Educating the imagination: Fostering compassionate empathy through art and media

Jennifer Lindstrand

Department of Integrated Studies in Education
Culture and Values in Education
McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
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Abstract

This work explores the concept of empathy, what empathy is and why it is important in relation to the field of education. The idea of a compassionate empathy, in which one moves from understanding to deeply caring, is examined as an essential component of creating a more just world. The ability to empathize is based on recognition and identification with another's feelings, beliefs or experience. In order to develop this type of compassionate knowing, it is important that a strong imagination be present. Simply put, without imagination empathy cannot exist. As with compassionate empathy, so too does the imagination need to be centered around care. Education can play a vital role in helping to foster a moral imagination. In this context, both the arts and media are explored as specific examples of tools for nurturing this type of imagination and empathy.

Résumé

Ce travail explore le concept de l'empathie, sa signification et son importance en matière d'éducation. L'idée d'une empathie compatissante, où l'on se réoriente à partir de la compréhension pour en arriver à la bienveillance, est examinée comme élément essentiel à la création d'un monde plus juste. La capacité d'empatiser est fondée sur la reconnaissance et l'identification des sentiments et croyances ainsi que sur l'expérience des autres. Pour développer ce type de savoir compatissant, il est important qu'une forte imagination soit présente. En termes simples, sans l'imagination, l'empathie ne peut pas exister. Tout comme l'empathie compatissante, l'imagination doit par le fait même être centrée sur la bienveillance. L'éducation peut avoir comme rôle vital de favoriser une imagination morale. C'est à l'intérieur de ce contexte que les arts et médias sont explorés à titre d'exemples spécifiques d'outils pour cultiver ce type d'imagination et d'empathie.

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"This is imagination. This is the possibility to go beyond tomorrow without being naively idealistic. This is Utopianism as a dialectical relationship between denouncing the present and announcing the future. To anticipate tomorrow by dreaming today."

A pedagogy for liberation: Dialogues on transforming education, Paulo Freire and Ira Shor (1987)

Introduction

Teachers today
They got nothing to say
They got nothing to say
Because they taught 'em that way
They only do what they're told
So they can get their pay
And go home
They walk down the streets
With their hearts in their hands
- The Brian Jonestown Massacre, 1998

Pedagogy of hope and change

I became a teacher because I wanted to make some kind of positive difference in this world. Cliché, perhaps, but it is true. I believe in the power of education to create real and positive change in people's lives. I believe education is one of the most powerful tools for promoting social justice and that community, empowerment, and healing can be brought about through education. I know that I am not alone in this belief. Although specific reasons for becoming teachers may vary: to make school interesting and meaningful, to help build creativity, to encourage people to always continue to learn, to create a safe space for students, to foster critical thinking, to nurture compassion and show compassion to those we teach – fundamentally it all comes down to the same thing, to being a part of creating a better world. For me, this would be a world in which people value and care about themselves and one another; a world in which diversity is celebrated, the natural environment is respected and cared for, and community is cherished. At the risk of sounding far too idealistic or naïve, I became a teacher because I wanted to encourage people to seek justice. I wanted to encourage compassion. I wanted to challenge my students to question the paradigms placed before them and to help my students find their voices. I wanted my students to confidently and creatively express themselves. I wanted to build a joyful and loving

community. Being a teacher, for me, beyond any curriculum, more meaningful than results of any standardized exam, bolder than many school board initiatives and mandates, is about reaching and nurturing the students' hearts and minds.

I have been a high school teacher for six years. From the very beginning, I have struggled with a love/hate relationship with the education system. The love part came easily, once I became confident in the classroom and opened up to my students. Together, my students and I built communities where we shared ideas, asked questions, and debated issues. We created together, laughed together and even, at times, cried together. There is no doubt in my mind that I love teaching. However, my love for teaching in the education system that currently exists is questionable. Archaic curricula and teaching practices, outrageously large class sizes, standardized testing, power imbalances between administration and teachers, emphasis on curricular outcomes over the actual needs of students and teachers – all of these have left me frustrated, tired and more often than not, without hope. Unfortunately, this is the reality of many education systems today. Government mandates for standardized testing, large class sizes, lack of funding, resources and support, and socio-political expectations placed on the education system are just a few factors taking time and energy away from issues of social justice through education. This can lead to the disillusionment of many teachers. Some teachers are literally just trying to survive in a system that continues to view education more and more as a corporate business, a place to prepare future generations for becoming workers and consumers (Apple, 2006; McLaren, 1995). According to some ((Dewey, 1916; Palmer, 2008; Warnock, 1979), this focus has led us to neglect the education and care of the whole person, of both teachers and students.

