

Fall 1998

The Grand Bazaar: Trust, Multicultural Education, and the Education of Teachers

Wade A. Carpenter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp>

 Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#), [Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carpenter, Wade A. (1998) "The Grand Bazaar: Trust, Multicultural Education, and the Education of Teachers," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 3 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol1/iss3/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Lesley. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Lesley. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lesley.edu.

The Grand Bazaar: Trust, Multicultural Education, and the Education of Teachers

Wade A. Carpenter

Abstract

Trust is necessary for education. But distrust is a major problem in urban, multiethnic schools. The existing literature on multicultural education, while strong on political, sociological, and economic concerns, devotes little if any attention to the character of the teacher. Teachers whose preparation has not connected ethics and ethnicity may consider resistance theory as simply shrill, and disregard it entirely. The article goes on to suggest that teachers get a highly personalized, balanced liberal and technical preparation from professors intimately familiar with urban k-12 instruction.

The Grand Bazaar

It's dirty in the Grand Bazaar; hot, oppressive, and crowded. It's all so unfamiliar, so totally unlike home. It smells bad. Around every corner someone will be begging for a handout. The people you encounter may love your money, but they may hate you. And you really can't tell, because you can't read their faces well. Their expressions seem to cover a very narrow range: the sullen, the uninterested, and the obsequious. You have learned to regard smiles with suspicion. Pickpockets and cut-purses roam free. A "vendor" will approach you, invading your body space to push a map or a tray of chocolates under your nose, and while your vision is blocked by it, he is unzipping your handbag or fanny-pack. And you'll never feel a thing. And you know that if there is an unpleasant event, the authorities will have little sympathy for you. These are not your people; you are the minority, and in their world. And the history between your people and them is not pretty. As you approach a stall, you know better than to show an interest in any item, because once you do, you're hooked - You will buy, and you will be cheated. Or you will have to be a bastard to avoid it. In the Grand Bazaar, there is nothing but suspicion between sellers and buyers. The assumption is that the other guy is trying to rip you off, and the assumption is usually right. It is almost a certainty that without a guide who knows the Grand Bazaar, you will be victimized.

Is this Tijuana? Istanbul? Kinshasa? Or, metaphorically, is it an American public school? Many kids view their schools and teachers with the same sort of apprehension felt by the tourist in the Grand Bazaar. Yes, one can learn in such a place. In fact, one learns a great

deal, and learns it very quickly. But can one be educated in this atmosphere? As long as teachers do not understand the suspicion and hostility that many students bring to the classroom and experience in it, those kids and those teachers themselves will be victimized by the schools.

Distrust and Education

Many of the questions being raised by professors writing in professional journals are extraordinarily valuable. Unfortunately, their solutions are often far less so. Perhaps an experience in the Grand Bazaar could help teacher education students and their professors understand why minorities don't do well in our public schools and our universities. Inner-city experience and overseas travel can be wonderfully helpful. Being a minority dealing with a hostile and inscrutable majority in an atmosphere of mutual distrust enables one to see at first hand a near-certain recipe for educational failure. A basic problem facing many of our teachers is a lack of trust by the kids. Every teacher who deals with lower-SES, minority, and inner-city youth has seen this, and many see it every day. Whether they have articulated it or not, many of those kids are silently asking that teacher "What do you have to teach me that's really worth knowing?" and "Why should I believe you?" One of the best contributions of leftist professors to education theory is their explanation of student resistance to what is perceived as an unfair, alien system. (Giroux, 1988; Kunjufu, 1985, 1988)

First, we have to admit that people of color and other minorities have reasons to distrust the white majority. Our history is such that they would be stupid to trust us. According to one survey discussed in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 44% of whites agreed with the statement that "most people can be trusted," but only 16% of blacks thought so (Dovidio, 1997). Given this scenario, multicultural education becomes at best one more feeble reform to lay on overburdened teachers. At worst it is a fashionable set of political positions and pedagogical techniques that will get grants funded and professors published. Either way, it will be discarded when the next hot idea comes along.

