VANESSA DE OLIVEIRA ANDREOTTI

8. EDUCATION, KNOWLEDGE AND THE RIGHTING OF WRONGS

[T]he world we live in is shaped far less by what we celebrate and mythologize than by the painful events we try to forget.

(Hochschild, 1999, p. 294)

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I present three metaphors or narratives that unapologetically raise "a thousand questions" about education and do not provide any clear cut answers. My intention is to raise the stakes in our collective struggle with the joys, challenges and dilemmas involved in enacting education beyond historical patterns that have cultivated unsustainable and harmful forms of collective relationships and have limited human possibilities for imagining (and doing) otherwise. My own focus in this chapter is concerned particularly with the urgency of imagining education in ways that can pluralize possibilities for relationships in the present with a view of pluralizing possibilities for collective futures (Nandy, 2000) that may enable a "non-coercive relationship with the excluded 'Other' of Western humanism" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 39).

I start from the assumption that certain features of modernity and humanism itself, which we often cherish as sacred grounds for our interpretations of social justice, *paradoxically create the conditions of injustice we are trying to address*. This does not mean we should dismiss or abandon these concepts altogether. The idea is to understand their limitations as well as their gifts in order to stretch possibilities for thinking and living together precisely based on the humanist idea that it is our responsibility (especially at the university) to question received wisdom, in this case, the historicity and limitations of democracy, human rights, development individualism, freedom, secularism, etc.): we can 'step up' beyond the simplistic acceptance of given concepts (without throwing them away), and take responsibility to open up new possibilities for the future—this is explored further in the third metaphor (see for example Quijano, 1997; Gandhi, 1998; Mignolo, 2000; Maldonado-Torres, 2004; Souza Santos, 2007; Souza, 2011; Hoofd, 2012).

The body of literature I draw on (postcolonial, decolonial, critical race and indigenous studies) problematises the ethnocentric and hegemonic effects of key Enlightenment principles that are the foundations of modernity, such as rational

unanimity in regard to conceptualizations of humanity, human nature, progress, and justice, as well as Cartesian, teleological anthropocentric and dialectical reasoning (see Andreotti, 2011a; Andreotti & Souza, 2011).

I agree with Mignolo's proposition that modernity's "shine" (i.e., its "light" side represented in moral progress, freedom, rights, citizenship, Nation States, Protestant work ethic, property ownership, universal reason, representational democracy, etc.) is only historically possible and presently sustainable through its "shadow" (i.e. its "darker" side of colonialism, continuous exploitation, dispossession, destitution and genocide). The emphasis on modernity's shine depends on a constitutive denial, or an active sanctioned ignorance, of its shadow. Inayatullah and Blaney argue that while the empirical agenda of progressive ethical advance takes precedence in achieving modernity's sparkly goals, the continuous epistemic, cognitive, structural, economic, cultural and military violences necessary for this endeavour are placed securely in the past, as collateral damage, to liberate the future for the shiny heroic entrepreneurship and allegedly un-coercive leadership of those who can head humanity towards its imagined destiny, which becomes a "teleological alibi for death and destruction" (Inayatullah & Blaney, 2012, p. 170).

In proposing a serious engagement with the idea of the two faces of modernity (i.e. its shine and shadow), I acknowledge the difficulties of engaging in polarized orientations that embrace or reject modernity wholesale and dismiss the complexity, provisionality and contingency of different positions. I propose that the grey area in between unexamined embraces or rejections needs much further exploration. In this chapter, however, I focus on positions concerned with the exclusionary effects of "epistemic blindness" (Souza Santos, 2007) caused by the colonization of the imagination through education itself (including its progressive forms).