Empathy, imagination, and social justice

It was my first class of my education degree. A part of me had indeed always wanted to be a teacher but another part was very resistant. Even though I

was excited about the possibilities of taking this "Teaching Multiculturalism through Drama" course, I was still quite hesitant about how I, along with my ideals, would fit into the education system and this whole notion of teaching. However, this class moved me like no other university course has; I was challenged to see my world and the world of others in an entirely new light. I was forced to confront and examine my own beliefs, preconceptions and biases, prompting me to reflect and grow on a personal level. I was also engaged in deep reflection and growth as a future educator, imagining the possibilities of a classroom working for justice and the importance of addressing in the classroom issues such as racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, and environmental devastation. It was our second or third class that our professor had written KNOW CARE ACT on the whiteboard as a springboard for discussion on what education should strive to accomplish and create. This is a simple enough adage, yet years later it is still very powerful for me. In my view, this idea of knowing, caring and acting addresses the necessary steps in achieving genuine social justice. The first step to creating change is education, whether it be formal or informal - an exposure to and exploring the issue deeply to fully understand the root causes and existing factors. Once the issue is understood and awareness is created, then we can be moved to care about the problem. It is not until we know and care passionately that we act upon the issues, working to make a change. This can be the case as well in our day to day lives, in our interactions with other people and nature.

Research questions

As an educator, I am passionate about the arts in education, and believe in the important role it plays in students' academic and personal development. For years, artists have played important roles as agents for positive social change. Many artists have served as political critics, using their art to condemn injustices and to point out the atrocities of war, poverty, racism, environmental destruction, etc. Artists and the art they create have also given the world inspiration and hope

through creating pieces that encourage us to imagine a better world, one of beautiful possibilities. For this thesis, therefore, I am very much interested in the potential role the arts can play in the development and growth of empathy. I am interested in exploring the possible connection between imagination and the ability to empathize, and what role education could play in fostering a culture of compassion and creating positive social change. In other words, can education in the arts nurture the imagination and therefore strengthen empathy, leading to a more compassionate and just society? On the other hand, what aspects of our culture might damage, distort or impede the growth of imagination and empathy?

The concept of Know, Care, Act is what will guide the following chapters. Freire (1970) speaks of conscientization as a fundamental first step in empowerment and working for social justice. Social change begins with finding value in ourselves and others, in all people; it also requires knowledge and understanding. Chapter 1 will begin by exploring the state of education in contemporary society. It will briefly examine some of the key issues and concerns as well as consider various theories about the purpose of education. Chapter 2 will consider empathy, what it is, and how it can be seen as a way of deeply knowing. Further to that, it will consider the importance of active and compassionate empathy. As opposed to a "'passive empathy' or 'poetic compassion', where one laments the victim's undeserved misfortune from a distance without doing anything about it" (Kristjansson, 2004, p. 303), an engaged and compassionate empathy evokes authentic care within us and a desire to create justice. This compassion is what will fuel the societal transformation that Freire (1998) speaks of, that is necessary for true justice and equity to exist.

Chapter 2 will, therefore, approach the issues of social justice and change in relation to empathy and imagination from an educational perspective, exploring the role education can play in nurturing both imagination and compassionate empathy. Specifically, Chapters 3 and 4, will consider the importance of both art and media in fostering compassion and action for social justice. The art forms of

literature and theatre will be explored as potential tools to guide the moral development of the imagination through story and expression. Mainstream media, will be considered as a means of addressing issues of justice in a significant way.

Chapter One:
Examining Education

Us V Them
Over and over again
- *LCD Soundsystem, 2007*

There is a lot of cynicism out there. People tend to keep to themselves in a protective sort of way. Many of us quickly walk past each other on the street without so much as a glance, let alone a smile. We are often paranoid and distrustful. Many are hardened and cynical because in the face of countless economic, political, and environmental devastations they have lost hope, feel overwhelmed by the problems and helpless to find a solution. In a society so connected by technology, many seem to be losing a genuine and intimate connection with others, with their communities. As a result, we should "recognize how difficult it is to affirm the reality of love [and hope] when history and our own biographies offer so much evidence of division, destruction, and death" (Palmer, 2003). In part a form of self-preservation, in part conditioning, many of us focus only on ourselves. We have become competitive and solitary. Through the many institutions that subtly (and some more explicitly) form our perceptions and beliefs, we have developed "a constriction of consciousness, deformation of thinking and feeling, a distancing, and a privatism" (Greene, 1995, p. 64) that many of us are not even aware of. In my introduction, I highlighted the role that education can play in leading us to a more just society. While that is true, I would also like to suggest here, however, that perhaps our education systems are currently, in fact, contributing to the problem.

Education in crisis

If we remember back to our first days, even first years of schools, we will probably remember a great sense of apprehension but also great excitement. Beginning school children are eager to learn, our imaginations are full of ideas

and future creations. Sadly, as time goes on, this pure excitement and vibrant imagination is "benignly neglected" (Esbin, 2008) by many teachers in most schools. Our current education system is much like the banking system that Freire (1970) describes. Very early on, students become vessels simply to be filled with information, being expected to present or recall these often meaningless facts upon request (Freire, 1970). This type of education requires little to no critical thinking or imagination. Our schools often focus on a specified, often narrow and limiting curriculum, these models of curriculum favouring one right answer or way of doing something. This issue of schools attempting to teach one "truth", one way of doing or seeing, ignores the personal feelings or experiences students have regarding a certain concept or topic, and therefore, over time, tends to actually numb their emotions and their capacity for emotional range (Rich, 1968). Freire (1996) argues that real education cannot take place within the "suffocating limit of specialization" (p. 99). Within this suffocation lies an archaic ideology on which many schools are based, with their accompanying business-style standards for both teachers and students.

