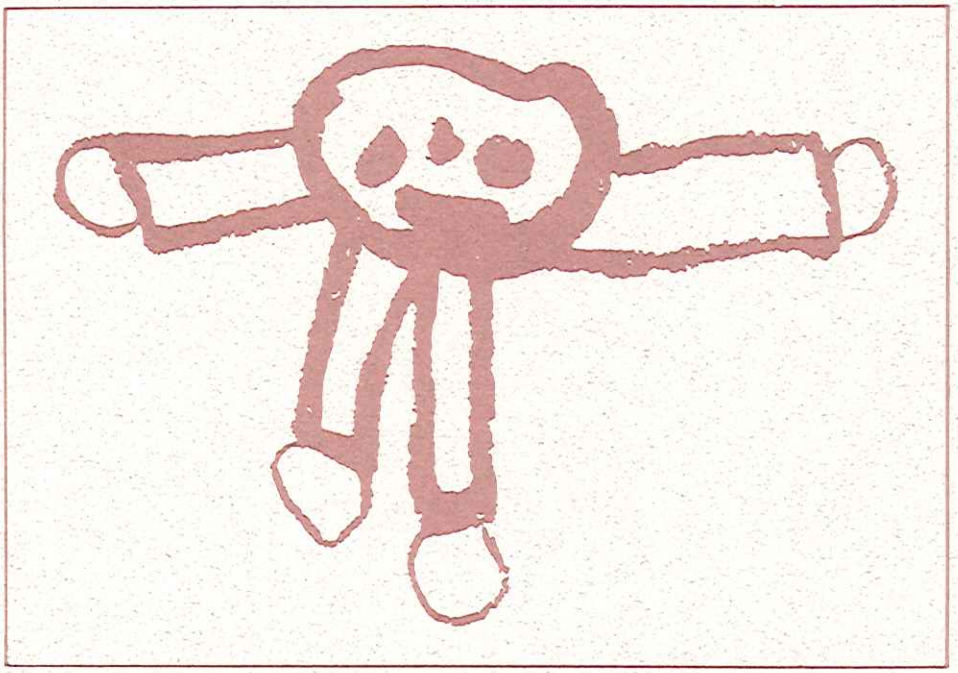
North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



Hubert Dyasi (Intro.)
Lillian Weber
Olga Winbush
Joseph Suina
Ruth Anne Olson
Arthur Tobier

Edited by Monroe D. Cohen

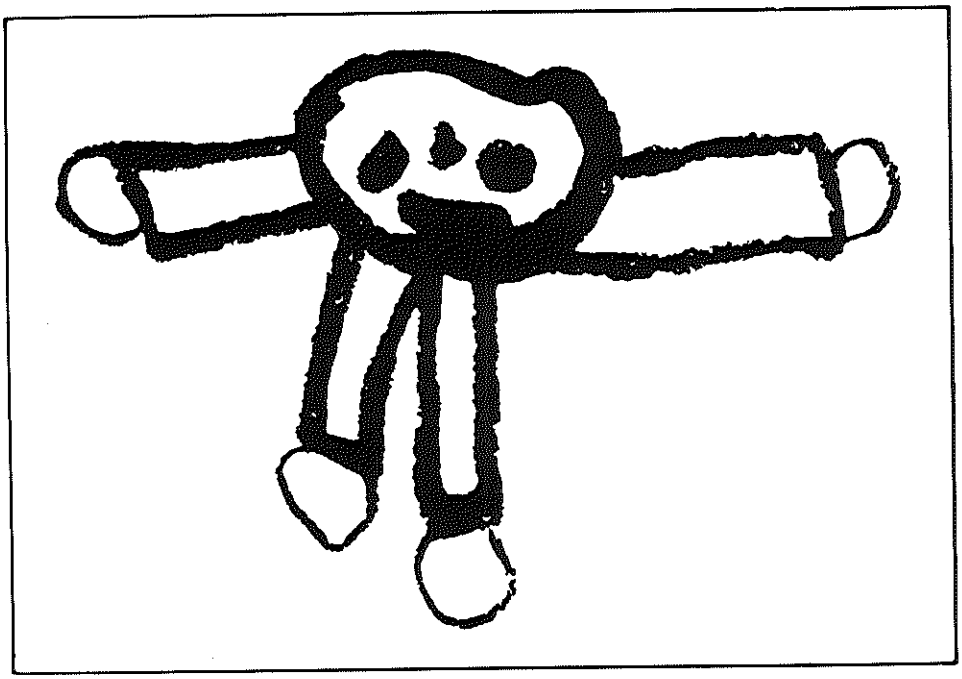
VALUING EACH OTHER: PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

In November 1972, educators from several parts of the United States met at the University of North Dakota to discuss some common concerns about the narrow accountability ethos that had begun to dominate schools and to share what many believed to be more sensible means of both documenting and assessing children's learning. Subsequent meetings, much sharing of evaluation information, and financial and moral support from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund have all contributed to keeping together what is now called the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation. A major goal of the Study Group, beyond support for individual participants and programs, is to provide materials for teachers, parents, school administrators, and governmental decisionmakers (within State Education Agencies and the U.S. Office of Education) that might encourage re-examination of a range of evaluation issues and perspectives about schools and schooling.

Towards this end, the Study Group has initiated a continuing series of monographs, of which this paper is one. Over time, the series will include material on, among other things, children's thinking, children's language, teacher support systems, inservice training, the school's relationship to the larger community. The intent is that these papers be taken not as final statements—a new ideology, but as working papers, written by people who are acting on, not just thinking about, these problems, whose implications need an active and considered response.

Vito Perrone

North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation



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Center for Teaching and Learning
University of North Dakota
March 1996

Foreword and Acknowledgments

Among the vital issues on which the North Dakota Study Group has focused attention in recent years, none has called more for "an active and considered response" than the need for cultural responsiveness.

Thanks are due, first, to Vito Perrone, who has provided inspirational guidance to the NDSG's ongoing deliberations, and to the various planning groups that have kept concern about racial and ethnic equity high up on the agenda of the Annual Meetings. Vito first proposed development of this publication.

We wish to acknowledge with gratitude a provocative presentation by Ana Maria Villegas, a research psychologist of the Educational Testing Service. She provided to NDSG members valuable background based on her September 1991 research-summary of "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy for the 1990s and Beyond" and its implications for the assessment of teachers.

Our present team of contributors deserves warm praise, both for the range of their insights and for their exceptional patience with the long process of getting these essays into print. An exemplar of such patience is Arthur Tobier, who deserves special mention for the many NDSG monographs he has produced in past years. Arthur's moving exploration of "Louis Armstrong's Neighborhood," incidentally, first appeared in an *Issues for Educators* monograph series of the School of Education at Queens College.

Professor/scientist William P. Weber and professor/artist John Weber graciously gave permission to use excerpts from a previously unpublished paper by their mother, the late Lillian Weber. (Beth Alberty, curator of the Brooklyn Children's Museum, ably selected the extracts from Lillian's paper.)

Lillian Weber was a charter member of the North Dakota Study Group. She served her colleagues well as a model of passion, intelligence, and spirtual force. Indeed, her influence as Director of the Workshop Center, at City College of the City University of New York, has changed the lives of many child-nurturers throughout the world. We dedicate *Valuing Each Other* to Lillian Weber, with love and respect.

The Introduction that follows is appropriately by Hubert Dyasi, who is carrying forward with vigor the powerful leadership that Lillian provided as Director of the Workshop Center.

Monroe D. Cohen, Editor

Introduction

Hubert Dyasi

Valuing and *devaluing!*

I have spent a great deal of time studying the following essays—not just for the purpose of writing this introduction. They give life to fundamental issues that caring and thoughtful educators grapple with continually. In the face of a bleak picture of wholesome multiculturist practices, they paint a landscape of possibility and of the constructive role that schools can play in its realization.

As I read the essays over and over again, many memories of my growing up as a young man in apartheid South Africa cascaded into my awareness. The memories centered on the devaluing of black African men and women and youth by white South Africans. Ordinarily, in my culture, men wear hats outdoors to signify their being men. They do not wear them indoors, because there they sit at places that indicate their social status. Many times I saw a black African man ordered by white people, even by white youth, to remove his hat as a sign of respect to them. He *had* to comply, and often did. As soon as the white person left, the man could not hide the anger and shame he felt over this devaluing. We young boys who were witnesses to this devaluing, we who were culturally and personally connected to the man, shared the shame he felt.

In my culture, to walk in a stately manner, instead of running, is also part of being a man. Like the other black men I have referred to, we too were forced to run to carry out a chore when ordered by a white person to do so. I saw women—mothers and sisters of my friends—ordered around and yelled at by their white female bosses. This behavior was devaluing, because my culture considers it taboo to yell at a woman. These essays present devaluing as a major issue in schools today.

Lillian Weber's insightful essay "Black or Multicultural Curriculum: Of Course—But What More?" describes a pattern of devaluing of African-American young males in schools in America. I know firsthand what she means by her reference to persistent devaluing of African-American youth in American schools, and understand very deeply why a focus on only the curriculum is an insufficient effort, albeit one that must be an integral part of efforts to change the situation.

Her essay promptly gets to the heart of the matter. "Not only are black youth felt to have no value to the school," she states, "they are felt to have no value to the whole society." The continual denial of worth of African-American youth in whatever manner, done from a position of authority as schools do, inflicts severe emotional and cultural damage on them and seriously undermines any good that might come out of the inclusion of African-American heroes and heroines in the curriculum. Even if the curriculum is changed and some days are set aside to acknowledge contributions of African-American, Native-American, Asian, or Latin heroes and heroines, we shall not have a truly multicultural situation as long as there is devaluing of students, whether overt or subtle, because of their ethnicity.

The devaluing of a segment of the population affects not only the individuals who are the direct targets, but also has an equally devastating effect on those who identify with them. To me, for example, the men and women I saw devalued in South Africa were not just nameless people. They were my friends' loving parents eking out a livelihood as roadworkers, gas-station attendants, streetsweepers, livestock herders, domestic servants, teachers, and nurses. Their plight hurt our souls, because these were men and women we loved and respected. They, on their part, adored us and made us believe we were the most prized beings in the world—and we *were*, in their world, which was also our world. How did we react to this devaluing? We asserted ourselves. The white population accordingly perceived us as "insubordinate" or "ungovernable." Perhaps we were, but adults in our communities thought otherwise.

Similarly, in addition to being targets of the devaluing that takes place in schools, African-American, Native-American, Asian-American, and Latin-American youths are forced continually to witness the devaluing of their people, regardless of age or profession. Our response in South Africa leads me to wonder whether devaluing, even when thinly veiled, is the cause rather than the result of so-called lack of discipline among African-American youth. I do not imply that lack of discipline is something to be proud of, but wish to stress the importance of tracing its roots if we are to succeed in reducing its incidence.

As Asa Hilliard III said, in one of the annual Catherine Molony Lectures sponsored by the City College Workshop Center, "Disorder, stress, and even disability will occur when cultural forms are arbitrarily delegitimized and suppressed by outside groups, and when coercion is used to cause a group to adopt alien cultural forms—especially when these are propagandized as superior to those of the dominated group" (Hilliard, 1993).

In many schools, African-American and other minority-group children also experience the devaluing not just of themselves

as persons, but also of their most prized cultural invention—their home language.

Another essay in this collection, Olga Winbush's "African-American Oral Traditions: Their Impact in the Classroom," gives a sensitive account of how schools denigrate African-American children's linguistic expertise. It surely must be one of the biggest ironies in education, Winbush says implicitly, that children who grow up steeped in a rich oral culture and who have achieved verbal expertise should be seen by scholars as "linguistically deficient." This non-recognition of African-American children's verbal skills is a denial of who they are. So, the school seems to say, in order to be seen as linguistically competent, these children must achieve what is demonstrably very difficult: show expertise in a language other than their home language.

For good communication to occur, at every point in a conversation or reading, a person must first understand the language, the substance of communication, and the social contexts to which the conversation or the text refers, and only then construct the meaning conveyed. To non-native speakers of a language, these four items are formidable obstacles; but students' difficulties in their attempts to overcome them are often interpreted by teachers as indicating lack of intellectual capacity to comprehend content rather than as psycholinguistic and background-knowledge difficulties, which they often are.

This point is clarified by Joseph Suina in his "Layers of Culture" essay. A teacher of a kindergarten of American Indian children expresses frustration because these children apparently cannot grasp the comparisons of *big, bigger,* and *biggest,* even though he has illustrated them with materials he had used successfully with English-speaking American children. The Native-American children are prime candidates for the misinterpretation indicated above. Even if they achieve a good understanding of the "new" language (as is often the case with African-Americans), their achievement is not highly valued, because their manner of speech is not the same as that of the dominant group, which is considered the "standard." This non-standard use of the language is often confused with lack of capacity to think about and to know the substance communicated.

Of course, students *can* master the dominant group's language—but sometimes at a price. In a personal communication to me Suina has written, "Children who have lost their native language also struggle with content, but it is the content of their own culture that they are failing to acquire." Upon reading this statement, I was instantly reminded of a statement attributed to Paulo Freire: "The act of learning to read and write has to start from a very comprehensive understanding of the act of reading the world, something which human beings do before reading the

words" (Berthoff, 1987). At the beginning was the world, then the word. The word is but a codification of the world as seen; the word is a human invention. When the codification is denigrated, the culture itself is delegitimized.

The unmistakable message ringing loud and clear in each of these essays is that multiculturalism is not an event: it is a context, an environment. As Ruth Anne Olson writes ("Ants Can Move Mountains") about the enriching powwow that took place in one of the schools participating in a program called Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS), the event was due to the involvement of the multicultural community as a partner in decision-making about matters affecting the school.