EDUCATION AND THE EXPANSION OF IMAGINAGION

In order to illustrate such effects, I will invite readers to construct the first metaphor with me: imagine a field of corn, harvest your cobs and peel off the husks. Place your corn cobs in front of you and compare them with the picture at the end of this chapter, page 138 below (Andreotti, 2011a). My argument is that, in the same way that our experiences and imagination have been colonised by one variety of corn cob (i.e. yellow), our over-socialisation in modes of being enchanted by modernity (epitomised in schooling itself) creates a condition of epistemic blindness where we see ourselves as autonomous, individuated and self-sufficient beings inhabiting a knowable and controllable world moving "forward" in a direction that we already know and contribute to (Andreotti, 2011b). From this perspective, we are able to describe the world and define for others the best pathway for their development. This is different from, for example, seeing ourselves as non-individuated, co-dependent in relation to each other and insufficient before a complex, uncertain and plural world moving towards contestable "forwards." This attachment to and investment in individual autonomy/independence, self-sufficiency and a single

collective "forward" is precisely what produces the idea of difference as a deficit rather than a necessary productive and creative force as many have suggested before. Audrey Lorde (1979) indicates that in order to address the problems created by this conceptualization of self/other, difference must be seen as something different:

> Difference must be [seen] as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark… Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act *where there are no charters*. Within the interdependence of mutual differences lies that security which enables us to descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future, along with the concomitant power to effect those changes which can bring that future into being. Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged. (Lorde, 1979)

In translating these insights into educational thinking, I have found Spivak's (2004) work extremely enabling as a pedagogical compass (rather than a map). Her insistence on hyper-self-reflexivity, self-implication, accountable reasoning, and learning to unlearn, to listen and to be taught by the world have expanded possibilities for what I can do/feel and think as a teacher and as a "relation" (Spivak, 2004). Hyper-self-reflexivity involves a constant engagement with three things: (a) the social, cultural and historical conditioning of our thinking and of knowledge/power production; (b) the limits of knowing, of language and of our senses in apprehending reality; and (c) the non-conscious dynamics of affect (the fact that our traumas, fears, desires and attachments affect our decisions in ways that we often cannot identify). Self-implication entails an acute awareness of our complicity in historical and global harm through our inescapable investments in violent systems, such as modernity and capitalism.

In this sense, two of Spivak's ideas in particular have sparked very challenging questions and interesting possibilities: the idea of "*education as an uncoercive rearrangement of desires*" (Spivak, 2004, p. 526) and the idea that this education should aim towards an "*ethical imperative to relate to the Other, before will*" (p. 535). Both ideas acknowledge that the problems of unexamined investments in harmful systems cannot be addressed in education through cognition alone.

Questions that emerged from these two "simple" assertions include: How on earth can one *uncoercively* enable a "*re-arrangement of desires*" that may command an imperative for an ethical responsibility toward the Other, "*before will*"? How can a pedagogy of self-reflexivity, self-implication, dissensus, and discomfort support people to go beyond denial and feelings of shame, guilt, or deceit (Taylor, 2011)? How is an education based on uncoercive rearrangement of desires different from transmissive, "transformative" or "emancipatory" education? How can one ethically and professionally address the hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, paternalism, and deficit theorization of difference that abound in

educational approaches benevolently concerned with helping, fixing, defending, educating, assimilating, or giving voice to the Other (Andreotti, 2011a)? How could a pedagogy address the arrogance of the "consciousness of superiority lodged in the self" (Spivak, 2004, p. 534), *including my own*? How can we learn from social breakdowns in ways that might open ourselves to ethical obligations (Pinar, 2009; Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Zembylas, 2010) and to being taught by the world (Biesta, 2012)? How can one theorize learners, teaching, and learning in ways that take account of power relations, of the complexity of the construction of the self and of alterity, and of the situatedness and the limits of my own constructions and theorizations?

These questions also raise further issues in relation to knowing and acting in the context of righting wrongs through education. I will explore some of those issues through my second and third metaphors.

