

Valuing Diversity: Buddhist Reflections on Equity and Education

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Abstract: Presented as the Keynote Address at the 2013 Annual ASIANetwork Conference in Bloomingdale, Illinois, this essay uses three of Buddhism’s central insights to forward a qualitatively robust conception of diversity and to substantially revise what we mean by equity. The first insight is that all things arise and are sustained interdependently. Interdependence is not a contingent, external relation among essentially separate entities; it is internal or constitutive. As Fazang (643-712), one of the leading Chinese Buddhist philosophers of the seventh and eighth centuries put it: interdependence entails interpenetration. A second, core Buddhist insight is that our conflicts, troubles, and suffering can only be sustainably addressed on the basis of things *yathabhutam* or “as they have come to be,” and not simply as they are at present. This insight calls into question the “time-space compression” (Harvey: 1990) that characterizes the postmodern lifeworld, the contemporary fixation on immediacy, and the erasure of temporal depth that results from the near equal proximity granted to all information by the light-speed connections of the internet. Finally, the world of human experience is irreducibly dramatic or meaning laden. Stated in more explicit Buddhist terms, our histories and the experiences out of which they are woven are at root a function of karma. According to this teaching, if we pay sufficiently close and sustained attention, we will witness a meticulous and dynamic consonance between the complexion of our own values, intentions, and actions and the patterns of outcome and opportunity we experience.

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Concepts have histories. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that concepts have lifetimes. Unlike Platonic ideas presumed to exist beyond time and contingency, concepts are born of experience, and then flourish, evolve, and at times pass into extinction. The concept of the “ether,” for example, once a mainstay of nineteenth-century physics and cosmology, is now found only in histories of outdated science. Similarly, teenaged conceptions of “love” will for most of us bear only passing, and mostly embarrassing, resemblance to the complexity of our mature affections.

Somewhat surprisingly for most of us, the concept of “values” is still quite young. The first published use of the word as it is used in such common locutions as “cultural values” and “democratic values” was in a 1918 anthropology paper. The concept of “diversity” as a distinctive value is of even more recent mint. Its origins can be traced to cross-fertilizations between the emerging science of ecology and environmental concerns that were given defining voice by Rachel Carson in her 1962 book, *Silent Spring*. Its subsequent development was nurtured by the identity politics of the civil rights and women’s movements of the 1960s and ’70s, and then by globalization-incited social justice discourses.

A decade and a half into the twenty-first century, the concept of diversity has taken undeniably firm root and now commands considerable attention in education, in the workplace, and in politics. But why is this? If diversity—as is commonly assumed—is just

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a numeric measure of multiplicity, why should we celebrate and cultivate it? More is not always better, whether we are talking about cooks in a kitchen, cars on the road, or musicians in an ensemble. What kind of value is diversity and what, if anything, does it have to do with advancing either equity or the public-good purposes of education?

Here I would like to offer some preliminary responses to these questions, using three of Buddhism's central insights to forward a qualitatively robust conception of diversity and to substantially revise what we mean by equity. The first insight is that all things arise and are sustained interdependently. Robustly interpreted, this means that relationality is more basic than that things are presumed to exist in relation to one another. Interdependence is not a contingent, external relation among essentially separate entities; it is internal or constitutive. As Fazang (643-712), one of the leading Chinese Buddhist philosophers of the seventh and eighth centuries put it: interdependence entails interpenetration.

A key implication of the insight of interdependence is that our modern propensity for taking the individual—person, class, ethnic group, corporation, or nation-state—as the basic and proper unit of economic, political, educational, and ethical analysis is like insisting on “eating soup with a fork.” Although taking the individual as basic opens some aspects of our total situation to critical engagement, it tends to obscure other and perhaps even more significant aspects, encouraging engagement, for example, with “home” as a space of negotiation among family members rather than as a qualitatively distinct place of relational growth and transformation.

A second core Buddhist insight is that our conflicts, troubles and suffering can only be sustainably addressed on the basis of things *yathabhutam* or “as they have come to be,” and not simply as they are at present. Histories make a difference. This insight calls into question the “time-space compression” (Harvey 1990) that characterizes the postmodern world, as well as the contemporary fixation on immediacy, and the erasure of temporal depth that results from the near equal proximity granted to all information by the light-speed connections of the Internet.