Olson's comments, written as they must be from a white person's perspective, are astonishingly similar to statements made from an African's perspective by the late freedom-fighter Amilcar Cabral. Cabral's love and respect for his own heritage were beyond question, yet he maintained that one should not overlook positive attributes of other cultures that might be very beneficial to further development of his African culture (Cabral, 1973). Similarly, Ruth Anne Olson pleads that Euro-based cultures, which are often still encumbered by high degrees of hubris, would do well to discover the positive elements of other cultures and learn from them.

Arthur Tobier and his colleagues of the Queens College Center for the Improvement of Education, at the Louis Armstrong Intermediate School (IS 227Q), also interpret a multicultural education in contextual terms. In their studies, they look upon history as more than a series of unconnected events and upon multicultural awareness as more than isolated trips to the neighborhood. Rather, history is talking about the fabric of living in a culture. Historical events are windows to the richness of the lives of "ordinary" people in the community. These lived lives provide situated logic and meaning to events. And right there lies the legitimate and pivotal role of schools.

Situated logic and meaning are thus the cornerstones of a truly multicultural curriculum. These essays, with their success stories, illustrate the power of social action by all groups with a stake in the schools. Essential is *joint* examination of different groups' situations and *joint* action to redress inequalities. At birth all human beings are free of prejudice and possess the highest degree of plasticity. We are, as the anthropologist Peter Wilson (1980) puts it, "the promising primate." The time is overdue for us to keep the promises of flexibility and freedom from prejudice in our lives. What better place is there to keep them than in our schools?

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1

Black or Multicultural Curriculum: Of Course—But What More?

Lillian Weber

"Before you can talk about or plan for a black context, you have to look at what the lives of these young people in schools add up to. What seems to me to be often the case is that there is *nothing* about the presence of black youth (particularly males) in schools that is valued. That presence is looked upon fearfully, as a problem, something to be discarded, gotten rid of. Certainly the tone used while referring to black youth is of overwhelming encumbrance and bother, and even worse than bother. . . . [M]y approach to all proposals for amelioration starts with asking whether what is proposed can relate amelioratively to this overwhelming situation of devaluation or non-value. Does the proposal provide value additionally to the participant's existence? Is any good meaning given to the membership of that participant in the school? [Editor's emphasis]

"To say this—to confront the reality of the situation—is for me of such enormous consequence and is so overwhelming that I have to stop and disregard all discussion of [black or multicultural] curriculum to go still further into this question. Not only are these persons, black youth, felt to have no value to the school, but they are felt to have no value to the whole of society.

"This judgment of persons really goes past *black* youth to the even larger grouping of young people 'at risk.' In fact, young people all over the country are at risk of not *ever* becoming adults who are considered capable of contributing to the society. For those young people—and the largest number is counted among the black youth, for whom there is no conception at all that they are going to be contributing to the society—I have to ask what is the role of the school and even *is* there any?"

* * *

"I certainly don't reject many of the suggestions that come up in the discussion of black curriculum. . . . Certainly it is a deprivation to the black young people not to have these past heroes present and alive as referent points for their thought and action. But in what way does that needed presence of past heroes contribute as remedy to the present situation of black young people . . .?

Editor's Note: *The following are excerpts from an unpublished article prompted by discussions within the North Dakota Study Group around 1990. The article will appear in its entirety in a book of the late Dr. Weber's papers to be published by Teachers College Press in 1996.*

. . . For such pervasive judgments of valuelessness the proposed solutions are too minimal, too small a remedy even though needed."

* * *

"The difference in quality of personal valuing became apparent to me after only a half-hour in an African airport. I saw clearly a whole realm of difference in this society where the dominance was not of the whites as against the blacks. This was a *society* of blacks, the black society participating and shaping and defining. This difference was obvious even though within the black society the economic structure may in fact be dominated by the major white world society. The difference was obvious even within the fact of hierarchical classifications of blacks. Certain definitions were shared in a way that is almost never true in our black-white society without imposition and devaluing. The space for self-definitions and decision making—politically, economically—for stating of problems and issues was apparent, it was there. I saw it immediately in the stance of the people that one meets, in the walk of the people that one sees. It became evident to me that this burden of taking on another framework than your own, as the price of membership, was *not* there, or certainly *less* there. What seemed clear to me was that without this burden of being non-participant in decision making or at least having a very secondary role in the decision making, and without the burden of exclusion from formulation of the problems and issues, thinking was and could be clearer, less impeded, less encumbered.

"Understanding how this framework of determination by 'another' acts to burden existence, and I believe very deeply that it does impact in this way, is essential to any and all solutions. In this context, I see the whole role of the school as secondary solution. Indeed, within this white-dominated society, which is the locus of our solution making, I don't think the school can really solve this problem in any kind of complete fashion.

"Nevertheless, since I am committed by my profession to work for making things better, for enabling the flowering of capacity, I *must* seek for solutions, even if they are partial. Those efforts I would want to apply to confronting the issues of valuing, because I think perhaps through this confrontation one can create a space for *some* valuing, a chance for *some* contribution. Anything short of that, of at least 'some,' is not adequate. If the talk is of black curriculum without confronting this question of valuing and contribution then it is only a skin, a surface, without roots and unattached to the real cancer. When I think about these problems, I think—and I would want this for all young people but certainly for young people who have not had a chance to feel their own value

and their own contribution—I would want to offer an approach that confronts the existence of value—even if my approach is said to be visionary. Let it at least *be* visionary."

* * *

"For these young people, or for any young people for that matter, the schooling that is offered for those of high school age cannot be just preparation for a future. Some of that may be there, but the school has to offer ways of current contribution, ways of being a partner, and it has to offer risk. There has to be a real life of worth. The only experiences of loyalty and of 'following after' cannot be just through membership in street gangs. There has to be a feeling that without you this school wouldn't work, without you this classroom wouldn't work, without you the lunchroom wouldn't work, without you, . . . without you, . . . without you. . . . And it has to be *true*—the real thing.

"I am proposing that if every young person had even one month a year which was real in this fashion, a time when he or she was valued because of the context of contribution in which he or she was functioning, some real change might occur in the relationships of valuing. I am proposing that the functioning of the young person had best be in a real job that is both respected and paid for—so that the participation in doing this, and doing it well, would be recognized. Of course what must be simultaneously recognized is that a part of the mentor's pay is in recognition that expertise is being transmitted to someone else."

* * *

"A different view of mentor or teacher is needed. Let us say that part of any day of a construction worker—say two hours of his eight-hour day—is set aside for his taking on, seriously, two assistants from whom he demands good work. And that expectation is an expectation from all adult workers."

* * *

"If black youth are regarded solely as an encumbrance and an intrusion, then to keep them in the situation is on the level of cruel and unusual punishment."

* * *

"Whatever it takes to do these things is needed because it is not possible to throw away fifty percent of the youths. And I say generally—youths, but youths with no prospects whatever of a

useful job and contribution just because they didn't go to college; like there is nothing else. That is a disaster for everybody. It just can't be lived with. When they say that one in every four black youths has already been part of or is under control of the correctional system—one in every four!—what are they saying? What? Can we have a black curriculum around the news of the past?! These young people have to be news in their own right. They have to be necessary to society. I think it is possible to have at least minor solutions, minor stabs at solutions, while we work for a bigger thing."

* * *

"I want to say very clearly that I'm well aware that I'm not defining a single format, *my* way. These are things that I have found and have learned from in the writings of those who struggle for self-definition in societies where it is possible for them to frame this around the dominant group in that society. I'm talking within things that have set me thinking about this, things I have both heard and read from Mandela, from Nyerere, and from others—not in order to educate me, but it has in fact educated me —which show there are other ways to define a problem and so one has to look at how we have done it and know that present definitions are far too limited."

* * *

". . . I am presenting the idea of a hero as something that needs to be re-thought in these terms. It's not just the risky jobs that I've talked about that could be available for some of the older kids who are adventurous and want to do that, but the idea of doing jobs that need that kind of commitment and the idea of ordinary people doing ordinary jobs as being heroes. That is the thing that you really want to emphasize.

"What shocks me, you see, isn't only the situation of the black youth. It is that the notions of success in the society have totally devalued physical work and participation and contribution in the fashion of blue collar workers. It has not only happened this way in our capitalist society where you have a fifty percent drop-out rate. The whole discussion prior to the changes in Eastern Europe was in a way that devalued work, even in a socialist society, and the events in China indicate that the work I described is also devalued there. That, it seems to me, is a very serious disease that has affected our societies. . . ."

* * *

"Without valued work, seen to be contribution, a large portion of people are condemned to what is tantamount to death. Are you going to make that decision—for death, or to put them all in jail? What is it you're going to decide? Are you going to at least work toward something where people can live? . . . Even in the society where the question of dominance by others is so fixed that full participation seems hopeless, engaging in the political process is certainly of the essence."

* * *

"Unfortunately, such job policy is *not* on the current political agenda. There are those who will do some of the work I have described in order to survive, even though reimbursed in ways that indicate devaluation. That the unvalued work is what makes *possible* the valued and highly reimbursed work of others is unsaid. The political power and dominance remain fixed and unreconsidered."

2

African-American Oral Traditions: Their Impact in the Classroom

Olga Winbush

For many African-American children, a cultural battleground has been enacted between themselves and their schools around the area of language. These children enter the classroom with their own family and community culture, parts of which are embodied in a distinctive linguistic style that is not understood by the teacher. As a result, a cultural clash ensues.

As a college student, I experienced a cultural clash of my own. I grew up in a linguistically rich environment. Whenever the adults in my life wanted to send a serious message, they would speak using analogies. My mother socialized me with such metaphorical statements as, "Don't let your mouth write a check that your butt can't cash." My male friends would "hang out" together on the street corner, showing off their verbal expertise through *rapping* and *sounding*. Only after I entered college and began to read the writings of various sociologists, psychologists, historians, and educators did I discover that I was considered "culturally deprived and linguistically deficient."

Now, as a graduate student, in response to negative conclusions that had been drawn concerning my people, I have begun to research African-American culture, and in particular Black language. This paper will discuss some of the oral traditions found in that culture and their implications for the teaching of Black children.

Ebonics

Ebonics is the term used for African-American oral language. It is defined as the "linguistic and paralinguistic features which on a concentric continuum represent the communicative competence of West African, Caribbean, and United States slave descendants of African origin. It includes the various idioms, patois, argots, idiolects, and social dialects of these people. It is thus the culturally appropriate language of Black people and isn't to be considered deviant" (Williams & Rivers, 1975, p. 30).

Ebonics is a systematic, rule-governed language which follows an African morphophonemic and morphosyntactic construction. When enslaved Africans were brought to the United

States, they did not lose their languages and culture in the Middle Passage. They were originally speakers of West and Central African Hamito-Bantu and Niger-Congo languages. Even though they were forced to adopt Standard English as a language, they kept many of the deeply embedded sound and sentence structures that characterized their original African languages. These Africans in America applied the English words to the African language structures, a process known as *relexification.* Many of these African linguistic retentions are still present in Ebonics today.

The verb system of Ebonics is an example of these linguistic retentions. Ebonics follows an aspect verb system, which is indicative of the verb systems of Hamito-Bantu and Niger-Congo language groups of West and Central Africa. In these systems, time is looked upon as being ongoing and continuous. Flowing from the past to the future, it cannot be stopped and held. The use of the *habitual be* by African-Americans is part of this aspect verb system. For speakers of Ebonics, "to be" is "to exist." Thus, when they say, "I be down at my sister's house," they are saying in effect, "I exist in time and space at my sister's house, yesterday, today, and tomorrow." The fact that many African-American children use the *habitual be* in their everyday speech does not mean that they have deficient language skills. They are simply making appropriate use of their cultural language.

Signifying

Several stylistic features of Ebonics are part of the vast oral tradition that Africans carried with them when they were forcefully brought to the United States. Many of these stylistic features have been retained in African-American linguistic culture and are part of the cultural milieu African-American children bring into the classroom.

Signifying is a highly stylized mode of discourse used by Ebonics speakers to convey some type of message. Indirection is an important quality of signifying. Metaphors are employed in signifying to put across indirect messages that carry a powerful meaning for the speaker and the listener.

There are two types of signifying: heavy and light. *Heavy* signifying is done when the speaker wants to make a direct point through indirectiveness, in hopes of putting listeners "in check" and causing them to modify their behavior in some way. African-American adults usually engage in this type of signifying. For example: two women are talking. One, A, doesn't want her friend, B, to know she is pregnant again. B says to her, "Girl, you sure need to join the Metrecal for Lunch Bunch"; and the pregnant woman states, "Yes, I guess I am putting on a little weight." B responds with, "Now look here, girl; we both standing here

soaking wet, and you still trying to tell me it ain't raining!" The friend, B, uses metaphor and indirection to let the pregnant woman, A, know that she already knew that A was pregnant.

African-American children, particularly males, engage in *light* signifying. Examples are *sounding, rapping,* and *playing the dozens. Sounding* and *playing the dozens* are ritualized verbal-insult games, which occur in a group situation. Following a well-established ritual pattern, they reflect the shared social knowledge of the group who participate in the verbal games. They are a type of symmetrical joking relationship, in which two or more people are free to insult each other and their families. *Sounding* refers to verbal insults directed at the participants, and *playing the dozens* are verbal insults directed at the participants' families. The insults are put across indirectly through the use of metaphors.

It is important that these verbal games are done within the context of a particular social group. If persons from outside the group attempt to participate, their joining in may be seen as a serious direct challenge, and a fight could easily start. The content of the insults does not include accurate personal facts that could hurt the listener. If personal insults are introduced then it is no longer a game, and a real battle may ensue.

In the African-American community, as in many communities in Africa, verbal ability is highly valued among both adults and children. The speaker who comes up with something spontaneous and original is applauded and respected by the rest of the group. Thus, the more metaphorical and indirect the sound or dozen is, the more appreciated the speaker is. Children who are sounding or playing the dozens are projecting their personhood on the scene.

