

The alternative vision, as I have described it, need not be characterized as a feminist or woman's view, although I think a feminist perspective can contribute richly to it. I have already mentioned John Dewey several times. His analysis of schooling suggested almost a century ago that education should begin with and remain closely tied to the actual experience and concerns of students. But his recommendations have been widely interpreted as psychological; that is, Dewey seemed to address questions about how children learn. He did not really challenge the dominance of existing disciplines in the curriculum but, rather, showed how they could be employed in the solution of genuine problems. Indeed, he made strong arguments for science, history, and geography in the school curriculum. He wanted these subjects to serve real human needs and also to be "progressively organized" so that those students who developed interest in them would gradually accept and employ their standard logical organization. My vision, in contrast, assesses the traditional supremacy of the disciplines as fundamentally wrong. Other matters—centers of care—are more important and more essential to full human life.

I have started an argument that I now want to fill out. In its general form, it is an argument against an ideology of control—one in favor of shared living and responsibility. Its first thesis is that there are centers of care and concern in which all people share and in which the capacities of all children must be developed. The second, closely following the first, is that education should nurture the special cognitive capacities or "intelligences" of all children and that this requires a scheme of multiple intelligences resembling that suggested by Howard Gardner. A third is that the focus on centers of care and the development of capacities must be filtered through and filled out by a consideration of differences that are associated with race, sex, ethnicity, and religion. The various perspectives that arise must be treated respectfully, critically, and regularly. Finally, my argument draws on Ruddick's maternal interests. Not only must we respect the various talents of our children and the occupations they will fill as adults but, if we are doing the work of attentive love, we must care deeply for them. We want to preserve their lives, nurture their growth, and shape them by some ideal of acceptability. Our parental interests inevitably guide the choices we make in all the other categories and, indeed, in the categories themselves.

Chapter 5

Caring and Continuity

The disciplines will probably remain as the backbone of the curriculum for the foreseeable future, although there have been important challenges to this traditional structure; for example, the National Association for Core Curriculum has worked for more than thirty years to transform what we now call the middle school into a humane center of education with similarities to the one I described in chapter 4 (see Lounsbury & Vars, 1978; *The Core Teacher*). But this curriculum has not swept the nation, nor has it threatened the stability of the secondary curriculum or the hegemony of the disciplines. Further, it represents an interdisciplinary approach, not one that displaces the disciplines. The experience of Core enthusiasts illustrates how difficult it is to make changes in the standard curriculum. Theodore Sizer (1984) has also recommended a shift to interdisciplinary work—work that would allow students to concentrate on problems instead of artificially and rigidly compartmentalized subjects. In recent talks, he has emphasized the moral aspect of this shift. We really *must* do something like this if we are to educate all of our children. Still, there is little movement in the direction Sizer suggests.

However, conditions in today's schools are desperate enough that sensible people may be ready to consider modification along the lines we are discussing here. There are some things we can do without entirely overthrowing the traditional structure. The changes I will suggest in this chapter are feasible, but they also acknowledge and embrace ideas that may seem heretical to some people in the educational establishment.

First, we must understand that the school, like the family, is a multipurpose institution. It cannot concentrate only on academic goals any more than a family can restrict its responsibilities to, say, feeding and housing its children. The single-purpose view is not only morally mistaken, it is practically and technically wrong as well, because schools cannot accomplish their academic goals without attending to

the fundamental needs of students for continuity and care. As we saw in chapter 1, social changes over the last forty years have left many young people without a sense of continuity and with the feeling that no one cares. Therefore, although schools should continue to reflect on and pursue many purposes, their first—their guiding purpose—must be to establish and maintain a climate of continuity and care. I mentioned the need for continuity in an earlier chapter. Caring in education differs from brief caring encounters in that it requires strong relations of trust upon which to build. Such relations take time and require continuity. I will discuss briefly four forms of continuity in the education of children: continuity of place, continuity of people, continuity of purpose, and continuity of curriculum.