EDUCATION AS A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

A common "feel good" teaching practice that I have often found in my field of study and work is an activity where a teacher educator gets student teachers to identify what is wrong with the world, what they imagine an ideal world would look like and what people should do to make things right. In most cases student teachers in the contexts I have witnessed come up with ideas related to pollution, homelessness, violence, poverty, destruction and (less often) discrimination as examples of "wrongness". Next, symbols of flowers, clean streets peace, harmony, nuclear families, children and people holding hands for "rightness", and, finally, education (as knowledge transmission) is imagined as a means to get from wrong to right. Invariably, the assumption seems to be that "wrongness" is a result of ignorance or immorality, not of knowledge, and that once people have the right piece of information or have acquired "appropriate" values, their patterns of behaviour and relationships will magically change. In the context of teacher pre-service education or professional development, I have seen this exercise being used to introduce curriculum guidelines that justify or mandate the inclusion of themes like global citizenship, conflict resolution, human rights, peace, or environmental education as part of the curriculum. In a similar way, the assumption on the part of policy makers and teacher educators seems to be that by delivering the right mandate or policy information, teachers and student teachers will immediately change their practices to include the new themes in the curriculum. I have seen many teacher educators frustrated when this does not happen, but assumptions about learning, knowledge, and teaching – and the effectiveness of the methodology used in this exercise – are seldom questioned.

What I would like to suggest is that the righting of wrongs in the world through education, from the perspective I propose today, requires us to think about the connections between "rights" and "wrongs" in a very different way. Perhaps a starting point is a shift in the understanding of knowledge from "knowledge versus ignorance" toward "every knowledge is also an ignorance" (of other knowledges).

The body of literature I draw on affirms that *"wrongs" are caused by knowledge too*. The "every knowledge is an ignorance" approach requires an understanding of how knowledges are produced, how they relate to power and how they may shape subjectivities and relationships in conscious and non-conscious ways. This shift in conceptualization on its own would change the exercise considerably. For example: after identifying "wrongs," participants could be invited to perform an analysis of what (socially, culturally, and historically situated) systems of knowledge/power production produce such wrongs; after identifying "rights" they would be invited to analyse what kinds of systems of knowledge production produce the possibilities for the "rights" they are able to imagine, and what kinds of ignorance could block their imagination to other possible "rights", or make their own knowledge systems complicit in the production of the wrongs they intend to right.

This, in turn, would shift the question of methodology of righting wrongs significantly too: if education is the means to right wrongs, what kind of education could take account of the complexity, multiplicity, complicity, and inequality inherent in the politics of knowledge production (including those happening through education itself)? What kind of education could support us to undo (at a deep psychic level, beyond surface cognition) the legacy of knowledges that make us blindly complicit in perpetuating wrongs? What kind of education could enable the emergence of ethical relationships between those who have historically marginalized and those who have been marginalized, moving beyond guilt, anger, salvationism, triumphalism, paternalism, and self- interest? What kind of education could equip us to work in solidarity with one another in the construction of "yet-to- come" collective futures in ways that do not require enforced or manufactured consensus? What kind of education could help us find comfort and hope in precisely "not having absolute answers" and being frequently challenged in our encounters with difference?

EDUCATION FOR "SAVING CHILDREN"

My third metaphor evokes the image of a river with a strong current. If a group of people saw many young children drowning in this river, their first impulse would probably be to try to save them or to search for help. But what if they looked up the river and saw many boats throwing the children in the water and these boats were multiplying by the minute? How many different tasks would be necessary to stop the boats and prevent this from happening again? I suggest there are at least four tasks: rescuing the children in the water, stopping the boats from throwing the children in the water, going to the villages of the boat crew to understand why this is happening in the first place, and collecting the bodies of those who have died – honoring the dead by remembering them and raising awareness of what happened. In deciding what to do, people would need to remember that some rescuing techniques may not work in the conditions of the river, and that some strategies to stop the boats may invite or fuel even more boats to join the fleet – they may even realize that they are

actually in one of the boats, throwing children in the water with one hand and trying to rescue them with the other hand.