To conduct my own research for my master's thesis on the ways African-American children's metaphor development is reflected in their participation in African-American oral traditions, I "hung out" with, observed, and taped fifteen African-American male adolescents as they sounded and played the dozens. I spent an entire summer with these boys, all of whom reside in Compton, California.

Here are some examples of the *sounds* they used:

"Hey man, I see you wearin' your $4.99 Specials" (referring to another boy's dirty tennis shoes). "Chipper man, you wearin' your everyday blue jeans with your everyday desegregated haircut" (referring to his uncombed hair).

When the boys were playing the dozens, the insults were even more ritualistic and metaphorical. For example: "I seen yo' mother walkin' across the street wearin' your father's shoes stylin' her wedding outfit that she bought at Thrifty's" (stating that his mother is more like a man than a woman, she has big feet, and the clothes she wears are out of style).

Needless to say, African-American children who exhibit this kind of rhythmic verbal style, fluency, and metaphoric capacity show that they have sharp intellects and a tremendous amount of creativity. Many times, however, these youngsters experience much difficulty in school. They are labeled as "low achievers," "remedial learners," and "behavior problems." When I interviewed the teachers of several of the adolescents I worked with in my research, they related that one boy could not be quiet in class and constantly had to be sent to the office, and that another boy was reading three years below grade level.

Usually children who show a great deal of expertise in signifying have the most difficult time keeping quiet in class. Their verbal skill is a part of who they are. It brings them success and esteem from their peers. When African-American children enter into signifying matches within the classroom, they are not necessarily doing so out of disrespect for the teacher. Rather, they may be employing a culturally appropriate method for establishing themselves within the social context of the school environment. Instead of banishing such youngsters to the office and causing further educational damage, teachers must begin to seek ways to incorporate the oral culture of African-American children into the curriculum.

Expanding the Schools' View of Culture

Our educational institutions must become much more culturally knowledgeable if they are to provide children with the best education possible. A nation's schools reflect the values and ideals of the dominant culture.

When African-American children are studied solely within a Euro-American framework, acknowledgement of their African heritage is often omitted, as is any mention of the 400 years of racism and oppression that Africans in diaspora have endured. Examining African-Americans within the context of white middle-class values, while ignoring the complex and visible culture that they as a people have established, often places African-American children in a precarious position.

As a result, the African-American community, and in particular the African-American family, has sometimes been judged as being dysfunctional, pathological, apathetic, "culturally deprived." A case in point is the 1970 study by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Case for National Action: The Negro Family," which led to negative and erroneous interpretations of African people and their lifestyles. Moynihan's argument that the female-headed households of African-American families helped to perpetuate "a tangle of pathology" within them did not take adequately into account the culture of African-Americans or the

continued oppression that is still a part of the lives of many of them.

A respect for cultural diversity means acceptance of the cultures and learning styles that children—*all* children—bring into the classroom and the consequent building of a curriculum that makes full use of those cultures and that builds on their strengths. There are many ways to make the classroom more culturally responsive to the oral traditions that many African-American children bring with them when they walk into the schools. If stylistic verbal ability is valued within African-American culture, these children should be enabled to work in more small-group situations, which would allow for needed verbal interaction. Signifying, and the inherent metaphorical skill that is a part of it, could be used to enhance children's reading and writing skills.

"If the language of one's culture is lost or surrendered, one may be forced to describe that culture in the language of the rescuing one" (Morrison, 1992, p. 28). Children need time to "cool out" in their own language, whether they are African-American, Hispanic, Native American, Asian, etc., and they should be given the chance to do so within the context of the classroom curriculum. Oral traditions have helped to define African-American people and their culture for generations. Use of African-American students' own language could empower them and help them see that they are valued and respected. Giving them opportunity to teach about signifying and other aspects of Ebonics could demystify the oral tradition and open up studies of different language styles used by other cultures.

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3

Layers of Culture
Conflict, Confusion, and Amazement

Joseph H. Suina

Fifty years, my entire lifetime, may seem a long period for experiencing conflict, confusion, and amazement. But it is only one tenth of the entire time of contact since the first meeting in 1544 between my native Pueblo people and our European guests. *That* meeting must have been full of wonder and speculation for both, about whom these strange people might be.

Then, as today, when two very different cultures come into contact with one another, a wide range of possible feelings can be experienced—from mistrust to rejection to curiosity to acceptance—of ideas and artifacts that each has to offer the other. In considering Pueblo/European contact, certain exchanges were happily embraced while others were brutally forced upon my people's "subordinate" culture.

It is hard to say when conflict, confusion, and amazement hit their peaks during those 500 years of contact. Was it, perhaps, in the hour when my ancestral grandfather first laid eyes on bearded men, on their metal swords glinting in the hot Southwestern sun, on their gigantic, snorting horses? Or was it that moment for me and a ceremonial priest two years ago?

> *Since I was serving on the staff of my Pueblo's war chief and responsible for the religious ceremonial aspect of our traditions, I had to secure special permission to travel at that time of the year, although it was work-related in my other world. On the evening of my return to my village, I had to open up the ceremonial chamber for the elders, who were preparing for a major religious event. I was horribly embarrassed to discover that I had left the key, along with all my others, in a hotel dresser drawer in Washington, D.C., where I had stayed on my trip. I had to confess this unfortunate fact to the old religious leader. He simply couldn't believe it. Not that I was so foolish as to leave a kiva key in Washington, but—to my surprise—he couldn't believe that I had been in Washington just that very morning. "All my life, all my life, I wanted to go there," he explained, with great longing in his voice and a far away look in his eyes, which were already witness to ninety years*

of life. He simply couldn't believe me when I told him I would be back in D.C. in just two weeks. His amazement surprised me, and I thought to myself how fortunate I was that I could travel back and forth between two worlds in a significant way with relative ease.

Although horses, bearded men, and metal swords were strange indeed, the native culture of my people was intact, viable, in no way subordinate yet to this new culture in those early moments of contact.

Having just completed a term as Lieutenant Governor of my Cochiti Pueblo and now serving as tribal councilman for my people, I've had numerous and varied experiences to reflect upon. Clearly, many issues that confront my tribe and other tribes arise out of contact with another often indifferent culture with a great deal of control over our lives. The results, aside from conflict, confusion, amazement, are sometimes heartbreak because of the mismatch between the values, processes, and perceptions of the two worlds. Almost always a tribe like mine, in a subordinate position, has had to follow the dictates of the "Great White Father," with no consideration for what the tribe wants.

The purpose of this paper is to share a few points of contact and to offer a glimpse of the results from the point of view of the individual and the group in a subordinate role. Perhaps, in beginning to understand the point of view of others, we can come to be more sensitive to their needs—particularly if we are to provide services and to make decisions that affect them. To me, conflict and confusion seem most pronounced when members of the subordinate culture must assimilate. They may have been given no choice, or they may have been fed information that causes doubt about their own viability for providing solutions to life's problems. In either case, they come to feel that they have to abandon their traditions in order to live "the good life." Such has been the case for me, many times over the years.

Undermining the Sense of Self

For example, the dominant society's school, with its Eurocentric curriculum, can do much to undermine the self, of self as it is tied to a culture, and thereby can lead to confusion that may last for years. Memories of such encounters remain among the most piercing that I have.

My fourth grade teacher was very proper, always well-dressed, and highly educated. According to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, she was undoubtedly a perfect model for Indian children. This white teacher was a very articulate

person; she prided herself on being precise with her words. Because she seemed to care for us, she earned the respect of most of the community. We sat in our rows and columns in the classroom, listening to her English roll off her tongue, as she explained different concepts with great authority at the front of the room.

Once when we were studying about thunder and lightning, she made it quite clear to me that this phenomenon could be explained in the way of "science." It seems that when hot air and cold air come together, results occur in the form of friction. Electricity then appears to us as a flash of light in the sky, and the roar of thunder soon follows because the light evidently travels faster than the sound.

There was no need for faith in Spirits, just simple pure facts that had been tested and proven by white men in white coats in white laboratories with remarkable machinery. It was all rather amazing. And there could be no questioning that she was correct. From her careful, articulate explanation, I now understood very well how the world worked. There was just one problem. I was confused by Grandmother's interpretation, which was quite different.

Grandmother said that the lightning and thunder, which often accompany rain, were the power of the Spirits bringing the blessing of the rain to the people. Before the rain, there would be a quiet stillness in the air. Even the birds and insects would fall silent, as if something powerful was about to happen. And then a breeze would pick up. And in the fields, the cornstalks would rustle, whispering in anticipation. The breeze would carry the scent of sweet moisture, of a distant rain.

On a hot July mid-afternoon, the possibility of refreshing rain carried such promise—respite for ourselves and much needed water for our crops. "A blessed rain from the Spirits, so much better for our crops than the water we could supply through irrigation," my grandmother would say. She would then make me run through the rain, ruffling my hair so that the rain could reach every strand on my head. I wanted to be purified and watered like the plants, to grow tall and fruitful just as Grandmother said. And if we were in the fields, my grandmother would stop our work if she saw even the slightest flash of light in the distance, for it was the first indication of the presence of the Spirits. Grandmother would reach for her pouch and hand me a cornmeal offering, take some herself; and the two of us would face the direction where the lightning had appeared and whisper prayers of gratitude and encouragement for

the blessed water to descend upon us. I trusted that something very special was happening. It was as holy a moment as the Catholic priest's raising the offering chalice right before Holy Communion at Mass. I could feel Spirits there in the fields with us.

But now, this new explanation I had gotten, so clear, and coming from an intelligent and respected person—what my old-fashioned grandmother had told me was NOT correct. How could she know? She never went to school! She couldn't even speak English. This conflict tore at me—caught between that which was so obviously, sensibly so, and that which let me touch the Spirits. My mind sided with the teacher, my mind created a new schema for rain and thunder—a more scientific, White way. But my heart, my heart—I almost felt it tear.

This fourth grader's confusion emanated from another era in America. In the 1990s, change has affected even the most conservative Pueblos. Change somehow manages to insinuate itself into all cultures, but in some situations it is delayed considerably through the process of enculturating the young into the native language and culture.

Language That Miscommunicates

Not long ago, I visited a classroom of a neighboring Pueblo where the children speak a native tongue similar to my own. Clearly, the native language was not the province of the school. The structures of English render many confusions in that school and in others like it. Even today, as the following story indicates, children and their teachers fail to communicate.

The kindergarten teacher, frustrated by his students' failure to grasp the concepts of "big," "bigger," and "biggest," sought my help, as a Keres speaker who shares the children's native language.

The teacher explained that he had never had this much difficulty with his students in Illinois, and then shared his instructional materials. They consisted of a worksheet, which displayed cartoon sketches of an elephant, a man on a safari, and a snake, displaying diminishing sizes. My immediate reaction was to the foreign nature of the materials for Pueblo children of the Southwest. Upon greater reflection, I realized that the problem was linguistic. In Keres, size inherently accounts for the volume or the direction that the object occupies—so that "ma-tse-ch" would suggest not only big size, but also roundness or

balloon-like in shape. The term would be perfectly suited for an elephant or a beachball, but not for a man. The upright hunter would best be described by "ma-ku-tsru," which would also serve for a telephone pole, an object where height is considered more than width. For the snake, "ma-ts'-tru" would be the proper descriptor, as it would for "rope" or "road," suggesting length and being parallel with the ground.

As the children considered the jungle scene of the worksheet, they found themselves, figuratively, being asked to compare apples, pumpkins, and bananas; there just was no reasonable comparison. Little wonder that they appeared baffled and confused.

Conflicting Forms of Prayer

In addition to a firm grasp of the native language, religion also plays a key role in the lives of Pueblo people and, in particular, in the socialization of children. Our dances and ceremonies are forms of prayer and are observed much more frequently in comparison to Christianity's primarily casual Sunday experience. During these events, the meaning of "Pueblo-ness" is conveyed verbally and through modeling by significant adults and older siblings. In another visit to the same school, but to a different kindergarten classroom, I encountered another non-Indian teacher grappling with confusion. To her amazement, she discovered the answer to a practical but important question facing her and the class. The answer evolved out of the religious orientation of the 5-year-olds, whom she referred to affectionately as "mere babes with a deep understanding of the meaning of life."

It was near Christmas, and this teacher was concerned that her young charges were bombarded with only the shopping-mall version of Christmas—lights, glitter, and toys—since that was all they seemed to be talking about. She wanted to instill in them the true meaning of Christmas through a simple, concrete activity that would relate to their realm of experiences. Thinking that a chocolate cake would serve well to illustrate that this was Christ's birthday, she and the class baked one for the celebration. When the time came, she set the luscious cake, complete with a single, flickering candle before the beaming young faces gathered around the table.

Heartily, the children sang the familiar "Happy Birthday" song as if the one being celebrated was present in the room—as would be the case for any classmate's birthday. What the teacher did not anticipate was the question that

was on the minds of all in the room, except, of course, her own. Then it came. "Who is going to blow out the candle?"

For a moment, the children looked at each other in puzzlement, and no one seemed eager to serve in the role of Jesus Christ. After a brief conversation amongst themselves in the language that the teacher was left out of, it seemed that the children had come to some kind of an agreement. As she was about to suggest a name of an individual to step in for the "Birthday Boy," two 5-year-olds got up and moved toward the cake with the flickering candle. As if rehearsed, one picked up the cake, and the other hurried ahead to open the door, with the rest of the children following behind. Just as they had anticipated, the outdoor breeze blew out the candle.

The teacher was dumbfounded and completely amazed at what she witnessed—though she had been left out of the process by the language she could not comprehend and a religious orientation she had only heard about.

To these children, Christ, God, the Great Spirit, or whatever name we wish to attach, is in the wind, the rain, and sunshine. It wasn't necessary to pretend to be Christ, because the Spirits are all around us. In attempting to teach these "mere babes," the teacher admitted that she herself was taught more than she could ever teach them.