Finally, the world of human experience is irreducibly dramatic or meaning laden. Stated in more explicitly Buddhist terms, our histories and the experiences out of which they are woven are at root a function of karma. The Sanskrit word *karma* (Pali: *kamma*) in fact derives from the same Indo-European root (*kwer-*) as the English word “drama,” and has the core meaning of “doing,” “acting,” or “forming.” In contrast with both the ancient Vedic notion of karma as a universally binding moral law that bad actions will lead to bad results and good actions to good results, and the global popular culture equation of karma with the fact that “what goes around comes around,” the Buddhist teaching of karma invites realizing the exception-less interdependence of intentional activity and experience. According to this teaching, if we pay sufficiently close and sustained attention, we will witness a meticulous and dynamic consonance between the complexion of our own values, intentions, and actions and the patterns of outcome and opportunity we experience.

According to the Buddhist teaching of karma, then, all purposely undertaken actions result in experienced consequences and all experienced realities imply responsibility. From a karmic perspective, if we find ourselves witness to structurally-imposed inequalities or ethnic strife or domestic violence, we cannot deny our implication in the conditions through which these human experiences occur and persist. If there were no active link between these occurrences and our own values and intentions, we would have been born into a world free of inequality, strife, and violence. We were not. According to early Buddhist teachings, seeing this is crucial to leading lives aimed at ending conflict, trouble, and suffering (see, e.g., the *Lonaphala Sutta*, Anguttara Nikāya III.99). Karmically, responsibility

implies the possibility of responsive creativity. We can change our values, intentions, and actions. Precisely because all things arise in dynamic interdependence, the dramatic topography of our own experience is always open to revision. There are no inevitable outcomes, and no ultimately intractable situations.

Buddhist practice and liberation thus entail a deep and ongoing *critique of self*. But because so many of our values are familial, cultural, and social in origin, they also entail a *critique of the structural systems* that shape our lives and the quality of our interdependence.

GEOGRAPHIES OF DIFFERENCE: WHEN INTERDEPENDENCE MEANS INCREASING INEQUALITY

The present moment is in many ways unique. As the exponents of market liberalism are proud to announce, we are witnessing at present the greatest wealth and income generation that the world has ever known. But at the same time, ours is a moment characterized by historically unprecedented inequalities of wealth, income, resource use, and risk. The richest 5% of the world's population now receives roughly a third of global income, with over half going to just the top 10% of the world's income earners. The top 1% of the world's households own 40% of global assets while the bottom 50%—nearly 3.5 billion people—possess just 1% of global wealth. And, whereas the richest 20% of the world's people account for 86% of global resource use each year, the poorest 20% use just slightly more than 1% (Davies, et al. 2008). So extreme are these inequalities that the annual net income of the world's 100 top billionaires in 2012—over \$240 billion—would enable the worst of global poverty to be eliminated four times over (Oxfam 2013) or to meet, with considerable room to spare, the achievement of UN Millennium Development goals regarding basic health care, sanitation, water, and education for all.

It can be argued, of course, that inequalities of income, wealth, and access to resources are nothing new and that global per capita GDP is at an historical high. But the fact remains that although per capita wealth and incomes have increased in absolute terms over the last two centuries, along with life expectancies and educational achievements, the majority of the world's people have been afflicted with *decreasing shares* of the benefits of industrial globalization. That is, in relative terms, they have become increasingly worse off. If, indeed, all things arise interdependently, the pattern has been one of great benefits accruing to a slim minority of the world's people and relational disadvantage for the rest.