Distrust and the Schools

Whites and conservative intellectuals believe that minority suspicions and rhetoric are overwrought, and it is hard to believe that most white people are out to "get" minorities. I don't know many white people who spend much time thinking about how they can oppress people of color. I don't believe that black people are a particularly prominent issue in most white people's daily thinking, and I suspect that believing so may be a particularly juvenile form of racial self-flattery. But it really doesn't matter whether or not white individuals are intentionally hostile to minorities: Minorities perceive hostility, and there are plenty of statistics to support their perceptions. The school system gives inequitable treatment to minorities. Institutional racism is easily documentable. Black/white achievement gaps are appalling (National Center for Educational Statistics,

1996). But it's not all white folks' fault. Minorities themselves can behave just as stupidly as whites can: Every day the inner-city teacher sees peer pressure directed against academically successful minority kids for "playing white". Teachers see the kids' skepticism in the sullen listlessness, misconduct, and resistance of a significant percentage of their students. If they are mediocre teachers, they assume it's just misbehavior and punish them, which usually only compounds the problem. If they are wise teachers, they try to distinguish the thoughtless misbehavior from the deliberate, if pre-theoretical, resistance to an institution those kids see as oppressive (Freire, 1970). And then the teachers work on the kids personally, punishing when appropriate, and trying more positive approaches when appropriate. The wise kids distinguish between the worthwhile teacher and the ignorant or prejudiced. But the teacher cannot be wise who doesn't even know the questions the kids are asking. The kids cannot be wise if all they see every day are uninformed, underprepared teachers. The Left may be making some of the best analyses in recent education literature, but its often-inaccessible and fanciful solutions may only worsen the problems for teachers of good will trying to reach real, live kids. The Right seems to have a great deal of common sense in its emphasis on personal attributes, and we would be bigoted to misinterpret its intransigence as indifference or unkindness. But its obstructionism and invective on social and economic issues seldom help the teachers or the kids, either.

The Teacher and the Job

Many, perhaps most, of our teachers are decent people working under difficult conditions. Most of their obstacles are the result of policies to which teachers can only respond as best they can. But some teachers are of questionable technical competence. Kids are bringing problems into their classrooms that would strain the imagination of those who do not work there day in and day out. Our teachers need (1) a liberal education, (2) thorough technical preparation, and (3) guidance from experienced professors. But far too many pedagogy courses are mindless, childish, and useless (Koerner, 1963; Bestor, 1985; Goodlad, 1990). But contrary to some high-profile critics, the remedy for "Mickey Mouse" Methods classes is not to eliminate them, but to fix them.

Poor teaching undercuts our efforts at creating a trustworthy place in the school. The most liberally educated teacher will need a broad repertoire of tricks of the trade to do the job. Why should kids trust those teachers who are only marginally competent? Why should teachers trust the professors who sent them out only marginally competent? But competence is only a beginning: No matter how kind and skilled the teacher is, one cannot reason with a child who has reason to hate and fear.

Multicultural Education:

Trust and Education

If the Grand Bazaar is all there is to schools, it may be time to write them off entirely. If the hermeneutic of suspicion is all there is to the United States, the answer to Aristotle's great question: "How then can men live together?" is simple: We can't.

But is the Grand Bazaar all there is? Most people, of whatever shade or creed, love their children. Most value honesty. The concepts of courage, prudence, temperance, justice, faith, hope, and charity have nearly universal acceptance, as they did 2,000 years ago (Character Education Partnership, 1996). Every day countless acts of cross-ethnic good faith occur which seldom make the nightly news.

While separationism and ethnocentrism have many admirable features, they could also limit minorities' markets and discourse to one another, which may lead to a stagnant economy and stagnant cultures. Like racism, these isms are fraught with so many contradictions that any version of monoculturalism is not viable. Even in those localities where monoculturalism is a demographic reality, multicultural instruction is advisable since people can no longer assume they will live in their hometowns forever. The question of whether our education should or should not be multicultural is preposterous; it has always been. For instance, it is widely accepted among folklorists that Uncle Remus's "trickster" stories were covert instruction for young blacks in the necessary skills and guile of slave life (Levine, 1978). But that raises the interesting question: Why did Uncle Remus tell the white boy? The answer is easy: To educate whites, of course. They've tried for centuries, and some of us have always gotten the message - probably about the same proportion of people anywhere who get any educational message. In short, we have too much to offer one another either to resegregate or to settle for any one-sided cultural dominance.

Trust and the Schools

So, how may educators deal with the distrust problem? First, bright people of whatever ethnicity or religion draw lines. They look for commonalities as well as differences; that's why they are considered bright. They trust the trustworthy, and devote much of their learning to spotting the untrustworthy. Surprisingly, the common feature to both multicultural education and character education lies in teaching kids how to discriminate well. Although the holy trinity of the left (race, class, and gender) is important, those elements are themselves constructs with little meaning apart from personal character, and character is the first step toward the social construction of trust. The Right is right, economic or any other sort of determinism is mistaken. Teacher educators should pay more attention to admissions, coursework, and guidance to turn out teachers who are worthy of trust.