The teacher went on to say that she learned more about herself than anything.

It [the culture of the children] was like a mirror held up to me. I learned, among other things, that I don't have nearly the faith in the metaphysical that my children and their parents do. Although I consider myself an environmentalist, my fundamental view toward the environment has been that you do something to it to affect it: to harm it, to protect it, or to harness it, for example. I never thought of it as having an inherent power to affect us as human beings.

She explained that she had to re-examine some basic approaches in her teaching in order to be more inclusive of her students' realm of reference and to broaden her own perspective of the world. In being open to the difference, she was able to see herself more clearly—with insight that led to a greater consciousness of her beliefs and actions. Being self-knowledgeable and self-aware are qualities most important in working with a diverse population, for without them we never realize how we are coming

across or that what we are doing, although well intentioned, may be causing conflict and confusion—as in the case of the thunder and lightning account earlier described.

Disrupting Life Patterns

While conflict, confusion, and amazement of the type the teacher experienced are not a constant minute-to-minute occurrence, they come at different times in different forms in the process of life. They are experienced by individuals in situations where what is familiar is challenged or altered in a way that is disruptive to the usual pattern of life. At times the whole community is exposed to such a situation, causing change in their collective experience. The following is such an example:

In the 1950s, when I was becoming more aware of the world around me, I came to appreciate the dual existence of our little farming community. We had homes in the village which we lived in during the fall, winter, and early spring. And ceremonies always brought us back to the village at different times of the year. The planting, growing, and harvest seasons would find most villagers at home in the fields located up and down on both sides of the Rio Grande.

Each extended family had a well-defined parcel of land and a summer home that reflected great care and pride in the fields. The individual choice of crops and fruit trees, in addition to the staples of Pueblo farming, put the trademark of the family on the plot of land. There were wonderful cherries and plums along the irrigation ditches for the public to enjoy. Fruit trees outside the summer homes were more for private use, but the people shared these freely as well. A shade tree nearby was for the family, as was a favorite swimming hole at the canal or the river.

In the heat of the day, everyone took a break, with a choice of a nap under a shade tree, a dip to cool off, or fishing for the evening meal. After supper, when the stars came out, families would gather to hear stories or just to socialize. You could hear distant drumbeats and a song that would blend in with the creatures of the night. Then all would eventually fall silent, only to wake up to the most refreshing, cool, crisp, early morning air.

One day the Monster Machines came. Huge earth movers, some with giant steel blades under their bellies and others with steel buckets the size of a small house. These shoved and gouged at our summer homes and fruit trees and everything around them, including the well-established

borders and neatly terraced fields, until all was erased. In a matter of weeks, the dust settled; and all that remained was one huge, boring level field without personality. Gone were the little side corrals and woodpiles. Gone were the fruit trees, shady lean-tos, and hornos around the back. And gone was even the special grove of bamboo reeds, which provided us young boys with the straightest and lightest arrows for our shooting contests. Gone forever was a special way of life, because the U.S. government once again had a bright idea for the Indians: that more level land would increase production and thus introduce the Kansas farmers' approach to tilling the earth.

The following spring the government provided seeds and even the services of modern tractors to encourage the use of this "much improved land." No one took advantage, except two individuals without their extended families.

Farming, which had sustained my people long before the arrival of the European, ceased almost altogether at that point. But spiritually it remains with us, and even today our religious orientation continues to be that of an agricultural society as it was for our ancestors. That is, our petitions for blessings and thanksgiving revolve around the things of nature, such as thunder and lightning, which are necessary elements for productivity with the land.

But now our songs, dances, and prayers have to be personally translated into meanings that are reality for us, such as petitions for physical well being, healthy relationships for ourselves in our homes and at work, and other important needs that we all have. Some things in culture persist as ritual, even though the literal meaning in the everyday life situation no longer fits. Perhaps this is the only way we have been able to hang on to something as precious as our relationship with the land and all of nature. We hang onto the hope that one day we will get back into farming.

While leveling the land cut deep into farming as a way of life, yet another Monster was beginning to grow soon thereafter. We didn't know it then, but it was to become the last straw, that would break farming completely.

This Monster took ten years to incubate. When it finally matured, it was enormous—five miles in length with a height of over 200 feet near the center. Like a serpent, it stretched two and one-half miles on either side of the river. With the promise of employment for everyone and endless resources for the tribal coffers, our people, in search of a more viable livelihood, had no choice but to accept the eleventh largest earth-filled dam in the world, right in the middle of our reservation. The tribe was never consulted

on its exact location, and in the process, an important shrine used by many tribes was shattered to make room for this imposing serpent.

Today, that act is considered one of the greatest sacrilegious acts of our time, and my village has been saddled with a large part of the blame by other tribes. How the dam came to be, where it got located, and how such an important and sacred shrine was shattered confused us and brought new and different forms of conflict to our doorstep. Reckless outsiders now come in droves to recreate at the lake formed by the dam. They have no cares for the environment. A liquor store, which the lotus-lovers needed to enhance their happy times, was placed on our leased land. We are left with a constant struggle with our neighboring tribes, for it is no stereotype that Indians and alcohol do not mix.

But that's not what brought our farming to its knees. Soon after the dam was completed in the mid-1970s, water started to leak through the bottom of the lake because the Corps of Engineers had not been exacting in their craft. The water surfaced in the fields below the dam, and the leveled land, now alkaline and waterlogged, could not support a man standing on its surface, let alone a healthy crop.

For the first time in over twenty years, this past August we put seed into the ground. Our tribe initiated an agricultural enterprise with the settlement money for the interruption of farming, a way of life for all these years. It was a joyful day, a truly amazing day, when the federal court actually ruled in our favor.

To restore the alkali-waterlogged land, an extensive drainage system was installed on both sides of the river, costing millions, which the U.S. government had to fork over after admitting responsibility for faulty engineering. The water that was a foot deep in most places has now receded to ten feet below the surface, and that which continues to seep through gets dumped right back into the Rio Grande. It's amazing what science can accomplish if it's harnessed for the welfare of the people, provided that it is congruent with their culture.

This February we will begin classes in agriculture at the Community Center, for both young and old. It has been a long time since that fateful day when the Monster Machines arrived to disrupt a way of life so that even people my age have so much to learn again. By the third week in September, the fields were once again covered with a green carpet of newly sprouted alfalfa.

I saw a man off the side of the road, looking over the fields in disbelief. He had tears in his eyes, sprinkling a cornmeal

offering as if he had just witnessed huge thunderheads building up over the Jemez Mountains. It must have been amazing for him, as it was for all of us who clung to the hope of having green fields once again. Missing are the summer homes and the fruit trees, and the fields still don't have the character they once did. But the land has life once again. It will be up to the young to give that land a new personality, one that they must shape according to their times and do everything they can to protect it.

Resolving Conflicts and Confusion: Layers of Culture

As a framework for understanding the kinds of conflict, confusion, and amazement described above, I like to think of culture as being comprised of three layers.

The first and most obvious is the *what*, the materials layer, which consists primarily of the artifacts and activities unique to a culture. These would include foods and entertainment, such as songs and dances and all else that is translatable to things and actions we can touch, hear, see, taste, and smell. Far from producing conflict to non-members, this "icing" of the culture is often sought after by outsiders: witness the countless ethnic restaurants and curio shops patronized by thousands everyday in towns and cities across America. Indeed, most countries consider tourism a major industry, promoting the distinctive cultural character of their location.

The middle layer, which I shall refer to as the procedural, deals with the *how-to* of the culture. It serves as a sort of road map to cultural organizations, government, politics, etc. Here, understanding the ways of doing things in the culture resides. This one is not as accessible as the materials layer, although with some effort a non-member can learn the procedures of another culture to varying degrees of proficiency without having to adopt its values, as in the case of workers or visitors in a foreign country. For example, Americans working in Japan usually become more and more proficient in the everyday functional life with the passing of time, but they may or may not adopt the values of that culture. In fact, rejection of the values has often shortened the stay of many foreigners.

The third, and least obvious layer, deals with the *why* of culture. This *beliefs* or *values* layer of culture possesses the problems that are most likely to lead to conflicts, confusions, and even amazement. In the worst of situations, the outcome can be despisement, hatred, and even war, when all means of resolution of differences have been exhausted (between two countries, for example). In a dominant-minority relationship, the result may be a roughshod riding over of the lesser culture, and consequent

resentment and retreat from a meaningful relationship on the part of the powerless.

A problem with the lack of understanding of the beliefs and values of another culture is the tendency to ascribe one's own values to the interpretation of artifacts, actions, and ideas of others. In the case of the dominant culture, the imposition of values may translate into action over the *other,* particularly if the former views itself as superior.

The Indian-U.S. federal government relationship is clearly a subordinate one which has been translated into an obligatory policy of the government to lead its "wards," the Indians, to "the better life." The government saw no reason to have to consult the tribe in regard to leveling the land. It saw leveled fields merely as more land to cultivate, leading (with a little help from machinery) to more profits and a giant step in the direction of what it determined to be the good life. But to the Indians, what mattered was not just the size of the yield or the profit. Instead, it was the unique way each family had made its mark on the land and the natural elements, as demonstrated by the summer homes and the areas they cultivated. It was also the pattern of life set through the dual-home existence, which highlighted each passing season in ceremonies and other forms of marking ordinary and important days of their lives. Perhaps the reason the tribe did not initially protest the drastic redirection of community life is that prior experience led to the realization that doing so would be futile. Only after the fact did the people protest by not participating in the farm program in which they had no voice.

Implications for Teachers

Caring teaching-professionals can find many implications for their work from the above discussions of culture. To extend those discussions, I strongly recommend the writings of Edward Hall. In his book *Beyond Culture* (1976), for example, Hall speaks of the *hidden* dimensions of culture. Teachers who have been socialized into dominant culture patterns—of story interpretation, classroom discourse, appropriate manner, proper ways of showing respect or shame, need to dedicate themselves to seeking out patterns that differ from those they have known. As I myself have had to be reminded, all teachers can come to understand that learning does not always proceed from the parts to the whole. A larger context may be necessary to deepen their students' understanding.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate some of my own words from a recent presentation (Suina, 1993):

> *This nation can learn from its rich, diverse populations. We can and must humble ourselves to make room for*

minority students in more meaningful ways than placing them in desks in our dominant culture classrooms. We can validate all who come to the feast by accepting each one's platter of contribution with dignity. A strong and unified nation will emerge only with a unification of the hearts, minds, and spirits of all people in an atmosphere of acceptance. And that can, and should, begin in our schools. (p. 19)

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4

Ants Can Build Mountains*

Ruth Anne Olson

* The context in which I heard this phrase suggests that its origins are West African or Australian aboriginal.

Race and cultural inclusion, more than any other topics, threaten professional discourse in education. I have seen professional meetings torn asunder by the anger and fear that surround this issue. I have witnessed a community of educators explode with rage at the perceived insult of local communities of color calling for attention to the roles that race and culture play in their children's school success. No one disputes the fact that large numbers of students of color fail to thrive in school. While the roots of this reality are found in many parts of our society, many educators are confused and offended by charges that they are in any way at fault for this state of affairs.

What is it all about? What do some people see that others don't? Why isn't it enough for schools to be color blind as most educators proudly claim to be?

For the past six years I have been a member of a culturally diverse staff—Hmong, African American, Indian, Latina, Chicano, Vietnamese, and a small minority of us who are white—working on issues of cultural inclusion and racial equity in schools. I have felt the subtle discrimination of ignorance as well as the blatant bias of racism. I have come to recognize the privilege of assumed authority that causes people to focus on my white face while ignoring my colleagues of color sitting next to me. I have felt my own pain as the people with whom I work turn to humor and a good belly laugh to diffuse their pain over hurtful incidents that happen to themselves and to their children.

I've also felt the wonder of being white, and, for three reasons, I address this article to my white colleagues. First of all, being white is the only journey that I truly know. Being me is being white, and glorying in the pride of my own culture is an important part of who I am and who I want to be. But second, being white means having power. It means that I must take responsibility for the legacies of my culture that have caused harm and destruction for others. Finally, and most important, I must use the strengths of my culture to work for healing in those places where I live and work. The pain of cultural prejudice and privilege is palpable in those places and, while I am but one small ant in each of those settings, ants *can* build mountains.

The Cultural Problem; The Cultural Solution

Our schools—like all institutions in the United States—are steeped in the culture of white Europeans. What and how we teach, how we make decisions, and the ways we treat one another all have their roots in the European heritage of the dominant American culture.

I am proud of that culture. It has brought a level of harmony and societal well-being known hardly any other place on the globe. At the same time, we have failed pitifully to live up to the best of what we believe. The history of our country is rooted in violence that we have committed against others—toward native peoples, enslaved Africans, and those pushed out of the Southwest. We have given too much attention to the success of the individual and too little to the importance of community. Our focus on bettering our lives in the short term is destroying our environment and our planet for the long term. And we needn't look beyond our own back yard to see the destruction wrought by our belief in our own superiority and the assumption that all the world should aspire to be who and what we are. It's time we face the fact that we have caused pain and destruction of others and that we have a profound moral, ethical, and practical responsibility to change ourselves and our institutions. For those of us who live and work in the world of education that means that we must assume the responsibility to change our ways if our schools are to be places in which all children can learn and succeed.

The first step toward change, always, is to understand the problem. Ours has two faces: prejudice is the active side of discrimination; privilege is the passive side.

Prejudice and Privilege in Schools?

It was a second grade classroom, in a magnet school in a city that touts its high quality of education. Though school administrators will tell you that there is no tracking in their schools, I had been told by several teachers the group that had just entered the room was known as the low math group. While more than 50 percent of the school's enrollment was white, all but one of the students in this class were black. That one was Native American.