To illustrate the depth of this disadvantage, in 1820 the gap between the richest 20% of countries and the poorest 20% was 3:1. By 1913 this ratio had risen to 11:1; by 1950 it was 35:1; by 1973, 44:1; by 1992, 72:1; and by 1998, 86:1 (Human Development Report, UNDP 1999). Today, that ratio is likely in the range of 130:1. In GINI coefficient terms (where 0 equals perfectly equality and 1 equals perfect inequality (in which one individual has all the wealth or income in a society), income inequality has risen from .61 in 1913 to nearly .71 in 2002; the global GINI for wealth in 2012 was an astonishing .893 (Milanovic 2007)—roughly the equivalent of a pizza large enough to feed one hundred people being apportioned so that one person gets ninety-nine of the hundred available slices and everyone else gets to divide the remaining slice. While it is possible to object that global inequalities can be attributed to the poor performance of “undeveloped” and perhaps poorly organized countries, there is little evidence to support it. In the U.S., for example, the share of wealth held by the top 1% of the population went from 19% to 35% over the period from 1976 to 2007, while the share of wealth held by the bottom 40% of Americans dropped to less than 1/3 of 1% (Reich 2010). Over the same 30 year period, of the total income increase in the U.S., 80% went to the top 1% (ibid.).

To what can such dramatic changes be attributed? One possibility, given national voice by the recent “Occupy Wall Street” movement, is that trends like these are an index of corporate greed. Another is that these changes reflect the shortcomings of both national and global leaders in squaring the ideal of government *by* the people with the vastly more challenging reality of truly governing *for* the people. Both of these claims undoubtedly contain a measure of truth. Greed is no longer widely viewed as one of the “seven deadly sins,” at least not in the stratospheric precincts of corporate and governmental elites. But ad hominem attacks of this sort are not only weak in logical terms, they also tend to reinforce critical ignorance of structural forces in favor of supposed personal failings.

Another possibility is that while global inequalities are perhaps structurally driven, this is a result of historical accident and/or developmental necessity. In this case, however, the impersonal nature of the forces amplifying inequality suggests that the tragic plight of those the World Bank describes as lacking even “the hope of a dignified life”—fully one-fifth of all humanity—is one for which none of us is ultimately responsible. This amounts, however, to a denial of our manifest interdependence and of the shared nature of responsibility for orienting the dynamics of interdependence in ways that reduce (rather than exacerbate) conflict and suffering. Addressing such dignity-denying global inequalities requires critical engagement with the *interdependence* of the personal and the structural.

THE KARMA OF THE FREE MARKET GLOBALIZATION

Over the last half century, a number of structural changes have taken place in the dynamics of globalization that reflect the “karma” of modernity, including the propensity to fuse liberty and discipline (Wagner 1994). Among these structural changes, the advent of global *network society* and *reflexive modernization* stand out as key factors in how expanding freedoms of choice have come to be entrained with deepening inequalities.

As the communications and computing technologies developed for military purposes during the Cold War were adapted for civilian use, they triggered an epochal shift in the organizational dynamics of power: the advent of what Manuel Castells (1996, 1997, 1998) has termed global *informational capitalism* or *network society*. A distinctive feature of networks is that their growth is a nonlinear function of both negative/stabilizing feedback and positive feedback that *accelerates interactions* and *amplifies differentiation*. Due to this structural feature of networks, and contrary to the expectations of many critics of globalization in the 1980s, the spread of global informational capitalism has not been characterized by increasing homogeneity, but rather by the accelerating flow of goods, services, and people that *unpredictably* intensifies and amplifies both integration and fragmentation. Thus, the rise of a commercially sustained and fully public internet has enabled not just the interdependence of national and local economies, but also their deepening interpenetration. To give a common example, it is now possible to use credit cards in any major city and to conduct securities and stock trades at any time, in any place, through mobile trading apps that allow real-time access to any number of stock exchanges around the world. At the same time, however, the Internet has also facilitated the rise of separatist movements and terrorist organizations that threaten state security, as well as social media that enables the formation of wholly elective communities and civil societies that run the gamut from the fervently political to the frivolous, and from the resolutely tolerant and inclusive to the rancorously intolerant and exclusive.

This systemic pairing of vitality and volatility as a central factor in the dynamics of globalization is brought into particularly acute focus by the theoretical lenses of *reflexive modernization* (Beck, Giddens and Lash 1994) and *world risk society* (Beck 1992, 1998).