CONTINUITY

John Dewey (1963) posited continuity as one of the criteria of educational experience. For Dewey, an educational experience had to be connected to the prior personal experience of students and also to a widening or deepening of future experience. Both directions on the continuum are essential, and Dewey gently chided followers who favored one and forgot the other. His child-centered followers, for example, too often concentrated on the child's past and present experience, forgetting that the teacher bears major responsibility for the child's future experience or growth. Others subordinated authentic present experience to a future experience disconnected from prior experience and present interest. Dewey's recommendations are still vital, but today they need to be analyzed more closely and extended.

The structure of social relations has changed dramatically since Dewey wrote. Many children suffer instability in both family and community life. More mothers work outside the home, neighborhoods are less personal, schools are larger, and recreation is often passive—connected to personal experience only by chance and presented with no consideration of what Dewey called "growth."

In such a world, schools should be committed to a great moral purpose: to care for children so that they, too, will be prepared to care. Instead, too many educators, perceiving the general and pervasive deterioration of schooling, have advised that the schools concentrate on academic matters. Some have even said that the schools were designed for academic purposes, but these people are plainly wrong. At least they are wrong historically if we look at the establishment of schools in the United States. Moral purposes have, until recently, been

more important than academic ones, and the latter were often frankly designed to serve the former (Tyack & Hansot, 1982). Today it is essential that the moral purposes of schooling be restored.

Continuity of Purpose

Students should be aware that their schools are conceived as centers of care—places where they are cared for and will be encouraged to care deeply themselves. This suggests that the school day should be organized in a way that reflects the primary purpose. We might, for example, organize the day so that half of it is spent on centers and themes of care and the other half on conventional subjects. (I'll say more about this under "continuity of curriculum.")

Looking seriously at the school day from the perspective of caring, we see that lunchtime is usually an educational dead spot. Teachers (except those on lunch room duty) take a break from students, and students all too often take a break from everything civilized. In contrast, families that take personal responsibility for educating their children often make mealtime an important educational event. It is a time when the day's experiences are recounted with enthusiasm or sympathy or apology; when moods are assessed; when world, community, and family affairs are discussed; when family work and vacation plans are debated; and, even, when specific information is proffered and skills demonstrated.

Perhaps mealtime should be such an event in the school day also. I do not mean that this should become another duty for teachers, although teachers might well want to participate at least occasionally. There should be tables at which adults from the community and students might sit together, eat, and engage in civilized conversation. There is no reason why this conversation should be guided by specific objectives or formally evaluated. We do not conduct formal evaluations of family conversation at the dinner table nor of other social events we hold in our homes. This does not mean that we should not talk about how the conversations are going, reflect on them, and improve them. It just means that we should keep our primary purpose in mind and not allow ourselves to distort every activity in the school day in a mistaken quest for a foolproof system of accountability. *Responsibility* is broader, deeper, and more ambiguous than accountability, and it describes commitment in interpersonal relations more accurately.

I have used lunchtime as an example of how differently we might look at the school day if we were committed to schools as centers of

care. Clearly, everything we do during the school day would take on new significance from this perspective, and we will consider other important features in the following sections.

To live by our primary purpose, we must make schools far more open places than they are now. Parents and other community members should be free to attend, watch, and help at the invitation of teachers. Parents, teachers, administrators, and students should remind each other of the primary purpose, and they should ask continually why they are engaging in certain activities. Activity should not be mindless for any of the participants.

In the United States today, many students describe themselves as "lost." They are told constantly that proper educational credentials will ensure a "better" life, but when they see that they are not in the top 10 or 20% academically, they fear that there is no place at all for them. The presence of caring adults in regular conversation can assure them that there are many ways to earn a respectable living and contribute to the community; that there is a place for them in the community now and in the future; and that we all recognize the continuity of purpose that guides both the school and the community.

Placing top priority on the moral purpose of caring for students and educating them so that they will be prepared to care does not imply that the school should set no other purposes. Schools, like families, are multipurpose institutions. Of course schools should have academic purposes. It should be expected that all students will find centers of care that will provide occupational and recreational interests, in addition to the personal and moral interests that are central in all lives. The school can also seek purposes that involve specific skills, desirable attitudes, and social interactions. If the purposes chosen are compatible with the primary purpose and pursued in its light, they are likely to be met more effectively than they are now because together they form a consistent pattern of goals that can be sought without contradiction.