In front of the children, the teacher told me that the children had trouble with math but, "They do as well as can be expected." She passed out a test that would determine their grade placement for the next year. "You probably won't be able to answer most of the questions," she explained to the class, "but do your best."

For the next thirty minutes, while the teacher sat at her desk, chaos reigned. Students wandered around the room, threw pencils, climbed on furniture, and shouted insults to each other. One boy begged the teacher to "make them shut up." She didn't even look up to acknowledge his plea. When the bell rang, the students started to run out of the room, leaving crumpled test papers scattered on the floor. As the children were leaving, the teacher said, "You'll be sorry that you didn't act nicer. You've all failed this test, and you'll never get out of the low group."

When I described the situation to the principal and asked what I might do to help address the situation, she shrugged her shoulders. "That teacher's not as bad as two or three others in the building," she explained. "But I think a workshop on learning styles would be helpful."

I know from personal experience that incidents like this are not uncommon in our nation's classrooms. Every person of color can tell of similar happenings in their own and their children's school experience. They are the ugly side of the sanctity of each teacher's classroom, yet few educators can face the possibility that they happen. The complainers must be exaggerating; they're just trying to make trouble. Indeed, several white colleagues hinted that I must be lying when I told them what I had witnessed.

It is not enough to feel confident that we ourselves would never treat children as this teacher does. We can address prejudice only when we make ourselves open to the truth of other people's experience and when we join hands to eliminate it.

While prejudice is real in our classrooms, privilege is the other side of the coin of discrimination. For while most of us work hard to avoid prejudice, effort and vigilance do not protect those of us who are white from being privileged—from receiving benefits that we never ask for but take for granted. Dr. Robert Terry and Dr. Peggy McIntosh have electrified their audiences and readers by their teachings about white privilege and responsibility. Their lessons seem so obvious once you think about them—how could one have missed this truth for so long?

Terry (1970) believes that the fundamental privilege of being white is that we can ignore the fact that we are white. In *For Whites Only* (1970), he describes a new white consciousness in which we must become aware of white as a color and of the role of whiteness in racial disunity. He urges us to become aware that the race problem is not a black problem but a white problem, that racial unrest has its root cause in white attitudes and white-controlled institutions.

McIntosh (1989) speaks of "an invisible package of unearned assets" that she regularly enjoys but that are unavailable

to her colleagues of color. As a white person she can, for example, buy greeting cards and toys featuring people of her own race. She is never asked to speak for all the people of her race and can get legal and medical help without her race working against her. McIntosh's full list is long, and she challenges us to look at racism in a new light:

> *As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.* (p. 70)

Daily work with a culturally rich group of people has made me painfully aware of how these privileges are translated into everyday experience in our schools. I've come to see that white privilege assures my children, but not many of their friends, that people like them will always be linked to the accomplishments in the topics they choose to study. I, unlike some of my neighbors, know that others will never suggest that low levels of achievement, the need for special support services, and other problems of the school are caused by the high numbers of children of my race. I, but few of my colleagues, can be confident of being greeted matter of factly or cordially whenever I walk into a school building.

These and many other privileges are part of the comfort that my children and I bring to school every day. They are so subtle, so deeply ingrained, as to be invisible to our eyes until we are in the presence of those to whom the same privileges are denied. Unfortunately, the reality of privilege in our schools joins with prejudice and overt racism to form a seamless web of failure and destruction for people of color.

But these realities also exact a heavy toll on white people —on us, the very people who appear to benefit. They leave us confused and helpless in the face of the anger directed at us by people who do not share our privileges. Our access to deep friendships with people of color is severely limited by the discomfort of those denied privilege in the presence of those who receive it. And we feel uncertain and betrayed when we find ourselves in situations where privileges that we have taken for granted are inexplicably taken from us (Olson, November 1992).

The Need for Cultural and Racial Equity

> *Several 10th grade Hispanic students were asked to reflect on their experience in school. All were high-achieving students, and they had many affectionate stories to tell of the things that their parents and other adults in their*

community had done to encourage them to stay in school and to succeed. "I have to work hard," one girl explained. "It's what my parents expect of me." "My older brother lets me know," another boy made clear, "that it's my responsibility to my parents and to my grandparents who came before them. They worked hard to give me the opportunity. I would deny their sacrifice if I did less than I could."

When the Hispanic woman who was the discussion leader asked the students about the role that school had played in their success, the discussion suddenly lost its energy. The students became quiet. "What classes have been particularly interesting to you?" she asked. The students shrugged their shoulders. "Can you describe your relationship with some of the teachers that you particularly liked?" The students looked blank.

The leader continued to press them in various ways, and one boy finally explained. "I work hard in school because I owe it to my family. But school doesn't have anything to do with things I'm interested in. I'm an American, but when we study American history no one says anything about the history of my people in the United States."

Another student agreed, "None of my teachers know—or care—about my community. It's like my friends and I are invisible." A third agreed, "School is their place, not mine. It's a nice enough place. But it's like we're guests in the school."

Being a guest is not at all like being at home. Hosts, not guests, run the show. The hosts decide who will be invited to dinner, what time the guests should come, and a thousand other big and little rules of the occasion. Good hosts work hard at making their guests feel "at home" but there is never a doubt in anyone's mind about whose home it is. There are, of course, advantages to being a guest. Guests don't mow the lawn, mend the curtains, or clean the bathroom. Guests don't have to be responsible for the big picture—just for their little place within it.

What are the implications for a system in which some students feel at home and others feel like guests? Our future requires that *everyone* sees long range payoff in doing the work at hand. We can't afford a society in which decreasing numbers of people feel ownership. Power has a strange way of getting turned on its head when hosts become resentful of the work that they have to do and when they can't figure out how to make their visitors play by the rules that they have set.

Supporting Diversity in Schools (SDS) is a program in St. Paul, Minnesota, that seeks to build shared ownership among people of all races and cultures in schools. To understand SDS, one first has to see the rich cultural diversity of St. Paul. Less than half (49 percent) of its elementary students are of European descent. Approximately 23 percent are Southeast Asian, a slightly smaller percentage are African-American, and the remainder are Hispanic-Chicano-Latino and American Indian. The land of Garrison Keillor is much richer than he's made it out to be.

SDS has created five school-community partnerships that bring together community leaders, parents of color, and school staff to work, in an environment of shared power, on issues of racial equity and cultural inclusion in the schools. Names of participating community organizations suggest the diversity of partnership interests: Family Service of Greater St. Paul, the Hmong American Partnership, St. Paul American Indians in Unity, St. Paul Urban League, and Neighborhood House—the oldest social service agency in St. Paul, located in the neighborhood of greatest Hispanic-Chicano-Latino settlement in Minnesota. SDS walks its talk by maintaining a culturally diverse staff and by centering its policy decisions in a culturally rich advisory group of parents, community leaders, and school staff.

Strangers in a Strange Land

"It is a good day. May you have health. May you teach the children well and live 200 years in happiness and prosperity."

We stood in a line—about forty of us, all connected professionally with a local elementary school. Hmong parents of the school had invited us to participate in a traditional "honor" ceremony—an expression of respect and thanks for the teachers of their children. We were awkward and nervous, for we had no idea about what we were supposed to do. We stood as we were told to stand and held our hands to receive an egg whose meaning we only partially understood. Evil spirits were swept away from us, and short pieces of yarn were tied carefully around our wrists.

Teachers gasped with pleasure when introduced to the parents of their students. Parents and teachers alike cried quietly as they were moved by the power of the event.

This event is one of many SDS success stories. Hmong children have attended this school for more than ten years. Five years ago, SDS helped bring their parents to the school's decision-

making table. Now, for the first time, they felt the confidence—the sense of connection—that would permit them to perform a ceremony that is a yearly tradition in their own country. This event was not "Tacos on Tuesday." It was not the cultural exploitation that so many people rightfully resent and fear. This was an event from the heart—initiated by Hmong families to bring respect to those whose work they honor.

The day highlighted the shared comfort and vulnerability of all involved. The Hmong people have come to feel that the school is their place—that their ceremonies and values have a legitimate place within it. They have seen good will and significant efforts by the school staff to reach out and to learn what they need to know for the Hmong children and families to become "homeowners" rather than guests.

Evidence of shared ownership is visible throughout the school. Hmong leaders have given regular presentations about their history and culture to the school staff. Several teachers have chosen to study Hmong language. The school's traditional sixth grade dramatic presentation told the story of a Hmong folktale, complete with technical assistance and costumes from Hmong parents. Hmong people are now visible on the school staff, and teachers have found a variety of ways to recognize and honor the many languages spoken by children in the school.

I would exaggerate to suggest that cross-cultural issues are fully addressed within this school. Miscommunications and unintended slights still occur between the staff and Hmong families, and few teachers have incorporated what they have learned about Hmong culture into the interactions and pedagogical practices in their classrooms. Furthermore, while staff members have reached out to learn more about Hmong people and customs, they have not yet given similar attention to learn more about the communities from which their black, Indian, and Latino students come.

But the results of everyone's effort are visible. To be a member of the school staff now means to be aware of cultural differences. And the sight of forty adults, all looking uncertain and a bit worried about doing the right thing (without having a clue to just what *was* the right thing), demonstrated that it was no longer clear who was the stranger and whose land we were in.

Building the Mountain

Building a mountain is hard work. It requires the labor of many hands working toward a shared goal, and it requires the cooperation of people with a variety of perspectives, skills, and tools needed to get the job done.

Who Are the Workers?

Much is said about parent involvement in schools, but nowhere is it so important as in the task of building racially and culturally equitable schools. Parents and other members of the community are the heart of equity and inclusion. They understand its absence in ways that are often invisible to school staff, they know the values and traditions of their own communities, and they have a direct and immediate stake in becoming "homeowners"—in assuming shared responsibility with school staff for the policies and practices of the school.

Twenty Indian children attend this school, forming only a small portion of the 450 total enrollment. When a local Indian organization approached the school staff about entering into partnership, most of the school's Indian families were isolated from one another and had little or no connection with their native culture. Few had ever attended any school events.

Five years later, the presence of Indian people in the school is taken for granted. Elders make classroom presentations about native history, culture, and modern tribal issues. A parent committee has reviewed library materials and removed those that are stereotypical and demeaning of Indian people. School staff are infusing Indian issues into their curriculum and have stood forward on public issues of Indian mascots and fishing rights. Each spring the building pulses with the sound of Indian drums and dancing at the school's annual Mini PowWow.

"Most Indian children shied from participating in the first powwow three years ago," a partnership participant later reflected. "The event was strange to them; the ribbon shirts, shields, and other garments that their parents had made for them were alien. But when the first powwow began, when those children saw big tall Indian men step onto the dance floor wearing feathers and quills, when they saw them standing tall and stepping to the beat of the drums, they saw, for the first time in their lives, that being Indian—being different from most of their classmates—was something to be proud of. By the end of the evening the pride and presence of their elders swept them into the power of the event."

The PowWow has become an annual event, and the activities that lead up to it have established the traditions of this handful of students as subjects of respect and honor among their classmates.

None of this could happen without leadership and willingness among the school staff. This partnership started when a handful of committed Indian leaders approached a visionary principal. An eager librarian and a handful of teachers were willing to give it a try to see how the opportunities might fit their own self-interest of knowing and teaching children. It has been hard. One year after its creation, issues of assumed power by school staff came near to destroying the partnership. Participants had to look hard at the meaning of shared power—they had to face head-on the questions of who's equal and whether partnership is possible if some are more equal than others. To everyone's credit, they made the effort, and the partnership has thrived to become a community.

What Are the Tools?

The tools for building the mountain of racial equity include books, movies, discussion, action projects—the same tools for learning that are already known to every teacher and to every parent and child.

> *The small group sat transfixed as an argument broke out among three of its members. Discussion of Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neal Hurston had triggered an emotional exchange about the relationships between black men and black women—and about the emotional abuse played out in the midst of oppression. Laughter and hugs broke the tension, and when the group gathered up to leave an hour later, a Southeast Asian man expressed the honor he felt that others would permit him to understand some of the disagreements within their community.*

The arts provide a particularly poignant way for us to learn. This multicultural book group met for three years and, in the context of shared reading, talked frankly about the color lines within their communities, laughed together about family traditions, disagreed about the flamboyance of stories written by Latina writers, and shed a few tears over the hurts of their pasts.

Another important tool for white people is to place ourselves in numerical and "power" minorities. Several years ago (Olson, January 1992), I wrote of my experience joining 3,000 Indian people for the annual meeting of the National Indian Education Association.

> *My feelings best can be compared to being a guest in someone else's home. I was glad to be invited, but I wasn't sure that everyone in the family would have included me*

had they been given a choice. I felt awkward at knowing there were certain family relationships and traditions of which I was ignorant and, while I felt included, I also knew there were lines beyond which I could not go.

I loved the opportunity to listen to the stories of others and to participate in their own pleasure of one another; but I was ever-conscious of my own concern that if I did something wrong it would reflect not only on my own person, but on my people as a whole.

We need to learn from our own experience what it means to be racially and culturally vulnerable—to feel for ourselves a touch of what others feel daily—the one Vietnamese-American staff member in a school, the small number of Mexican-American children in a classroom, even the majority of black children in a classroom dominated by European-American curricular content and instructional process. These are critical experiences to making our schools inclusive of all people.

Finally, of course, the most important tool is to remain open to all that we can learn in the routine and regular ways that we interact with people different from ourselves. As members of the dominant culture, we grow up with assumptions that everyone is like us. Even in social conversations, all too often we are better talkers than we are listeners—we are better doers than we are watchers.

When we work with colleagues whose communities are different from our own, chances are that their experiences are different also. The world treats an Indian person with a Ph.D. differently from the way it treats white people with similar levels of education; it treats a black CEO differently from a white CEO. And if we listen hard to how our colleagues live their lives and how they define their obligations we will learn a great deal about ourselves and about our own institutions.