According to these linked theoretical perspectives, the rapid economic growth and societal development associated with the first centuries of industrial modernization were predicated on the possibility of exporting many of its material, social, and cultural costs, including air and water pollution, environmental degradation, and the loss of felt community that ensues with the deepening individuation of society. According to Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, a tipping point occurred sometime around the middle of the twentieth century with the emergence of conditions in which further growth would entail the production of in-principle unpredictable threats, risks, and hazards, in the face of which responsible decisions would nevertheless have to be made. That is, beyond certain thresholds of scale, scope, and complexity, it was no longer possible *either* to externalize the environmental, social, political, and cultural costs of industrially sustained growth *or* to inhibit their percolation into virtually every aspect of life. Recent examples of this include the 2010 Horizon deepwater oil drilling disaster in the Gulf of Mexico and the 2011 nuclear meltdown at Fukushima in the wake of the Japanese tsunami.

The structural coupling of global communications and transportation networks with the dynamics of reflexive modernization has brought about conditions in which globalization and industrialization processes simultaneously intensify interdependence and accelerate the multiplication and magnification of difference. On one hand, this is fueling a historically unprecedented expansion of “emancipatory” (often market-mediated) *freedoms of choice*. On the other, it is bringing about the dramatic intensification of “disciplinary” *compulsions to choose* under conditions of continuously heightening ambiguity, uncertainty, and risk. The combined result is a progressive differentiation of globalization “winners” and “losers,” not as a function of the *failures* of our techno-economic systems, but rather their *successes*. That is, the growing instability and inequality of contemporary globalization processes are not results of primarily external factors, but rather recursively amplifying internal factors. In Buddhist terms, they are a function of our *karma*—ironic consequences of personal/structural commitments to a constellation of modern and market values that include universality, equality, individuality, sovereignty, autonomy, competition, and control.

In sum, the present moment marks an era-defining shift from the predominance of the *technical* to that of the *ethical*, even as the “difference engines” of contemporary globalization are forcing confrontation with a deepening aporia. Although the values of universality and equality continue to be important, there is no escaping the need to more fully recognize and respect difference, enabling differences to matter more, not less than ever before, including differences of cultural, religious, and gender identity, class, and exposure to risk. At the same time, border-spanning predicaments like climate change, persistent world hunger, and looming water shortages make evident a need to engage in more robust and globally coherent collective action, incorporating differences within shared and deepening commitments.

Because of the way that global networks and reflexive modernization are implicated within the dynamics of contemporary development processes, appealing to so-called universal values as a means to address this aporia about our ability to at once respect and sublimate our differences is not ultimately feasible. The dynamics of economic growth are tied too closely to the increased differentiation among markets, products, and consumer demands. And, in the absence of a global shift away from growth-dependent models of development, our only recourse is to work outwards from within the already ongoing differentiation processes and across existing cultural fault lines, not in ideological denial of or aversion to them.

This is no easy task. To begin with, cultural differences are not objective matters of fact

that can be readily observed. Neither are they putatively empty gaps between “us” and “them” or between “insiders” and “outsiders”—absences that have no internal content and ultimately belong to no one. As Naoki Sakai (2008) has insisted, cultural difference is a phenomenological event: an alteration of consciousness that consists of the experience of uncanny feelings of unease, oddly opposed meanings, and uncomfortably crossed purposes. Resolving predicaments that enunciate cultural differences—regarding, e.g., the meaning of a “good” environment or “just” gender relations—is ultimately less a matter of constructing common institutions than of improvising shared “structures of feeling” that express new constellations of coordination-enriching values (Hershock 2012, 249ff). And, as made clear by predicaments like global hunger or climate change, these new constellations of values must have critical traction not only across national and cultural borders, but also across relational spheres—from the social and cultural to the economic, political, and environmental. That is, we are in need of values that are “thicker” globally than they are locally. Diversity, conceived with sufficient robustness, is such a value.

DIVERSITY AS RELATIONAL QUALITY

Buddhist teachings of interdependence and non-duality offer useful guidance in developing a critically robust conception of diversity. One corollary of the Buddhist notion of interdependence is that all things should be seen as empty (*śūnya*) or without any abiding self (*anatman*). Stated otherwise, relationality should be seen as ontologically more basic than “individual things” that may or may not be related in some way. Far from signaling the content-less absence of sameness, differences are dynamic expressions of relational qualities. And, thus, far from entailing an *erasure* of difference, Buddhist non-duality consists in realizing a *restoration* of the conventionally excluded middle ground between sameness and difference. To paraphrase the Chinese Buddhist philosopher Fazang: realizing the non-duality of all things is realizing that all things are the same, precisely insofar as they differ meaningfully from/for one another. Ultimately, all things *are* what they *mean* for one another. That is, realizing the non-duality of all things involves distinguishing between merely *differing-from* or being “not the same as” each other and *differing-for* one another. Difference is itself differentiated.