Continuity of Place

In order to build a caring community, students need continuity in their school residence. They should stay in one school building for longer than two or three years. Children need time to settle in, to become responsible for their physical surroundings, to take part in maintaining a caring community. When we have to choose between highly specialized programs for a narrow age range and continuity of place, we should choose the latter.

In the past couple of decades, many school districts with declining enrollments have chosen to close schools in order to economize and provide special programs. When our first priority is program—as it has been for more than thirty years—we are inclined to cram students into larger and more specialized schools where we can provide the best and most advanced courses. When our first priority is continuity and care, we may be willing to sacrifice a few advanced courses for the sake of community.

In the future, using the priority of care and community, districts undergoing declining enrollment might keep their schools open and rent space to organizations compatible with education. Once such a decision is made, all sorts of creative opportunities arise. Cooperative deals might be made with child care groups, art and music studios, even veterinary hospitals and florist shops. (I know there are legal problems here, but they are not insurmountable. The problem is more lack of imagination than legal constraint.) The basic guiding idea is to make the school into a family-like center of care. We must stop moving children from place to place in order to solve social problems or "satisfy their developmental needs." One of their greatest needs is stability—a sense of belonging.

There are two cautionary remarks I want to make here about my own advice. First, I am not necessarily arguing for smaller schools. Although I think smaller schools might enhance a caring environment, it may be that smaller classes, or even *some* smaller classes in crucial areas, are more important. I do not intend my examples and suggestions as recipes. Continuity of place might be achieved in a big school, just as some sizable cities manage to maintain a sense of community. It is the guiding idea that I want to emphasize. Second, continuity of school place will not be possible for those youngsters whose families move or break up. So it is certainly not a complete solution. Some day we may have to consider residential public education to meet the needs of transient families, but this is a highly controversial idea that deserves separate and extensive analysis. Suffice it to say here that our inability to provide continuity of place for all children should not prevent our providing it for as many as we can.

The need for continuity of place raises serious questions about junior high schools and middle schools. Preadolescents need opportunities to work with and live with younger children. They also need continuity of place in order to achieve a sense of belonging. Establishing special schools designed to meet their developmental needs may be counterproductive. Children can never be reduced to a set of

abstract, discrete, and universal needs isolated from their one obvious need—the need for care; and care requires continuity.

In the United States today, many children are shifted about from year to year to achieve racial balance. This is morally wrong and irresponsible. We are using our children as a means to achieve a desirable social end, but children—or any human beings—ought not to be used merely as means. Further, the people we are supposedly helping are rarely consulted about the means chosen. Using the perspective of caring, we may decide to plan more effectively. We want youngsters to stay in one place (with many of the same people, I will argue next) for a substantial period of time. Then we should plan for racial integration, if this is held to be desirable, early on, project what classes will look like from year to year, and keep the children in one place. To achieve racial and ethnic harmony, it is not sufficient merely to expose children to different groups. They must have time to develop caring relations with particular others. This observation leads logically to our next domain of continuity.

Continuity of People

Children need continuity not only of place but also of people. Students could easily stay with one teacher for three or more years rather than the typical one year. Placement should, of course, be by mutual consent. Some readers may react to this by saying, “That would be great if the teacher is a good one. But suppose my kid has a bad teacher for three or four years?” First, that’s one reason why such an arrangement has to be by mutual consent. Second, you should not accept having your child with a bad teacher for even one year. When we do not like or trust our physicians, lawyers, or dentists, we find new ones. Within reason, we ought to be able to do that with teachers, too.

At the high school level, such a system would allow teachers to take responsibility for the entire development of students in a particular subject. I had this experience for many years as a mathematics teacher, and it was wonderful to work with students for several years and watch their growth. Jaime Escalante, the real-life teacher-hero of the movie *Stand and Deliver*, insists that to do the job he has set for himself, he needs three years, not just one, with his students. He recognizes the same need I’m addressing: Students need to know someone cares for them as persons. In low moments, even though they can’t see the sense in it, they will continue to work on mathematics out of trust and love for their teacher. Then better moments come along.