What Is the Vision?

People who write about cooperation say much about shared goals. While it's true that success depends on knowing where we are going, a need for clear goals will stop us dead in our tracks as we seek to build cultural inclusion. For it's likely that none of us knows clearly where we're going. At best, we are talking about rejecting an unsatisfactory present and muddling toward a hazy future.

None of the people in the situations described above understood fully where they were going when they started. What they did know was that the present dominance of European-American

practices is not working. And, as they moved along, they began to understand the importance of basic ground rules necessary for a successful effort to build a mountain where all people are fully visible and equitably respected.

First, they began to understand the importance of working as equals. Creating equal partnership is enormously difficult and, by definition, requires that parties with the greatest power must actively give up the strategies that they take for granted for getting their own way.

While it may be true that parents wield significant political power in some communities, the people involved in the activities described throughout this article are largely void of significant authority—formal or informal. The challenge, then, is for teachers and school officials to understand their own authority and to be willing to set it aside. There is no doubt that the strength of their voices can win in any disagreement. But using those voices inappropriately will silence the parents and community people and will shatter the hopes for inclusion and ownership. Only when the principal is willing to give up her authority to control—only when other school staff are willing to see themselves as learners in a context of curricular and instructional reform—are community people willing to risk their talents and confidence for the sake of inclusive education.

Second, school staff must accept the fact that families and communities have a legitimate right to insist on change. Prejudice and overt racism *do* exist in schools. They are not present in all classrooms, they are not practiced by all teachers, but they do exist, and they damage children. Furthermore, white privilege dominates all classrooms—as it does all other aspects of our society. It is a problem for all of us, and it will not go away until we each pledge to address it.

The View From the Top

Building racial and cultural inclusion is a long and difficult task. It happens in small steps, by lots of ordinary people committing themselves to the task of understanding a need and setting out to address it. The good news is that educators no longer need to feel offended by the charges that schools must change. We must only recognize that our country is changing and we must change with it.

Our cultural practices served us well in the past; we can be proud of them. But the children in our schools now come with a new breadth of culture—with values that can enrich our own and that can, if we listen to them and learn from them, save us from the excesses of our own. We have a mountain to build, and it's time we get on with the task at hand.

I don't know what we'll see from the top for, to my knowledge, no school in the nation, no nation in the world has built the mountain. We have an opportunity—indeed an obligation—to do what has never been done before.

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5

In Louis Armstrong's Neighborhood:
Children and the Arts of Public History

Arthur Tobier

How should schools address the past of the child's immediate present, the world the child sees everyday? As a fixed thing, a footnote pinned to a textbook and presented nice and tidy, the ideas all worked out? Or as an active inquiry into that world—the caring, belonging world of community—which encourages and takes account of the child's own questions?

I've been raising that set of difficult concerns in one way or another for a year and a half, working as a consultant in the arts of public history at the Louis Armstrong Middle School (I.S. 227Q). Some teachers and administrators at the school had expressed the need to expand their curricular possibilities in history so as to challenge what they considered a narrowness of their students' intellectual frame of reference. My colleagues at the Queens College Center for the Improvement of Education thought we could extrapolate from work I have done previously to help the Louis Armstrong teachers do public history.

By "public history" I mean a practice that encompasses the skills of the oral historian, documentary researcher, and developer of public exhibitions. My own pedagogical outlook was shaped working with Lillian Weber, at the Workshop Center for Open Education at City College. Then, for a dozen years, I did public history at St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery on Manhattan's Lower East Side, producing oral history pamphlets and organizing exhibitions about how the community around the church came to be what it is in the 20th century—a community that dates back to the 17th century and embraces the full spectrum of the city's history.

In this work at St. Mark's we were committed to understanding the lived histories of the ordinary people and small communities that make up the city, histories that give the city its character and meaning but have largely been left unrecorded and subjected to silence. At the Louis Armstrong Middle School, we felt that if such a practice could become part of a teacher's repertoire, with the time and resources for carrying it out, the school could address the past of the world the child sees every day and still carry out its obligation to help children come to terms with the historical nature of the country. What we were after immediately

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was helping the child gain a sense of place—no mean feat in a world that is becoming increasingly placeless.

I

Forging Cultural Pluralism

What is it to have a sense of place, to say that we live here, or there, or somewhere? What does it mean when someone says she's from Corona, or from the Lower East Side, or from Fordham? From this place or that place? We tend, in general, to think we know what we mean by such identifications, such place-holders. More often, the likelihood is that we're asserting what we can't know, in effect affirming a name, a location—Corona, Lower East Side, Fordham—as a way of negating the complexity of the relationships that such identity encompasses. We trade off the richness of the actual situation for the sterile nominating concept. We do it, in particular, in places from which we are turning, and often these are the places where the children live. We want the children to have a sense of place, a moral framework, without which history is an abstraction, something that can be lied about. But at the same time, we so organize school life as to make it an impossible effort to support, substituting, instead, a silence and a turning away.

The framework for this turning away is easily traced. When local schools were made into a centralized system, the commonplace was eclipsed as a subject of school study. History in schools became identified with national purposes, and the historical nature of what went on where we lived was left unexamined. As children, we enjoyed day-to-day life where we lived, but we weren't helped to see any of it as an extension of larger historical patterns. Our minds were trained to think in fixed terms of the places where we lived, the ideas already ordered. It became natural to think of the city as a given, and to lose sight of the human construct it is, poured out and flowing.

But cultural pluralism is our most profound tradition and the one that has the most meaning for other people around the world. People who migrate here accept the formal shaping that goes on through the agency of the city's institutions, but they don't give the city carte blanche in that shaping. At the deepest level of their thought, they hold out for their cultural and historical identities, and they express themselves in forms of their own making. Even on the most minimal of stands they define their own sense of place. In the communities they build, they transform the city no less significantly than the way the city transforms them. This holding on to one's cultural integrity, which has great value for the city as a whole, is what any study of community history needs to

reflect. It is in this large moral framework that a sense of place has significance. And it is this social framework that schools often ignore, treating the communities around them with casual indifference.

The Bird's Last House

Taking the study of a community at that level of seriousness holds out all sorts of possibilities for the school: possibilities that have to do with the way a school defines itself and possibilities with regard to children's learning. We had a taste of those possibilities last spring when one of the Louis Armstrong music teachers and I took his class in the history of jazz on a walking tour I had devised relating to the history of the jazz avant-garde in Manhattan in the 1950s and '60s. The College's idea is to build up an archive of jazz oral histories in the school and to use it, along with the resources of the Louis Armstrong House (his former residence) that Queens College has been given to oversee, as a starting point for historical investigations.

I had brought some of Charlie Parker's records into school and talked a little about Parker's work in relationship to Armstrong's, and about both men in relationship to jazz history, thinking it might help the students develop a perspective of the music they were being asked to listen to. The walking tour was meant to show them that the history was really lived and not just written about. A friend who worked in jazz agreed to meet with the group at her apartment in the area to talk with us about her own deep interest in the music and how it developed. It was pure coincidence that her apartment had been the studio of the "Bird," Charlie Parker, when he died in the early 1950s.

We started out in the churchyard at St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, where Peter Stuyvesant is buried and where free avant-garde jazz concerts were given in the 1960s. By the time we reached our destination on Avenue A, we'd been on the Bowery, St. Mark's Place, Astor Place, Cooper Square, and Fifth Street, places where lived histories are still visible to the naked eye. We passed the city shelter for homeless men, lots of old tenements, and old people, obviously living marginal existences. We talked about the marginality and poverty of what we were seeing and about the marginality of most artists' lives. We talked about why some jazz artists are so poor that they live in tenement districts while others, like Louis Armstrong, prosper and make good money.

My friend, Judy Sneed, met us at the door and led us into the studio. Given our focus, the room couldn't have been more appropriate. In the center stood a full bandstand, including drums, snares, and saxophones. The walls were stacked with records and covered with photographs of jazz musicians. The light was so dim

that we could hardly see one another, just as in a club. One of Louis Armstrong's old records was playing on the turntable as we walked in. All of it caught the children's interest immediately, and it was never lost. Loud and excited in the street, they suddenly grew silent and gave Judy their active interest.

In the 30 minutes that we were there, Judy explained that jazz was simply the music she had grown up with in South Carolina. You turned on the radio, and there it was. It was the popular music of the time. She made our class-group feel good about being students. She said she thought them lucky to be studying in junior high school what in her day you could only hope to study in college. She related the music they enjoyed to its roots in jazz. In the time that was left, she played a few of Armstrong's riffs from the 1920s, which were very beautiful sounding. And to show the historical progression, she played a couple of minutes of Charlie Parker's "Salt Peanuts."

That particular lesson in jazz history required no words, and it was lost on no one. On the train going back to school that afternoon, new thoughts were shared. Not the least of them, I think, were about the *sense of place* that they had acquired. They had not only acquired a story, but they could place it. History comes all rolled up like that.

The Garment Factory

Recently I took a small group of seventh-graders over to a garment factory, to start them on the process of doing oral history. The garment factory is one of a dozen or so businesses that make up the block-long, one-story-tall commercial strip across the street from the school. It's been there for 35 years, owned by the same family. The Louis Armstrong Middle School has been in session across the street for the past 10 years, but the twain had never met until the other day. An obvious reason is that the factory, from the outside, is just a storefront, rather unassuming. Unlike the school, it barely gives notice of what it is.

I wouldn't have been particularly drawn to it either, except that the one sign taped to the front door, "Operators Wanted," had some resonance for me since my mother had been a sewing-machine operator. I had been intentionally scouting the neighborhood to see what possibilities exist for children to do historical investigations. One look inside through the small glassed-over opening in the door had been enough to make clear to me that the place was a treasure for what we are trying to do.

It is a fair-sized loft. About sixty women work on the shop floor, most of them Latins, operating sewing machines and steam presses, cutting and assembling dresses for retail distribution around the country. Not quite a steel mill, but still an industrial

scene—in the midst of blocks of suburban housing—which begs to be questioned.

We've just started going there, so there isn't much to say about the process. The children are studying "roots," and I have been helping their teacher think about what she is doing. Actually, I hadn't thought that we'd go into the factory when we did. I had simply offered to take the children "into the community," so that we could see up close what was out there. They are interested in conducting oral-history interviews, and I wanted them to be able to choose for themselves whom they would interrogate. We were going to explore the whole block, and we may yet get to do that. But, as it happened, when we knocked on the door of the factory and said we were from across the street—a teacher and his students—the whole place responded with smiles, murmurs of approval, a starburst of enthusiasm. We were received so openly and warmly that the children were immediately charmed and at the same time immersed in their subject, even though it is probably right to say that a minute before the subject hadn't existed for them. You might say that instead of their choosing the subject, the subject chose them.

II

Perhaps our most sustained effort in exploring the arts of public history with children came in the summer, when the Center for the Improvement organized a "Different Way of Knowing" workshop in history. With fifteen students and four teachers from Louis Armstrong Middle School, we focused on an exploration of the black community on the block where Louis Armstrong had lived for the last 36 years of his life, with a side trip to interview someone who knew Armstrong well. The purpose of the work was twofold: student enrichment and staff development, free of the tyranny of the 45-minute school period. The workshop ran for 8 days, 2 hours a day and, although that gave us little time to develop work at any depth, for many of the children—11- and 12-year-olds—primed by their own circumstances, the experience was bracing. As one child observed, coming away from an interview, "So, real history comes from real people!"

Why Corona?

Corona, when first settled by Italian immigrants and migrant Italian-Americans from Manhattan and the city of Brooklyn, was perhaps one of the city's last bastions against progress and the "melting pot." We chose Corona's black community to study out of the recognition that where you stand invariably is the best place to dig. If education for democracy is the goal, where one stands

deserves to be the starting point. If where you stand is rich with historical meanings, so much the better. What better place for the Louis Armstrong Middle School to start then Louis Armstrong's neighborhood?

Northern Boulevard in Corona, on foot, has a whole other feeling to it—a different aspect, that you miss when you drive through in a car, 48 miles an hour, trying to make the lights. For one thing, it's more informational, more conversational. The people reveal more, and it's altogether more conducive to real learning.

Freed from the constraints of fragmented periods or time where teachers are often forced to breeze through material without valuing anything, we could be open to our experience: storefront churches, ethnic markets and restaurants, small industrial workshops, community organizations, city agencies, the small businesses that help create the structure for community. Although we study Main Street as a concept in school and sometimes perform *Our Town*, none of the teachers had considered exploring *this* Main Street, this part of our town, and doing so was a revelation to them.

In fact, it was a revelation to me that, although one of our four teachers had grown up in Jamaica (Queens) where there are many black neighborhoods, she still found Corona to be different. Engaging, but different. It left her wondering. It left us all wondering. Some of our students would tell us later that on the first day we walked along Northern Boulevard and through the streets they were a little apprehensive, even a little frightened about going into Louis Armstrong's neighborhood. They would recall those feelings with humor, having moved along in their historical understanding of Northern Boulevard. Except for two students who lived in the neighborhood and me, nobody had ever taken or been given the time to visit the place. I'm inclined to think that if the place were still a gentry farm instead of a black working-class area it would have had more appeal. As it is, we touched the surface of what the streets had to say about history as we walked along.

Detectives, Mapmakers, Video-Viewers

When we first gathered at the College to unravel the tangled historical threads we were given to play with, we spent some time talking about detectives and detective work, a subject on which all the students and teachers were well versed. It isn't difficult to establish the parallels between how one goes about understanding a crime and understanding historical change. In fact, the only thing the students could think of that historians didn't do was make arrests.

We also read maps—maps of metropolitan New York City, maps of the borough of Queens, maps of Corona. We were going to try to map a walking tour with historic stops of our own making, based on the stories we hoped to collect. Finding their home blocks on the map excited everybody's geographic imagination. We could have spent a profitable time expanding on map work. We could have done maps for each person we interviewed.