The contrast between differing-from and differing-for marks a bifurcation in the meaning of differentiation that can be further qualified as a contrast between *variety* and *diversity*. Variety is a quantitative index of multiplicity—a function of simple *coexistence*. Walking into a typical shopping mall, the great variety of consumer goods for sale is immediately evident, with each type displayed to individual advantage. Variety can be seen at a glance and imposed at will. If a business or school wants to mandate a certain ethnic mix among its employees or students, it can readily do so. Variety does not entail how those present relate or fail to relate. In contrast, *diversity* is a qualitative index of the degree to which differences are activated as the basis of mutual contribution to sustainably shared flourishing—a function of complex and coordination-enriching *interdependence*. Diversity cannot be seen at a glance and cannot be imposed. It is an emergent relational achievement. Whereas variety is present whenever things *differ-from* each other, diversity emerges, if at all, only when things in some significant degree also *differ-for* one another.

To make this contrast more concrete, consider the difference between a richly endowed zoo and a natural ecosystem. With sufficient funding, a zoo can contain all of the plant, animal, and insect species found in a given ecosystem. Yet if there is a breakdown of energy inputs, food, medicine, and so on, all of the living beings coexisting in a zoo will be dead in fairly short order because the structure of the zoo enforces their essential autonomy and

prohibits the emergence of the extent and quality of interdependence found in a self-sustaining ecosystem. In natural ecosystems, each species has evolved in response to potentials in a given environment, placing energies into circulation in ways that serve both its own interests and those of all other species present. Ecosystems are self-regulating, adaptive systems of relational dynamics. Thus, whereas successful zoos can *exhibit* great species variety, healthy ecosystems *express* self-sustaining patterns of species diversity.

Importantly, the greatest species diversity does not occur in the geographical center of any given ecosystem, but rather in the *ecotone* where different ecosystems overlap and interfuse. This suggests more generally that diversity—as a distinctive relational quality—tends to be greatest in zones of interaction that are conducive not just to competition and conflicts of interests, but also to their sustained resolution. Put somewhat differently, diversity emerges and is enhanced when systemic conditions support the subordination of competition to coordination.

GOING BEYOND COMPARATIVE EQUITY

This robust conception of diversity as a distinctive quality of interdependence opens prospects for rethinking both the meanings of and means to equity. To date, efforts to align the dynamics of global interdependence with greater equity have been informed by a matrix of disparate appeals to universality (common principles and ideals) and identity (uncommon practices and realities), informed by overarching allegiances to the modern conviction that the individual (human being, ethnic group, gender group, nation, etc.) is the natural and proper unit of ethical, legal, economic, and political analysis. As commonly defined, equity is a variable function of “equality of opportunity”: a measure of the degree to which a level “playing field” has been achieved.

This comparative conception of equity has proven to be a powerful instrument for redressing some of the most egregious injustices based on differences in, for example, gender, ethnicity, and religion. However, equality remains a fiction. As women in even the most open societies will attest, equal access and opportunity do not necessarily translate into equivalent outcomes. Fictions can be very powerful. They can change lives and histories. But their power is never absolute or eternal. And, past effectiveness notwithstanding, continued appeal to the fiction of equality in a network-structured world that is fueled by continual differentiation amounts to willful naivety.

An alternative to such a comparative conception of equity is to see equity as a *relational* function of enhanced capacities for and commitments to furthering our own self-interests in ways deemed valuable by others. Such an alternative accords with the Aristotelian insight that there are instances when the universal application of a law will result in injustice, and when justice can only be served by giving direct consideration to personal and circumstantial differences. In addition, however, relational equity entails going beyond *considering* difference to *appreciating* it. Rather than being linked to the achievement of equality, relational equity coincides with the emergence of diversity, marking a shift of commitment and concern from *how much* we differ-from each other to *how well* we are differing-for one another.