The heresy in all this is that I am claiming that specialization, a high priority on program, and efficiency are not sacred and not always sensible. It is not necessary to create special schools to provide for the developmental needs of preadolescents. Teachers do not need degrees in counseling to advise students on the usual academic and personal problems. (This does not at all diminish the role of professional counselors, who will still be needed for special problems and to advise other teachers.) Further, teachers should not be allowed to avoid their responsibilities as moral educators by claiming that they are not prepared for this work. All decent adults are, or should be, prepared for this work. It is a human responsibility—one that belongs to all of us. Mathematics teachers (Escalante is a good example) should be concerned with their students’ progress in English and science, and in social and moral life, too. They must be *educators* first and mathematics teachers second.

Further, once we have accepted the priority of care, we may be able to weave in the benefits of some specialization. For example, some elementary schools use teams of teachers who stay with children over a period of years. In this arrangement, children will have mathematics and language arts specialists who will provide both continuity and specialized instruction. Another advantage of this system is that children may be able to find their own special teacher and confidante on the team. In some ways, this system is more practical than one that matches children with just one teacher for several years, but both schemes are worth trying.

Before moving on to discuss continuity in curriculum, I want to mention a familiar phenomenon that vividly points up the need for continuity in the teacher-student relation. These days, tragedies strike school campuses fairly often. Children are murdered, killed in accidents, commit suicide. When these tragic events occur, “grief counselors” are dispatched to the affected schools. I am not arguing that there is no need for specially trained people to advise administrators and teachers and, perhaps, to listen to severely disturbed students. But the best grief counseling should come from teachers who know and care deeply for their students. They are the people who should comfort, counsel, and express their common grief. In contemporary schools, teachers and students do not know each other well enough to develop relations of care and trust. Of all the domains of continuity, this is the easiest and, perhaps, most important one to change. Students and teachers need each other. Students need competent adults to care; teachers need students to respond to their caring.

Continuity in Curriculum

Dewey (1963) argued that continuity is the longitudinal criterion of educational experience; that is, material offered in school should pass the important test of being connected to students' personal experience—past and future. When this criterion has received attention at all, it has usually been interpreted to mean that students should be allowed to exercise some choice in their selection of courses. Such choice has also been endorsed as appropriate for participation in democratic life. But choosing one's courses does not ensure continuity unless one also has some choice of course content, and this is rarely allowed. Further, mere choice, unguided by intelligent dialogue with teachers, can lead to chaos rather than continuity. Students wind up with a hodgepodge of unconnected courses, and schools begin to look like shopping malls (Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985)—places where people often abandon themselves to peer pressure and whim. Properly objecting to such haphazard proliferation of courses, Mortimer Adler (1982) and like-minded colleagues have gone to the opposite extreme and want to require that everyone take exactly the same course of study. Both approaches are wrong, and neither is necessitated by our commitment to democracy.

If we were starting from scratch to build a curriculum, I would suggest organizing it entirely around centers or themes of care: care for self, care for intimate others, care for strangers and distant others, care for nonhuman animals, care for plants and the living environment, care for objects and instruments, and care for ideas. But we cannot start from scratch. Further, several centers of care are compatible with existing subjects: There are students who are deeply interested in literature, art, mathematics, or some other academic subject. In the interest of compromise and practicality, then, I would suggest a secondary school curriculum that is divided equally between the subjects as we now know them and courses devoted to themes of care. (I will not discuss elementary school curriculum here because the public has always been reasonably receptive to humane alternatives in the elementary school. It is the secondary school curriculum that most needs reform.)

Suppose, for illustrative purposes, that we consider an eight-period day. I have suggested that it be divided equally between the standard subjects and themes of care. One period designated to the latter would be lunch with conversational groupings. The rest of the time would be devoted to themes of care, and a team of teachers would be available to supervise various projects and discussions. Top-

ics might include health management, sex, child rearing, household technology, driver education and safety, nutrition, drugs and substance abuse, environmental issues, and a host of others that arise in current life. The precise topics discussed in any year would be chosen by students and teachers together. Because students would be enrolled in a class like this for six years (grades 7–12), there would be time to cover a lot of topics. Teachers should, of course, exercise some leadership and be sure that individual students get the information and skills they need in all important areas.