Another building-block of our "project" was viewing a video documentary made for a local church. The video alternately presented oral histories and documented a performance by neighborhood elders, from early rehearsals to final presentation. The video went back and forth between the stories people had to tell about their lives and the production as it progressed. I wanted it to provide our students with a sense of who the people in the community were—not simply who they were to see on the street, but who they were to know historically.

Communicating with Parents

I also spoke to all the parents, explaining what I could about what we were trying to do pedagogically. Communicating with parents, it seems to me, is basic to teaching practice and a good thing in itself. I needed to reassure myself that the parents had some feeling about the work we were going to do with their children.

I can't think about anything more difficult to do in the context of school than doing history with young children whose parents are indifferent to their children's groping for historical understanding. A distinction needs to be made between children who are being filled up with the facts and figures of historical reality and children who are being asked to consider history as a construct that is forever yielding to different perspectives. Parents have the power, I think, to open or close their children's historical imagination. But also I wanted to put the parents actively behind what we were going to try to do. One's relationship to history, after all, is cultural, and we were going to be dealing with children who live in perhaps ten different cultural contexts.

The parents were invariably pleased with the attention given them. I was not only reassured, but received a real sense of that cultural complexity in those brief conversations and left it as something to think about further.

Framing an Assignment

Finally, I framed a class assignment which, in the end, appealed to the children's own questions. Since we were not to have time to warm up to the subject, I felt we needed a fiction, a story that the children could relate to that would draw them in. Being a

neighborhood historian requires a *disposition* to think about things in a particular way. It involves a kind of educated suspiciousness rather than formal academic skills, a readiness to entertain doubts rather than certainties.

Accordingly, on the first day of our summer institute, each student received a copy of the following "problem":

About 100 years ago there was a resort on Flushing Bay called North Beach. It had hotels, restaurants, amusement parks, swimming beaches, band concerts. But over time during the next 50 years, from the 1880s to the 1930s—two developments occurred that changed the history of North Beach. First came the development of Queens as a borough of New York City. That started in the first years of this century. The Queensborough Bridge was built, the subway was constructed, streets were laid out, houses were built. Cars came into general use. People could get to the ocean more easily and did.

Then, in the 1930s, the United States entered a period of severe economic depression. Businesses stopped making money. People lost jobs. They stopped going to North Beach. The businesses there went bankrupt and closed down. Trying to help the situation improve, the city stepped in, took over the property, and developed North Beach as an airport. North Beach Airport was opened in 1939. Later it became LaGuardia Airport. The resort of North Beach disappeared, and with it disappeared most of what we know about it, except for some photographs in books and archives and the memories of people old enough to have gone there.

Now, 50 years later, a similar situation is occurring. The city needs money. It wants to increase the amount of taxes it collects from property-owners because the city's expenses have grown. At the same time, developers are interested in the location of the Corona-East Elmhurst area near LaGuardia Airport. They've proposed to the city building a luxury New Town, where the community of Corona-East Elmhurst now exists. They want to level what is there—people's houses, stores, etc.—and build a community of high-rise luxury buildings with such high rents that nobody who lives in the community now would be able to stay, even if they wanted to.

The developers don't recognize that a community exists in this place. They don't see it. They see only individual buildings that don't impress them very much. The city is disposed to going along with them; the city has no memory, and it needs the money that development offers. The

community needs to assert as a community; it needs to show the city its history. It needs to make a claim for itself as a community in that place over a long period of time. It needs to show it has an historical right to be there and not some place else. It needs to hire a detective agency to help them uncover its history. And that's where we come in. We're the detective agency they're coming to for help. What can we do?

Reaching Out

Our "field work" included a tour of the Armstrong House. Its director, Gail Hightower, who is a professor at Queens College's Aaron Copland School of Music, conducted the tour for us. We wound up in Louis Armstrong's study, with the children listening to a recording of his inimitable rendition of "What a Wonderful Day," and interviews with two of Armstrong's neighbors, Avannah Patterson and Selma Heraldo.

Mrs. Patterson and her family had moved into the neighborhood about the same time as the Armstrongs. Both her father and husband had been coal miners in West Virginia, and they had all lived through the brutal organizing wars between the United Mine Workers Union and the mine owners. The hard times of the Depression, the violence, and the threat of more of the same had sent the Pattersons north in the late 1930s. She and her husband found jobs working for the city, and then found a modest house on a quiet leafy street in Corona to raise a family.

In the 1940s and 1950s it was an integrated neighborhood, friendly and secure. Having Louis as a neighbor just made it all the more special. Everybody knew Armstrong was world renowned, but at home Armstrong made no special demands because of it. Louis, she said, would stand on the street in front of his house every morning when he wasn't on the road and play something sweet as the neighbors went off to work, and always made Mrs. Patterson feel good. On the day of Armstrong's funeral, she said, American flags were draped over the porch rails of every house on the block.

Selma Heraldo, who lived next door to the Armstrong house, had been born on the block in 1920 and had never lived elsewhere. Her father grew up in Nicaragua and, for a while, in the days when Corona and lots of other communities in the city supported boxing clubs, fought professionally. In the 1950s, she had gone on tour with the Armstrong entourage as a companion to Lucille Armstrong. In our interviews with Mrs. Heraldo, she described the casual racism that was a part of everyday life traveling through the South in the years leading up to the Civil Rights movement, and which was astonishing to a black woman who had

grown up in an integrated community—and infuriating to Armstrong.

But the interview that was most compelling to the children was the one we did with the dancer Honi Coles. I want to reproduce it here because of its intensity and because of the values it expresses. It affected the children considerably.

Interviewer: How did you come into this area?
Coles: Well, how in the world did we come here? First I lived on Northern Boulevard. Nick Penny of the Inkspots owned an apartment building between 95th and 96th, and we moved there. Right, Marian? This is my wife, Marian. Also show biz. She was a chorus girl at the Apollo Theater for 26 years. She now belongs to a dancing group called the Silver Belles. The oldest one is 83 and youngest is 54.
Int.: Where do you dance?
Marian: Wherever we can get a job. We were at the Latin Quarter not so long ago.
Coles: So whatever you want to ask . . .
Int.: How did you get your name?
Coles: Originally it was Honey. I was born and raised in Philadelphia. And I belonged to a club called the Jolly Buccaneers, all guys. In the winter, we had big sweaters, bulky sweaters, had a pirate's head on the front and the names on the back. And after about five or six unsuccessful fights, we got tagged by the guys on the block, who hollered when they saw us, "Hey Honey, Honney!" So I took the Y off and cut the extensions off and I and it became "Honi." In English it doesn't mean anything. But the French, I learned in later years, have an expression "Honi soit qui mal y pense": "A gentleman never has bad thoughts."
Int.: So when you went to France, your name meant something?
Coles: When I went to France? Not really. Nobody ever associated the two. It's interesting, though, that you mention France. That was my first taste of real freedom. I went to Paris in 1936, and it was the first time I was unaware of the fact that I was black. Because there was no such thing as color, in those times, on the continent. It was rare that you ran into any sort of racial thing. Blacks were welcome because American performers were treated very well. It's a subject that I don't really care to talk about, but I will.

In France I had complete freedom. And coming back—at that time we traveled by ship—coming back in late 1936 or early 1937, everybody on board was hunky-dory. But the closer we got to America, the more distant whites and blacks became. And finally there was just a cold wall between us. After five and a half days of traveling together, we were perfect strangers.

Now that I've exhausted that subject . . .

Int.: What did that experience do to your thinking?
Coles: It just made me aware of the inequities of this country. It didn't turn me against this country, by no means. But it made me more aware because I was aware of the question in childhood.
Int.: How so?
Coles: I grew up in an integrated neighborhood. In Philadelphia, neighborhoods were white here, black here. Next door to each other. I ate in the houses of friends who were white; they ate in mine. We'd fight occasionally, but they were fights that could happen between blacks and other blacks, or between whites and other whites. I wasn't really aware of the situation as far as blacks and whites were concerned until I was in high school.
Int.: What happened?
Coles: Nothing outstanding happened. I just became a little more mature. I went to high school in a different neighborhood from the one where I lived. There were very few blacks there, and I became aware of it. But not startlingly so, not to the extent of where I experienced hatred. Just aware of it, and of the small things that happen.

You're probably more aware of it now, this generation, people of this age. We didn't have television or anything of that sort. When I was a kid, younger than present company, we'd stay in our neighborhood. We didn't go anywhere else, didn't have confrontation with other people. So we weren't aware of the gulf between black and white and were surprised when we saw it. Today they're more aware of it: headlines in the papers, the television, all that. The kids are well aware of it.

Of course, it has become different now in New York, compared to back then. It was no single thing that happened, but the financial things were determining. At the advent of World War II, people were imported from the West Indies and came up from the South to work in the factories. It became, "I'll knock you out of a job, and you're going to hate me for life. You say you hate me because I'm black, but what's really determining it is financial."
Int.: What year did you move to Corona?
Coles: What year did we move here? 1947. Later on, Clark Terry moved up here at the end of Northern Boulevard, just before you cross over at the Dory Miller Apartments. Louis Armstrong lived on 107th Street. Lorraine and Dizzy Gillespie bought a home out here. A lot of us migrated from Harlem when the war ended. It was nicer out here.

Before the war, Harlem was the beauty spot of New York City. Tree-lined from 110th to 155th. Big beautiful trees on either side of the street. The island in the middle was well-kept with grass, well-kept at all times. Nobody on the street of 7th Avenue after 6 o'clock without a shirt and tie on. You never saw a man in shirtsleeves. Young ladies were dressed accordingly.

There was a real sense of community, too. Everything was so close. 125th Street was "Main Street." There's no "Main Street" out here unless you call Northern Boulevard "Main Street." There everybody gathered. Maybe you lived a block apart. You'd gather at the Apollo, or at the restaurants on 125th. Or at the Rhythm Club, a musicians' club. It was the equivalent of the Grand Street Boys' Club downtown. Bojangles Robinson was its patron, and it stayed open 24 hours a day. So you'd meet musicians and dancers and singers any time of the day or night. Then the whole tenor of the place changed, like everywhere else, and we came out here.

Int.: Is there more to say about all these musicians being out here than just that they were here?

Coles: You said it exactly. We were here. We had moved to a new neighborhood; nothing else attached to it. We saw each other less than we did in Harlem.

Int.: Some writers say that the collection of jazz musicians living in Queens had an effect on the local culture. Does that sound right?

Coles: I suppose that could be. But I think the only one that ever lived out here who affected the youngsters would have been Louis Armstrong, because he lived in a neighborhood on a side street. That street was kind of blocked off, and he had the kids in his yard, playing his horn and everything. That may have had an effect. For the rest of them, I can't say. As a matter of fact, I didn't know Jimmy Heath lived out here until I saw him at your school's Night for Louis Armstrong concert.

Of course, if you wanted to go back to the 1920s, Northern Boulevard was a more welcome place to hang out. There were two or three bars along there that were popular meeting places. The Copasetics, a group I danced with, gave their first dance at Big George's. That was a famous club in its time. Big George was a bouncer at the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem. The Savoy is where the Lindy (for Charles Lindbergh) was created. You all know your American history?

And then later, after we moved out here, I used to play pool up there on 105th Street, 106th Street. I was a pretty good pool player. My father owned a pool hall in Philadelphia, so I had had a lot of practice. I had a ritual of going by every night to play a few games. I played straight pool, black ball, whatever. I won most of the time, win a few bucks and go home.

But Big George died, the bars closed, and the general character of the neighborhood changed.

Int.: What made you go into dancing?

Coles: Well, I'll tell you. In the neighborhood that I lived in in Philadelphia, there was no place to go recreationally, no place for the guys to hang out. We used to get on the corner and dance in

the summertime. My grandparents had a farm in Virginia, and I used to go down there in the summer months on vacation. One summer I came back and everybody was doing the Charleston. Everybody! Charleston was the craze of the country. That really got me into being on the corner dancing. Eventually I met up with a couple of guys, and we formed an act, and we'd go on the amateur shows in the different theaters, not thinking that I was going to have a theatrical career. I just did it for fun. Just for my own pleasure. We didn't dance on the corner for money. We danced for pleasure. And that got me into show business.

Int.: Can you tell us about your first year in New York?

Coles: That was about 1929—1928 or 1929. Can you think that far back? I had been dancing for about a year and a half. I played the Lafayette Theater, which was on 131st Street and 7th Avenue. It was the equivalent of the Palace Theater downtown. An all-black show and an all-black audience. Some special nights, we'd have some white people, but generally it was an all-black cast and an all-black audience. And it was a first-class theater. The building is still there. It is used as a church.

Int.: Did you ever play the Apollo?

Coles: I managed the Apollo for sixteen years, from 1960 to 1976. I was production manager from 1960 to 1976. I saw all the acts come up: the Temptations, the Supremes. Stephanie Mills graduated from my amateur show into the Wiz. She was just a child.

The Jackson Five. Do you want to know about the Jackson Five? The Jackson Five came from the midwest one year. They were brought by a black guy who was booking the act. The gig that they were supposed to do fell through, and they were stranded downtown: mother, father, and five kids. Couldn't pay their rent, had no money to eat with, had no money to get back home. So they came to us—Bobbie Schiffman, who was my boss, and I—and asked us if we could help them get out of town, which we did. That was my introduction to the Jackson Five.

The Apollo started out predominantly black, but then after a while we booked everything. We booked all the great bands, white and black. Charlie Barnett, Benny Goodman, Buddy Rich, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Fletcher Henderson. But probably the biggest night of all was Amateur Night. I know from when I was there, a lot of time my amateur shows were better than the regular shows.