The pursuit of relational equity, like the pursuit of equality of opportunity, entails ending all forms of social, economic, political, and cultural exclusion. But nonexclusion can also be achieved through universal tolerance. And, unfortunately, simply tolerating those who differ from us and allowing them a place at the table is not necessarily the same as welcoming and seriously engaging their contributions. Committing to relational equity carries us well beyond liberal opposition to exclusion and the valorization of tolerance to the much more

difficult task of appreciating—at once valuing and adding value to—mutual inclusion.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Valuing diversity and equity in the robust, relational terms suggested here has important implications for education. First and foremost, perhaps, is that if diversity is an emergent relational quality, it cannot be taken to be a legislatively enforceable aim of education policy. Educational variety can be mandated and imposed; educational diversity cannot. Although it is possible to prescribe the ethnic or cultural complexion of student bodies and faculties, whether diversity emerges is a dynamic function of the degree to which differences among students, faculty members, and disciplines cease being categories of division and become meaning-generating conduits of mutual contribution.

Seen in this way, educating for diversity begins with refusing to reduce the promotion of diversity to a numbers game—a purely quantitative result of predetermined policies. As already intimated, valuing diversity involves going beyond merely tolerating differences. In engineering, tolerance is the degree of difference that can safely be ignored. And while tolerance is undeniably preferable to intolerance, it is not enough and, all too often, amounts to a “politically correct” masquerade for indifference. Diversity is not generated by maintaining polite indifference, but rather by struggling to marry the conservation of differences with the cultivation of responsiveness. In practice, this will mean moving away from confusing *internationalization* and piecemeal efforts to plant different national “flags” on our campuses, and instead seeing internationalization as a practice of generating matrices of perspectives that together enable multiscale and high resolution insight into global dynamics. Internationalization in this sense involves qualitatively enriching struggles to realize difference-enriching patterns of resolve that transform colleges and universities into cultural and epistemic “ecotones,” or zones of creatively charged conflict resolution. College and university campuses might, for example, be places where religious differences are actively mobilized as resources for critically debating the meaning of equity and the means to ending global hunger—places of resistance to the “contract of mutual indifference” (Geras 1999) that justifies caring abstractly about others without acting resolutely on their behalf.

This conception of diversity, in turn, suggests seeing *interdisciplinarity* as an ongoing process of realizing an academy that is less rigidly compartmentalized into epistemic “silos” and more flexibly responsive to real-world predicaments—an academy that is not defined by the preservation of discrete “*bodies* of knowledge,” but rather by the adaptive emergence of new “*ecologies* of knowledge.” As has been argued persuasively on empirical grounds, the merits of promoting epistemic diversity are considerable when addressing problems or issues that involve redefining the meaning of success since, in such cases, cognitively diverse groups significantly outperform cognitively homogeneous groups of experts (Page 2007). But if, indeed, the structural dynamics of twenty-first century global interdependence and the predicaments being generated by them are precipitating an era-defining shift from the predominance of the technical to that of the ethical, there are equally strong normative grounds for promoting academic diversity. If evaluating these structural dynamics and resolving the predicaments being generated by them requires working across national and cultural boundaries, increased interdisciplinarity among the humanities, natural, and social sciences is not merely astute, it is crucial.

Educating for relational (rather than comparative) equity begins with resisting the temptation to reduce equity to access. Although “education for all” is a laudable goal, it is not a substitute for “educational quality for all.” If equity is not taken to be a comparative measure

of the “status” of individual persons, communities, or classes, but rather understood as a dynamic index of responsiveness, educating for equity involves generating the sensitivities and sensibilities needed to go from learning about each another to learning from and learning for one another. This implies a shift of epistemic emphasis from facts (knowing-that) and skills (knowing-how) to ethically informed discernment (knowing-to). In short, educating for equity entails reimagining education as the progressive merging of *knowledge* with *wisdom*.