Therefore, education should help people in the task of learning to "go up the river" to the roots of the problem so that the emergency strategies down the river can be better informed in the hope that one day no more boats will throw children in the water. Going up the river involves asking essential, difficult and often disturbing begged questions that may implicate rescuers in the reproduction of harm and expose how self-serving practices can be disguised as altruism. Questions such as: How is poverty *created*? How come different lives have different value? What are the relationships between social groups that are over-exploited and social groups that are over-exploiting? How are these relationships maintained? How do people justify inequalities and dominance? What are the roles of schooling in the reproduction and contestation of inequalities in society? When do institutionalized initiatives, such as the human rights declaration or military interventions, become helpful in promoting justice and when do they worsen or create new problems? How would people respond if they realized that bringing justice to others meant going against national or local economic and cultural interests? How are Nation States – and nationalism – implicated in the proliferation of divisions, fragmentations, fundamentalisms and inequalities? How have cherished humanist ideals contributed to the dispossession, destitution, exploitation and extermination of peoples and the destruction of ecological balance?

Through this metaphor, I propose that education is about preparing ourselves and those we work with to enlarge possibilities for thinking and living together in a finite planet that sustains complex, plural, uncertain, inter-dependent and unequal societies. In order to do this, we need an attitude of *sceptical optimism* or *hopeful scepticism* (as opposed to *naïve hope* or *dismissive scepticism*) in order to stretch the legacy of frameworks we have inherited. In simpler language, perhaps we need:

- to understand and learn from repeated historical patterns of mistakes, in order to open the possibilities for new mistakes to be made
- more complex social analyses acknowledging that if we understand the problems and the reasons behind them in simplistic ways, we may do more harm than good
- to recognize how we are implicated or complicit in the problems we are trying to address: how we are all both part of the problem and the solution (in different ways)
- to learn to enlarge our referents for reality and knowledge, acknowledging the gifts and limitations of every knowledge system and moving beyond "*either ors*" towards "*both and mores*"
- to remember that the paralysis and guilt we may feel when we start to engage with the complexity of issues of inequality are just temporary as they may come from our own education/socialization in protected/sheltered environments, which create the desire for things to be simple, easy, happy, ordered and under control.

Hopefully, once we go up the river together we will be able to come down and address the issue of justice as an on-going agonistic conversation that is going to be really difficult, but that we cannot shy away from. Going up the river is necessary for substantially committing this conversation to a form of radical democracy that moves beyond practices embedded in historical patterns of

- Hegemony (justifying superiority and supporting domination)
- Ethnocentrism (projecting one view, one "forward", as universal)
- Ahistoricism (forgetting historical legacies and complicities)
- Depoliticization (disregarding power inequalities and ideological roots of analyses and proposals)
- Salvationism (framing help as the burden of the fittest)
- Un-complicated solutions (offering easy solutions that do not require systemic change)
- Paternalism (seeking affirmation of superiority through the provision of help) (Andreotti, 2012, p. 2).

However, if we take seriously Spivak's (2004) calls for hyper-self-reflexivity and a commitment to the Other "before will", we need to become affectively accountable for the new and old problems our social justice solutions may engender. This for me means changing again the questions we ask, for example:

- How can we address hegemony without creating new hegemonies through our own forms of resistance?
- How can we address ethnocentrism without falling into absolute relativism and forms of essentialism and anti-essentialism that reify elitism?
- How can we address ahistoricism without fixing a single perspective of history to simply reverse hierarchies and without being caught in a self-sustaining narrative of vilification and victimisation?
- How can we address depoliticization without high-jacking political agendas for self-serving ends and without engaging in self- empowering critical exercises of generalisation, homogenisation and dismissal of antagonistic positions?
- How can we address salvationism without crushing generosity and altruism?
- How can we address people's tendency to want simplistic solutions without producing paralysis and hopelessness?
- How can we address paternalism without closing opportunities for short-term redistribution?

The ethical responsibility towards the other "before will" poses a series of intense and tough demands. It requires us to have the courage, strength, confidence *and* humility to rise to the challenges and difficulties that these questions create; it commands that we educate ourselves to become comfortable with the discomfort of the uncertainties inherent in living the plurality of existence; and it calls us to become inspired and excited by the new possibilities opened by unchartered spaces, processes and encounters that do not offer any pre-determined scripts or

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guarantees. How do we teach for that? And how do we prepare ourselves to teach for that given that we have been over-socialised in forms of education that go exactly in the opposite direction of finding personal comfort and security in certainties (unequivocal fixed knowledge, right/wrong answers), conformity (external validation), subtle deference to institutional authorities, and unexamined ideas of autonomous and independent thinking?

