an

article critical of the Ruby Payne phenomena sweeping workshops for teachers, social workers, and human service providers across the country. Our author cautioned readers about the return of language that conceptualizes issues like poverty in a deficit mode, once again seeing the issue as a problem with the individual rather than a set of systemic problems found in the larger social order. We invite authors to reexamine our thinking about the intractable issues associated with poverty in this country. How should teachers and other human service providers think about issues of poverty? What are the advantages and disadvantages in conceptualizing the problem one way or another? What do students who are preparing to become teachers or human service providers need to know and understand about the lives of their students and clients. What should we be teaching them? We welcome articles that provide historical perspectives, social and political analyses, views on the economics of poverty, examination of research, and conceptual and philosophical analyses.

Volume 5, Number 1, 2010: Art, Social Imagination and Democratic Education

"My vision, in launching this Foundation, is to generate inquiry, imagination, and the creation of art works by diverse people. It has to do so with a sense of the deficiencies in our world and a desire to repair, wherever possible. Justice, equality, freedom - these are as important to us as the arts, and we believe they can infuse each other, perhaps making some difference at a troubled time." Maxine Greene

An understanding of the role of public schools in sustaining the life of a democracy requires more than the occasional class in civic education. It requires the development of social imagination. Maxine Greene reminds us of the important role that the arts - visual art, music, performance art and literature - can play in such an education. We invite authors to explore the many dimensions of a vision for such an education. We also invite authors to contribute to a special section on Maxine Greene's lifetime work and writings on art, social imagination and education.

This issue is dedicated to Maxine Greene.

Volume 5, Number 2, 2010: The Professions and Scholarly Communities: Creating the Public's Questions and Understandings in the Public Square

Professionals and scholarly communities in all fields bring a special expertise to the discussion of ideas in the public square of a democracy. At times, democratic decisions or views widely held by the public conflict with sound professional knowledge of the professional or scholarly community, and challenge the integrity of the choices that a professional must make in a particular case. At other times, the professional is faced with a conflict within the profession itself between deeply entrenched traditions and the challenges posed by newer paradigms. Under both circumstances, the professional is left

with a decision about the ethical path to follow and the result will influence the public's understanding and questions. This issue of the *Journal of Educational Controversy* examines instances where professionals are faced with a dilemma that either pits a democratic decision against the expertise of professional standards or a conflict within the profession itself when traditional paradigms are challenged. How does the professional examine the choices that would have to be weighed and consider the most ethical position that should be taken?

Volume 6, Number 1, 2011: The Education and Schools Our Children Deserve

The politicizing of education at the national level has centered on issues of standards, accountability, global competitiveness, national economic growth, low student achievement on worldwide norms, and federally mandated uniformity. There has been little discussion of the public purposes of our schools or what kind of education is necessary for an individual's development and search for a meaningful life. There is a paucity of ideas being discussed at the national level around topics such as: how school practices can be aligned with democratic principles of equity and justice; how school practices can promote the flourishing of individual development as well as academic achievement; what skills and understandings are needed for citizens to play a transformative role in their society. Without conversation at this deeper level about the fundamental purposes of education, we cannot develop a comprehensive vision of the kinds of schools our children deserve. We invite authors to contribute their conceptions of the kind of education our children deserve and/or the kinds of schools that serve the needs of individuals and of a democratic society.

Volume 7, Number 1, 2012: The School-to-Prison Pipeline

The School-to-Prison Pipeline refers to a national trend in which school policies and practices are increasingly resulting in criminalizing students rather than educating them. Statistics indicate that the number of suspensions, expulsions, dropouts or "pushouts," and juvenile justice confinements is growing. Moreover, there is a disproportionate impact on students of color and students with disabilities and emotional problems. In this issue, we invite authors to examine the policy implications, the political ramifications, and the causes and possible solutions to this problem. Moreover, what are these policies teaching our children?

Volume 8, Number 1, 2013: Who Defines the Public in Public Education?

Our journal published an article recently on the banning of the Mexican-American curriculum in Arizona's Tucson Unified School District. The incident

raises many larger questions about what knowledge is of most worth, whose perspective gains ascendancy in the curriculum, and what public is represented in the public schools. Controversies have emerged not only over what should be included in specific areas like the literary canon, historical interpretations, science curriculum, etc., but also in the larger arena of ideological frameworks over what it means to be human, what it means to be an educated person, and what social values should frame a public education in a society that embeds a fundamental tension between its capitalist economic system and its democratic egalitarian ideals. Even the tension between the secular and the religious continues to defy easy answers in a society that values separation between church and state. As Warren Nord says about the typical study of economics, it assumes that "economics is a science, people are essentially self-interested utility-maximizers, the economic realm is one of competition for scarce resources, values are personal preferences and value judgments are matters of cost-benefit analysis" (Warren A. Nord, "The Relevance of Religion to the Curriculum," *The School Administrator*, January 1999). In effect, the so-called secular study of economics makes a number of assumptions about human nature, society, and values. What are left out of this study of the economic domain of life is the theologian's questions of social justice, stewardship, poverty and wealth, human dignity and the meaningfulness of work. To what degree do students understand or are even aware of these hidden assumptions in their study of economics and other subjects? To what degree should other perspectives be included? We invite authors to shed some light on these questions.

Volume 9, Number 1, 2014: Challenging the Deficit Model and the Pathologizing of Children: Envisioning Alternative Models

Martin Seligman, founder of the field of positive psychology, has said that, "Modern psychology has been co-opted by the disease model. We've become too preoccupied with repairing damage when our focus should be on building strength and resilience, especially in children." Is this also true of modern education? Political and pedagogical responses, from the "War on Poverty" through "No Child Left Behind" to address the educational gaps in academic achievement of historically marginalized and neglected groups (the poor, minorities and children with disabilities), were often deeply rooted in a language of cultural deprivation and special needs. Has this deficit model begun to surreptitiously creep into our educational discourse for all children? Have we become too focused on needs and deficiencies and forgotten that children also have capacities and strengths? Does the current emphasis on accountability and standardized testing contribute to the pathologizing of children? We invite authors to respond critically to this argument, envision alternative models, examine historical causes and precedents, analyze political and social ramifications, and share real life stories on the influence these ways of thinking have on the classroom and on the learning as experienced by students.

Volume 10, Number 1, 2015: Tenth Year Anniversary Issue: Construct your own Controversy

In previous issues of the *Journal of Educational Controversy*, we have defined a contemporary controversy and asked our authors to examine the issue. For our 10th year anniversary issue, we have decided to have an open issue where authors can define their own controversies. We asked authors to use the following outline:

1. Define an educational controversy -- formal or informal education, K-12, college or university, adult education, secular or religious education, or larger philosophical issues in the educational ethos of a society or a culture. The issue can be a contemporary one or a perennial one that is revisited.
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3. Provide an historical and philosophical framework for the controversy.
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6. Provide suggestions to resolve the issues raised and provide supporting arguments.

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