A related, and somewhat surprising, implication of this shift is that educational equity entails creativity. In a world of accelerating interaction and amplifying differentiation, equity is a “moving target,” the pursuit of which involves the cultivation of greater and greater responsiveness. This apparently resonates well with the generally high value now being placed on innovation in education. But this can be misleading. Innovation is appropriate when the desired outcomes of a change process are already clear, when it is possible to specify the terms of success. In this sense, while innovation requires creativity, it is a closed creativity that enables anticipated results—a specific product or industrial process, for example. The kind of creativity needed to enhance diversity and further the pursuit of equity is quite different—a difference that can be signaled by distinguishing between *innovation* and *improvisation*. In contrast with the closed creativity implied in innovation, improvisation consists in the exercise of an open creativity that expands frames of anticipation rather than facilitating arrival at anticipated ends. When jazz musicians improvise, the point is not to play what they have learned to expect in renditions of a standard tune, for instance, but rather to expand the melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic horizons of the tune in unexpected and yet musically gratifying ways.

Improvisation goes against the grain of the received model of curriculum-based education (though perhaps not that of cutting edge research). For the several hundred years since Peter Ramus forwarded his revolutionary “curriculum” approach to education in the late 16th century, we have accepted that education is a competitively structured process that is most effectively parsed into explicitly finite courses of instruction. The choice of the word “curriculum” beautifully illustrates the presumptions of the model: *curriculum* is a Latin word for a racecourse of standard length. This model of education has been a remarkably powerful alternative to the studio model of education in which learners apprentice to teachers who guide them toward mastery of a given knowledge domain in ways that are paced in accord with student needs and abilities and that are understood to be intrinsically openended. The standardized and methodized nature of curricular education made it a natural fit with the projects of modernization and industrialization, and the empirical correlation of educational expansion with economic vitality is incontestable. But, like all *finite* games (Carse 1987), curriculum-based education is played to win. Finite games inevitably result in both winners and losers, with the winners being accorded *power*—an increased ability to determine what happens, when, and how. The curriculum-based form of compulsory mass education was promoted, perhaps most eloquently by Adam Smith in his seminal *Wealth of Nations* (1776), as a key public good. Yet the very traits that made this form of education compatible with the aims of nation building, modernization, and industrialization also ensured that it would be deeply complicit in the inequalities that have resulted from these global processes.

Valuing diversity and equity compels us to play education as an *infinite* game. This should not be confused with what, in the spirit of Ivan Illich, might be termed our mandated submission to lifelong compulsory consumption of educational commodities. Infinite endeavors—like marriages and parenting—are not played to win (or lose) but to sustain the

interest and commitment of all involved while continually enhancing the quality of play or interaction. Engaging in infinite endeavors both requires and results in *strength*—capacities for responding as needed in ever-changing circumstances to improvise unanticipated pathways toward deepened involvement and heightened relational quality.

Interestingly, construing education as an infinite endeavor calls into question the merit of market metaphors in imagining the shapes of education to come. Market metaphors can be useful in spurring institutional innovation aimed at meeting predetermined fiscal, enrollment, or graduation targets. They are not useful in eliciting commitments to educational diversity and equity, or in building the creative capacities needed to improvise relational networks of the extent and quality needed for schools to function as nexuses of coordination-enhancing conflict- and predicament-resolution. For education to serve public goods purposes in a world of increasing interdependence and differentiation, students should not be treated as consumers or clients paying (with attention, time, and money) for educational commodities and services. Neither should they be treated as judges of educational quality. Instead, students, teachers, and administrators should be regarded as indispensable and co-responsible partners in improvising more diverse and equitable means-to and meanings-of personal, communal, and (ultimately) planetary flourishing.

The idealism of such a view of education may be appealing. But the reality, it must be admitted, is that educating for diversity and equity in the ways described here is neither a contemporary norm nor an endeavor with a long and august global history. Neither can diversity and equity be claimed with any convincing empirical support as values that are part of a common human heritage. But perhaps that should not trouble us. Making use of Jean Luc Nancy's felicitous distinction between the common and the shared (Nancy 2000), we do well to reflect on the fact that claims regarding heritages, traits, or values that we all *have* in common are often shadowed by compulsions for us to all *be* the same, doing violence both to how we differ-from each other and the ways in which we might productively differ-for one another. Educating for diversity and equity is an endeavor that we might share. In Nancy's terms, sharing is a process into which into our differences can and should be brought vibrantly intact. And if educating for greater diversity and equity is not something we now have in common, it is something in which we each might have distinctive and mutually-inspired contributory shares. For that prospect, and the prospect of progressively marrying the real and the ideal, we can all be thankful.

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