But the Left is also right: moral rectitude is not enough, either. Robert E. Lee was an extraordinarily admirable man, but a Lee victory would nonetheless have meant continued slavery for two races. Praxis - reflective, intellectually defensible social and political action - is needed as well as character and culture. The hungry cannot eat Plato's Republic, and the abuse of high culture and manners to hold people down is easy to document. But the rhetoric of the educationist Left is also misguided: Radical-progressive theory coated over with inaccessible language hidden in refereed journals doesn't accomplish much, either. The poor find high-flown deconstructionist theory and feel-good pop psychology poor substitutes for solid knowledge and intellectual skill that enable them to compete with the well-connected. The inner-city teacher quickly discovers that most minority kids are far less interested in intellectualized "discourses of hegemony" than they are in getting a fairer piece of the action. Content-lite instruction limited to immediately "relevant" themes is unsatisfying. As an inner-city mother said to a teacher with the sort of open-ended job she coveted for her child, she wanted to know Why the school keeps sending my daughter home with all this crap.... She knows 'bout landlords. She knows about gangs and whatnot. She needs to know what she don't know. If my girl is going to get your job, you need to give her everything. Not half. Not some. Everything. Get her to where you are, so she can pass you by" (Glasser, 1997: 504-05).

The Preparation of Teachers:

The Professor and the Job

Intellectual and bureaucratic egalitarianism have been academia and government's way of avoiding equality and equity (Dovidio, 1997; Carpenter, 1989). Concepts like multicultural education and critical theory can be very useful in establishing a base for successful action, but they generally miss the mark when divorced from messy personal experience. Only five percent of the nation's Education professoriate have experience teaching in multicultural or inner-city situations (Gollnick, Smith, & Huber, 1994), and it shows. Creative exchange arrangements with urban k-12 schools is only the first of many possibilities to address this problem.

Personal character, community praxis, and worthwhile instruction are only necessary preconditions for trust; they are not sufficient. The liberal elements of teacher education are also vitally important. But curriculum theory and instructional practice -the technical side of teacher education - also play a role in the promotion or diminution of trust. Does our curriculum emphasize change and difference to the neglect of stability and commonality? Arthur Schlesinger and Diane Ravitch (1992, 1990) have raised concerns about an excessively divisive agenda being promoted by some of the multiculturalists. Multicultural education advocates like Banks (1993), Sleeter (1995), and Giroux (1997) certainly do emphasize change and reform in the curriculum, and heaven knows there is

much in their constituents' lives that needs change and reform. But when one reads the hyperbole and the tortured deconstructionism of some writers, one wonders how much a trust-destroying worldview is being accepted into the curriculum. Because of the lack of correspondence between fashionable theory and classroom practice, (Cuban, 1993) any conclusions would be risky. So now we have to consider the quality of the classroom practice.

Most K-12 teachers are gentle souls who are better conflict resolvers than conflict generators, so only in their wildest enthusiasms can scholars imagine teachers as willing sources of oppression. Unfortunately, the same traits may make it difficult to turn teachers into the agents of liberation that Giroux, Sleeter, and company rightly envision. The Education professoriate that prepares those teachers is generally learned and honorable, but its effectiveness is questionable, by its own admission (see, for example, Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Herbst, 1989; Goodlad, 1990). Scholars as broadly liberal as Martin Haberman (1995) especially deplore the preparation of inner-city teachers. The outcome is that kids have little respect for ignorant teachers, and find more sinister subcultures more attractive. Then the school itself is at jeopardy, since without personal safety, the kids would be foolish to trust their schools and their teachers. Schools have enough trouble as it is from the alienated and the criminals; if K-12 teachers lose the trust of the kids who want to learn, all they will have left going for them will be those wretched doggie tricks they learned in their "Methods" classes.

The boring, low-level teaching typical of insecure, poorly prepared teachers (Siskin & Little, 1995; Bushweller, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1997) is unlikely to bring about trust, much less achievement. The most conservative instruction is worth little if it only enables students to recite names, dates, amendments and state capitals. On the other hand, the most critical education is worth little if it just empowers students to recite litanies of oppression. We need liberally educated and technically adept teachers who can dive deeply and broadly (Borrowman, 1956).

We have the right to demand that teachers pay close attention to the kids. Arthur Powell's recent (1996) description of the personal attention given to prep school students is loaded with fine ideas that might be adaptable to public schools. Future teachers who will teach the masses need professors who know the k-12 classroom - especially the urban or multicultural classroom - intimately, and who devote the same attention to them that prep-school teachers give the elite. The recent initiatives toward reducing class size in elementary schools are praiseworthy. Now let's talk about reducing teacher load in the secondary schools.