Many themes would draw heavily on literature and history. Instead of analyzing canonical literature and studying chronological history, students might choose from a reasonable variety of important topics those which they would study with care. Possible topics would include childhood and aging, spirituality, moral life and obligation, oppression, and war and peace. Again, teachers would take responsibility for providing some whole-class discussion of essential topics, individual and group coaching on special skills, and an appropriate sequence of topics for each student.

The other half of the day would be spent on more traditional subjects, augmented by special subjects necessitated by our attention to multiple intelligences. These would consist of disciplinary knowledge modified by considerations of care. In this segment of the curriculum, we would rely on revision rather than revolution, and in fact such revision is well under way—much of it inspired by feminist, ethnic, and other critical studies. Eventually, after many years of successful practice, the disciplines might give way entirely to a new mode of curricular organization.

Curriculum planning in this new mode would involve the recognition of multiplicity in human capacities (Gardner, 1982, 1983) and therefore would establish several equally valued programs at the secondary school level. Each of these programs would include the courses, seminars, and workshops devoted to themes of universal care, and each would include specialized courses in the revised disciplines.

Suppose, again for illustrative purposes, we were to establish four equally prestigious programs in our secondary schools: a linguistic/mathematical program that looks somewhat like the present one; a technical one that concentrates on the world of technology; an arts program that includes specialties in music, fine arts, dance, and drama; and an interpersonal program that emphasizes studies of people and their interactions. There could be interesting hybrids, too. For example, students with kinesthetic-spatial talents might want to combine studies in technology and arts; future athletes, physical therapists, and

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coaches might be attracted to such a combination. The four programs and their combinations could provide for most of Gardner's seven intelligences. This is a realistic suggestion and, so far, not dramatically different from what has been suggested for magnet schools, except that I would like to see all of these programs in one school for the sake of student interaction and easy switches between programs. Further, we would want heterogeneous groups in the care half of the day.

No one program would be "college preparatory." Rather, it should be possible within each specialization to prepare for college or to prepare directly for the job market. Similarly, no program would be vocational in the narrow sense of preparing for a particular job. Here I am in agreement with Adler and his colleagues. The school must do more by way of education than mere job preparation. But there must be opportunities for intelligent choices, and those opportunities must be designed with the full range of human capacities in mind. Each program would provide preparation for a large class of occupations and recreations.

Under this plan, every student would spend part of every day in courses that treat themes of care and part in areas of specialization. Instead of creating a host of disconnected courses, we would integrate departments where feasible and design courses that have continuity in both the subject matter of specialization and the areas of care. Such planning should be cooperative; that is, both teachers and students should participate in the construction of curriculum. Teachers must know their students well enough to connect present interests with prior experience, and they must know the community and subject matter well enough to make connections to future experience. A curriculum of the sort suggested here recognizes both the universality and tremendous variety of possible future experiences.

SUMMARY

To meet the challenge to care in schools, we must plan for continuity:

1. *Continuity in purpose.* It should be clear that schools are centers of care—that the first purpose is caring for each other. This includes helping all students to address essential issues of human caring and, also, to develop their particular capacities in specialized areas of care.
2. *Continuity of school residence.* Students should stay in one school building long enough to acquire a sense of belonging. Although I

would prefer smaller schools, it may be possible to create a feeling of community in larger schools if community is made a priority. Children should be in residence more than three and, preferably, for six years.

3. *Continuity of teachers and students.* Teachers, whether singly or in teams, should stay with students (by mutual consent) for three or more years.
4. *Continuity in curriculum.* The idea is to show our care and respect for the full range of human capacities by offering a variety of equally prestigious programs of specialization, each embedded in a universal curriculum organized around essential themes of caring.

I will turn now to a fuller discussion of curriculum organized around centers and themes of care.