Corn cobs image (first metaphor) kindly offered by Nella de La Fuente

EDUCATION FOR "CULTIVATING HUMANITY"

Sharon Todd (2009) warns us against common sense conceptualizations of humanity as "goodness", something to be cultivated, constructed in contrast with violence (or "evil") conceptualized as "inhuman", something to be eliminated. She argues that such conceptualizations fail to recognize humanity's complexity, pluralism and imperfection and that an education for facing humanity would be more productive in addressing ethical questions related to our collective suffering and connections with each other.

Jacqui Alexander (2005) suggests the idea of dismemberment as an alternative insight on questions of violence and inter-dependence. She states that:

[S]ince colonisation has produced fragmentation and dismemberment at both the material and psychic levels, there is a yearning for wholeness, often expressed as a yearning to belong, a yearning that is both material and existential, both psychic and physical, and which, when satisfied, can subvert, and ultimately displace the pain of dismemberment. (Alexander, 2005, p. 281)

She suggests that strategies of membership in coalitions, like those of citizenship, community, family, political movement, nationalism and solidarity in identity or ideology, although important, have probably not addressed the source of this yearning (Alexander, 2005). For Alexander, these coalitions have reproduced the very fragmentation and separation that she identifies as the root of the problem. She states that the source of this yearning is a "deep knowing that we are in fact interdependent – neither separate, nor autonomous" (Alexander, 2005, p. 282). She explains:

As human beings we have a sacred connection to each other, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc in our Souls. There is a great danger then, in living lives of segregation. Racial segregation. Segregation in politics. Segregated frameworks. Segregated and compartmentalised selves. What we have devised as an oppositional politics has been necessary, but it will never sustain us, for a while it may give us some temporary gains (which become more ephemeral the greater the threat, which is not a reason not to fight), it can never ultimately feed that deep place within us: that space of the erotic, that space of the Soul, that space of the Divine. (Alexander, 2005, p. 282)

Since contemporary theoretical discussions have conceptualized hostility either as a natural human response or an effect of discourse, it may be useful to think about it a little differently. Echoing Alexander's (2005), Todd's (2009), and Duran's (2006) concerns for shifting root metaphors, my last set of questions refers to education as a host and/or a medicine for social diseases:

- *What if* racism, sexism, classicism, nationalism and other forms of toxic, parasitic and highly contagious viral divisions are preventable social diseases?
- *What if* the medicine involves coming to terms with our violent histories, being taught to see through the eyes of others (as impossible as it sounds), and facing humanity (in our own selves first) in all its complexity, affliction and imperfection: agonistically embracing everyone's capacity for love, hatred, compassion, harm, goodwill, envy, joy, anger, oppression, care, selfishness, selflessness, avarice, kindness, enmity, solidarity, malice, benevolence, arrogance, humility, narcissism, altruism, greed, generosity, contempt *and* reverence?
- *What if* our holy texts (both religious, activist and academic), our education (both formal and informal), our politics and agency, and our ways of knowing and being

have carried both the mutant virus that spreads the disease and the medicine that prevents it?

- *What if* learning to distinguish between toxins, viruses and medicines involves disciplining our minds, bodies, psyches, and spirits by confronting our traumas and letting go of fears of scarcity, loneliness, worthlessness and guilt (generated precisely by the imperative for autonomy/independence, self-sufficiency and control)? What if we have to learn to trust each other without guarantees?
- *What if* the motivation to survive alongside each other in our finite planet in dynamic balance (without written agreements, coercive enforcements or assurances) will come precisely through being taught collectively *by the disease itself*?
- *What knowledge would be enough, what education would be appropriate, and what possibilities would be opened, then?*

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