As many kids do not trust the teachers, the teachers' poor opinion of their professors is no secret (Bushwell, 1995; Carpenter, in press). "Irrelevant", "out of touch", and "la-la land" are terms too- often used to describe their professors and their courses by veteran teachers. Teacher education professors need to be out there in the k-12 schools, often and

intensively. Their students need a highly personalized preparation devoted to developing their character as well as their knowledge and skill.

All the earnest scholarly calls for character and justice, choice and equity, prosperity and transformation, and achievement and opportunity are nonsense to the kids. They aren't so dumb as to believe any of it. They will never trust us - and should never trust us - until we at least reach the minimum. As the creed and the tithe are for Christians, adequate preparation is the minimum for teachers. Character education is an intrinsic part of the liberal education tradition (Maritain, 1943; Kimball, 1986), and it is a needed element of multicultural education. Tailoring instruction to individual and group audience is an intrinsic part of the technical tradition (Monroe 1952; Hale-Benson, 1986). Hence, careful preparation of teachers of character by professors who know the urban k-12 classroom is not a fond wish, to be jettisoned in the interest of cash-cow courses for the university. Without at least this good faith effort, the Grand Bazaar really is all there is in many schools. And it is a dirty place.

References

- Banks, J. A. (1993). Multicultural education: Development, dimensions, and challenges. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 74, 22-28.
- Bestor, A. (1953/1985). *Educational Wastelands: The Retreat from Learning in Our Public Schools*. (2d edition). Urbana: University of Illinois.
- Borrowman, M. (1956). *The Liberal and the Technical in Teacher Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bushweller, K. (1995). Ed school stomp. *American School Board Journal*, 182, 22-27.
- Carpenter, W.A. (1989). Review of *A Dream Long Deferred*. *Educational Studies*, 20, 291- 295.
- Character Education Partnership. (1996). *Character Education in U.S. Schools: The New Consensus*. Alexandria, VA: CEP.
- Clifford, G.J., and Guthrie, J. W. (1988) *Ed School: A Brief for Professional Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cuban, L. (1993). *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms, 1880- 1890*. 2d edition. New York: Teachers College.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *Education Update*, 39, 8.
- Dovidio, J. (1997). "Aversive" racism and the need for affirmative action. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 25, A60.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. (Continuum).
- Giroux, H. (1988). *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*. Granby, MA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Giroux, H. (1997). Rewriting the discourse of racial identity: Toward a pedagogy and politics of whiteness. *Harvard Educational Review*, 67, 285-320.
- Glasser, P. (1997). Not half, not some. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78, 504-505.
- Gollnick, D.M., Smith, G.P., and Huber, T. (1994, February). NCATE Standards for Diversity. Clinic presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Multicultural Education, Detroit.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1990). *Teachers for our Nation's Schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Goodlad, J. I. (1990). *Places Where Teachers are Taught*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Haberman, M. (1995). The dimensions of excellence in programs preparing teachers for urban poverty schools. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 73, 24-33.
- Hale-Benson, J. (1986). *Black Children: Their Roots, Culture, and Learning Styles*. Revised edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Herbst, J. (1989). *And Sadly Teach: Teacher Education and Professionalization in American Culture*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Hutchins, R.M. (1989). *The Higher Learning in America*. New Haven: Yale.
- Kimball, Bruce (1986) *Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Kleibard, H. M. (1986). *The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1883-1958*. (New York: Routledge).
- Koerner, J. (1963). *The Miseducation of America's Teachers*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Kunjufu, J. (1985). *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*. Chicago: African-American Images.
- Kunjufu, J. (1988) *To Be Popular or Smart*. Chicago: African-American Images.
- Levine, L. (1978). *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Maritain, J. (1943) *Education at the Crossroads*. New Haven: Yale.

- Monroe, W.S. (1952). *Teaching-Learning Theory and Teacher Education, 1890-1950*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- National Center for Educational Statistics. (1996). *National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1996*. Available Internet: <http://nces.ed.gov/NAEP/96report/97986.shtml>.
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1996). *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 395 931.
- Powell, A. G. (1996). *Lessons from Privilege: The American Prep School Tradition*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ravitch, D. (1990, Summer). Multiculturalism: E pluribus plures. *American Scholar*, 337- 356. Schlesinger, A.M. (1992). *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Siskin, L. S., and Little, J.W. (Eds.) (1995). *The Subjects in Question: Departmental Organization and the High School*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sleeter, C. (1994, February). *Multicultural Education: White Perspectives, White Racism*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Multicultural Education, Detroit.
- Sleeter, C. (1995). *Multicultural Education: Five Views*. In Fred Schultz, ed., *Annual Editions: Multicultural Education, 94/95*. Guilford, CT: Dushkin.