Amateur Night sort of leaked down from the Lafayette Theater. The people who owned the Lafayette moved down to 125th Street in the mid-1930s. Then they broadcast the Apollo Theater on the radio, and the amateurs were a big, big hit. Then everybody came to the Apollo: Mae West, George Raft. They had one whole side generally filled with celebrities.

I'll give you an example of how important the amateur show was. We used to have a rehearsal the same night as the show in the rathskeller underneath the Apollo. I think we were rehearsing Jimmy Durante. This big, tall white guy comes down and registers. He says he wants to be on the amateur show. Hey, everybody's welcome.

We had a habit then—there was a tree. This goes way back. There was a tree that stood in front of the Lafayette Theater, a large beautiful tree, and in the summertime all the performers would stand under it and say, "I hope I get a job, I hope I get a job." Consequently, they named the tree "The Tree of Hope." When they cut it down, in later days, everybody wanted a piece of it. We had the stump of the tree on the stage of the Apollo, sort of in the wings, and you had to touch the tree when you came on the amateur show.

So this guy touches the tree three or four times and comes out, over to me, and I say, "What's your name?" He says, "George Plimpton." It still didn't ring a bell, but he's the guy who goes around doing everything in order to experience certain things: a true amateur. He boxed the champion. He played football with the Lions. He played baseball with the Yankees. I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I'm going to play the piano."

I figured he was going to get murdered. He had all the earmarks. He was shy. I think he wanted to get booed off, and that would be his experience. He played *Claire de Lune*, and won third prize.

The Apollo is still a place to visit, but it isn't quite the same as it was. You had a better chance when I was there. Now they are into videos. They're thinking more about that, actually, than they are about giving people a decent chance to show their talent.

Int.: Were musicians in the 1950s as well paid as some writers claim?

Coles: Some were. Most got the scale, whatever that was. It depended on your drawing power. If you were a big star, and drew big audiences, you got more money. I think I got $65 a week, and it was one of the higher-priced spots. There were a lot of tap dancers around, a lot of singers, a lot of bands. One was as good as the other. They didn't have to pay big money to find talented performers. What were you making as a chorus girl, Marian? $35 for 32 shows a week! That's a little more than $1 a show, singing and dancing. They had to organize a union and go out on strike before they were given a few dollars more.

There were very few fabulous salaries in those days that I can recall. Of course, later on people took loads and loads of money out of the Apollo.

We stopped the interview to look at some videos of Honi Coles dancing. One is from the 1930s, copied from film footage, and the other was made at the Smithsonian about eight years ago. The transformation of the storyteller into performer had a real effect on everybody in the room. It was clear that we had been talking with a master.

Int.: It looks like a lot of fun.
Coles: Oh, yes, a lot of fun. That is the good thing about tap dancing. The better you do it, the more pleasure you get out of it.
Int.: Were you ever scared to perform?
Coles: I'm always a little scared when I go on until I get on.
Int.: Did you ever try to get into the movies?
Coles: I'm in *Dirty Dancing*. Has anybody seen that? I was the band leader. I did *The Cotton Club*. I was in a thing on TV with Burgess Meredith called "Mr. Griffen and Me." I've done four or five things. Nothing really important.

I came from an era where you never saw any black man do an important role in a movie, where he meets the girl and gets the girl. Things have changed.

All right, enough of me. Let's talk about you. What are you going to be? Have you made up your mind? Anybody going to be in show business?

If there aren't people like Honi Coles in every neighborhood, there are stories like his in most places, and they are to be found with the right questions. Learning to ask "right" questions and, more importantly, learning to listen well—with the attentiveness of the young child absorbed in a good story—is a function of practice. You get better at it with time.

III

Time to take stock: What are the implications of these experiences for others beyond ourselves? How can we assess the significance of our brief summer workshop?

It seems to me that in any assessment the pedagogical values of our explorations would be clear: the intellectual equivalent of vitamins and sunshine. Certain building blocks for creative thinking had clearly been established. The interaction with the streets and the people in the communities surrounding the school had provoked critical thoughts, questions of an historical nature, and empathy with another generation's experience. It had promoted a sense of place. It had gone in the direction of enriching all kinds of formal skills, including those of numeracy and literacy.

It provided fresh ground for the development of what psychologist Howard Gardner calls "interpersonal intelligence"

—ability to understand other people, what motivates them, how they work, how to work practically with them. Gardner describes this form of intelligence as probably as important, or more important, than those intelligences a school routinely interacts with. Interpersonal intelligence is neglected by most schools because it is difficult to understand and to measure, but it gave our students a sense of having achieved something special. The recorded interview with Honi Coles can be regarded as a genuine accomplishment, whatever way one chooses to look at it: academically, culturally, historically. Though maybe not measurable, it is pregnant with potential for learning disciplines, not the least of which are those that involve the valuing of a community's elders.

What we did collectively, then, has real meaning and is a source of real values, as opposed to those that come out of curriculum boxes. In the midst of a collaborative effort, our students were consistently self-disciplined, resourceful in their thinking, excited by the subject, actively giving of themselves. In relatively few hours of work, these young people had walked a new terrain, explored it, questioned it, came to feel mastery in some sense, even if only at the level of their own questions.

In the best of all possible worlds, the teachers would have been free to pursue that work, at that level of programming intensity, if they had chosen to. They would have been free to deepen it and expand upon it. They would have been permitted to take that particular dimension of learning out to its edges and make of it a prism through which the school transmitted its values. But the world is less than perfect where teachers are concerned, and what experience communicates isn't necessarily what one gets to do. The teachers are constrained administratively everywhere they look. Curriculum prescriptions come with the territory, and at the middle-school level they claim the large share of the timetable.

Even so, there *are* things that can and must be done. One thought that has occurred to us is to do a replay of the two-week workshop. At the end of the spring term, after the school's present curriculum has been covered, we'll try to put together small groups to focus on community studies. Meanwhile, we're starting workshops in the arts of oral history and setting up interview situations in which our youngsters can participate, as in an apprenticeship.

A few times we've used the school museum to illuminate issues of national history in its local context. We brought in an exhibition, done originally in Chinatown, that reconstructed and interpreted the history of Chinese laundry work in America. That exhibition connected to a whole panoply of themes in American history, from immigration to local history, to ethnic stereotypes, to community organization. We are going to commemorate Women's History Month with an exhibition about one woman's

life, reconstructed from materials found in her attic after she had died which were passed on to one of the teachers of the school.

An I.S. 227 art teacher picked up on our efforts, which matched her own pedagogical values. Using historical photographs we had brought into the school, she helped a team of students produce a mural for the school cafeteria of turn-of-the-century Queens street life. Now several other murals in the same vein are being planned. When the social studies teachers in the school start to see the murals as historical resources, a pedagogical revolution will be in the making.

We've been learning how to extract and make use of the local dimensions of the global curriculum that the state asks the school to give the children to chew on. This year's study of China in the sixth grade, for example, connected to the celebration of the Chinese New Year in nearby Flushing, which classes participated in firsthand and then built on in further classroom work.

Slowly we begin to see that there's nothing to the humanities that doesn't have its local corollary. We've been exploring this notion in an elective class in "historical roots," which has an oral-history component we're trying to take into the deepest part of the pool, enabling young students to see what it is like intellectually to float in deep water.

Slowly we've been nurturing our contacts with community elders, becoming sensitive to the familiar, caring quality of the communities around us, and literally learning to see the native geography, which development has only thinly veiled, and which we feel will enable the children to see better than any textbook the continuity between past and present. I have a clear fantasy about this: Had I money to give the school, I'd invest in a bus that teachers could use to drive around Elmhurst and Corona, giving their history lessons from behind a steering wheel instead of in front of a blackboard.

A Lesson from London

Going along with this thinking, it would make sense for the Louis Armstrong Middle School, and other schools like it—interested as they are in the molding of values in their students—to deal with the issue of historical thinking on a schoolwide basis. What would be needed would be to sit down as a body, assess the historical resources in the surrounding communities, and decide how, over the years to come, to give young students the value of that experience.

In London, where work of this kind is widely established, the School Authority until recently helped develop long-term programs in regard to school-based historical investigations.

Teaching helped teachers convert their ideas into materials that their students could work with. Schools made it easy for teachers to go out into the community with their classes, mapping historical trails of their own devising, interviewing the older generation, making their own publications. What helped, too, was that pressure in support of this work came from the community, specifically in the form of community publishing projects.

When I came across this work in the late 1960s, it was just developing but already had a body of writing that found uses in schools serving working-class populations of mixed ethnic and racial backgrounds. One publication introduced the poetry of a 14-year-old West Indian boy. Another, a taped oral history, was the reminiscence of a woman whose father had been "the" local shoemaker. Yet another piece was written by a cab driver, who had grown up in an East End community. There was a collection of poems by senior citizens called *Elders*. Another was made up of students' writings, whose publication got their teacher sacked from his job (and later rehired by a more progressive educational authority). Yet another volume collected oral stories—the folklore—about the local doctor in a particular neighborhood.

By now there are hundreds of titles, done in local communities across Britain. These books have brought to life worlds of common experiences that are the building blocks of historical thinking for children and that our mainstream educational standards continually repress. In my view, it is the submerged local experience, and its understanding, that enables the oncoming generations to make sense of the world that holds them. By ignoring this experience, and the values it produces, the school not only sets itself against the community but cuts across the paths of the children's basic understanding (or under-standing, to make the point more literal). Just as importantly, that work is interracial and intergenerational.

Moving Forward

We'd be hard put to find work of that character here. Here you come across few things taking seriously the historical character of our local communities. What work there is of this nature is more often externally produced. The view is narrow, the story told brief, and the whole thing off-putting. This, for example, is the full entry for the community of Corona in the much-lauded WPA *Guide to New York*, originally published in 1939, the year before Louis and Lucille Armstrong (she was a neighborhood girl) moved into the house on 107th Street, a couple of blocks from Northern Boulevard, down the block from Big George's, which to black entertainers in New York is as important culturally, if not historically, as the Algonquin is to white writers:

Corona, on both sides of Roosevelt Avenue west of the World's Fair site, was called West Flushing in 1856 when the Fashion Race Track was opened there. The track, named for a race horse, operated until 1866. When the land was first subdivided, in 1870, the name was changed to Corona to express the hope of making this the "crowning community" of Long Island. Today Corona is a drab section of closely packed two-story houses, largely populated by people of Italian descent.

In brief, very little experience at the local level is actually available for children to identify with here. A school is pretty much on its own in carrying out real historical investigations. There are intellectual resources to draw on throughout the city, but unless teachers are themselves intellectual resources, those other resources tend to be hard to come by and harder to keep engaged over the long term. But just because young teachers are convinced by their academic training to follow formal rote in "doing" history with their youngsters, and just because the school's bureaucratic requirements have the day segmented into intricately isolated squares making concentration difficult, that doesn't mean something else isn't meant to be.

After years of neglect, protests have come down from on high decrying our lack of historical imaginations and calling on the schools to "do a better job." When we get clear about what we should be better about—formal instructions or historical inquiry—there isn't any doubt in my mind that it will be here, in East Elmhurst and Corona, and other places like them across the country, that this work, which is basic, must begin. If our intellectual life, and not just our Gross National Product, is to go forward, we need to be a people who can appreciate our historic complexity where life is lived, at the local, grassroots, democratic level, the level of the hurly-burly. Lincoln's level, Whitman's level, Faulkner's level, at the level of Carl Sandburg's hog butcher, at the level of Louis Armstrong's neighborhood, at the level of *real places.*

Who would argue against the democratic value of helping urban children *see* their city—feel it, touch it, smell it, imagine it—as a built place, given meaning by ordinary people, such as the elders amongst whom they grow up? Or, for that matter, who would begrudge children the time they need to connect to the rich historical underpinnings of that process? Would anyone in civic life begrudge it? Can we help children learn history by providing the resources for them to develop their own relationship to it? Can American public schools afford to have their practice based on something that is still open and contentious, unresolved and messy, not fully comprehended but discoverable?

About the Editor and Contributors

Monroe D. Cohen has extensive experience in teaching (nursery school through graduate school), editing (10 years as director of publications for the Association for Childhood Education International and editor of its journal *Childhood Education*) and consulting (overseas tours with the U. S. Agency for International Development in Afghanistan and Brazil and project director of Magnet Schools Assistance Program grants). Most recently, Dr. Cohen was director of the Queens College children's program.*

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Arthur Tobier has been a newspaper reporter, magazine editor, and public historian. From 1976 to 1985 he ran the Community History Workshop at St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery, curating exhibitions and collecting oral histories, chronicling the stories of basic American artists and artisans, teachers and tradesmen, immigrants and emigres, neighborhood heroes and heroines. He is co-editor of *Education for Democracy* (1986).

Annotations marked with an asterisk are adapted from some that appeared previously in *To Teach: Making a Difference in Children's Lives*, New York: Teachers College Press, by permission of its editor, William Ayers.

Lillian Weber was professor of Education at City College in New York City. In 1972, after several years of work in the public schools of New York, she founded the Workshop Center for Open Education at City College. She was a founding member of the North Dakota Study Group on Evaluation, served on the board of directors of the National Consortium on Teaching, and was a member of the Prospect Center. She authored numerous books, articles, and chapters focusing on the child as active learner, and on teaching as an activity that can support the child's growth and development. She lectured throughout the world, and continues to be widely regarded as the leading voice of the late 20th century in showing teachers how to accept children as lusty and inquiring and how to create environments that stimulate children's outreach to make sense of the world. Lillian Weber died in 1994. *(Statement by William Ayers).**

Olga Winbush has been a progressive educator for the past 15 years, 10 of which she spent teaching kindergarten through fourth grade at the Children's Community School in Van Nuys, California. She currently is a reading instructor at Antelope Valley College in Lancaster, California. Olga has a master's degree in human development from Pacific Oaks College and is studying for her doctorate in comparative education at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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