It is very important to recognize that our education systems are heavily influenced by politics, economics and prevailing cultural beliefs. Many schools, as a reflection of the larger society (which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter) encourage aggressive competition as opposed to understanding and cooperation. This type of mentality is so engrained that it is rooted even in our language when addressing issues of justice: "war on poverty", "battle against discrimination", "mobilization for peace" (Leonard, 1968). This way of thinking also stems from the pervasiveness of Neoliberalism and its connection to Neoconservatist dogma; the philosophy being that a certain type of democracy, economic values and way of life should be asserted throughout the world using various methods, including military force. These two ideologies have teamed up in an interesting way to bring emphasis on "market values" and "traditional values" in schools (Apple, 1996). The discourse of this alliance blends two types of language: 1) that of using education to produce workers, consumers, supporters

of privatization, and tight accountability and control, and 2) that of promoting "western, traditional values" (Apple, 1996). This type of education encourages competition and individualism. The infusion of these two ideologies into the system teaches which values are the "right" values, telling those who may not subscribe to that particular hegemonic belief, that they are contributing to the problems in society (Apple, 1996). Educating based on these principles serves to create even more of a separation between people and breeds an "us" vs "them" mentality that already far too commonly exists. In this type of system, schools are told what to teach based on what is expected by Neoliberalists (producing students who will become strong, competitive workers in the world economy) and Neoconservatives who believe there is only one true way of seeing and living in the world. This makes it very difficult for those teachers who wish to encourage their students to see beyond the hegemonic belief system placed before them. It becomes extremely controversial if, for example, a teacher brings up issues regarding how prevalent slave labour is in a capitalist system or of the importance of respecting all people's rights to religious belief. When exploring the influence of Neoliberalism and Neoconservatism on schools, Michael Apple (1996) warns that, "educational work that is not connected deeply to a powerful understanding of these realities […] is in danger of losing its soul" (p. 5).

High expectations placed on teachers and students have a suffocating effect on education. Instead of deeply investigating the social and political reasons why schools fail in terms of drop out rates, low tests scores and school violence, governments and school boards are quick to implement "shallow technical 'fixes' for complex human problems" (Palmer, 1999, p. x). This movement to constantly "raise standards", while ignoring the human issues present in educational work, has lead to mandates for province-wide competencies for teachers and students, provincial standardized exams and a "growing pressure to make perceived needs of business and industry into the primary goals of school" (Apple, 1996, p. 28). Increasingly, CEOs or presidents of companies are brought in to inspire and motivate teachers at staff meetings and professional

development days. These professionals know very little about education and what it means to be an educator but are experts in making a business operate and succeed. Running schools merely as businesses is detrimental to the quality of education given (Robinson, 2001). This is one reason why I have become concerned by the language used in some schools. I have heard administrators, while discussing educational philosophies and hopes for the academic year, continuously refer to the students as "clients" and the administration as "management". While hearing this, I find myself questioning in my mind, "When did I stop working with real students? When did these become simply clients with whom I conduct business? When did I start working for a large company that needs to be controlled by management?" To me, this type of terminology is indicative of "demands being made of education today [having] far more to do with "world-class" technical achievement than with creating a community of citizens" (Greene, 1995, p. 64). This education that is "mechanical, reductionist, and competitive, and committed to forcing all children to be the same does violence to the souls of the young, to say nothing of the souls who would teach deeply" (Palmer, 2008, p. 13). I have met many teachers who have come into the profession full of energy and passion. Years later, many are simply worn out and have given up on the ideals they once held. Some end up feeling frustrated and "robbed of intellectual autonomy" (Freire, 1998, p. 15) by a standardized, rigid system. Others struggling to hold onto their beliefs about education often begin to feel alienated and alone in their philosophy of education or deemed radicals or "propagandists" if they teach from a critical perspective (Freire, 1998).

In many ways, our education systems are breaking under the pressure of contemporary society, in many ways they are failing. The current system seems to be breaking more teachers than it is nurturing (Royce, 2005). It is a system that encourages and rewards students who conform to the status quo, who memorize and regurgitate information and buy into a form of education that reveals very little to us about how intelligent they actually are, to say nothing of how successful and happy they will be in life (Hetland, 2008). Several educators

would argue that the type of education systems currently in existence are forms of oppressive education (Apple, 2006; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2006; Greene, 1995). This form of education seeks to inhibit imagination and to take complete control over what is taught (Freire, 1970). Teachers lose their freedom and imaginative ability to teach in a creative way or to address important issues in their classroom. Students become passive receivers, losing their creativity as they store and absorbs too many facts, which are often meaningless to their lived realities (Freire, 1970). Many of the life skills and emotional development needed in life cannot easily be measured by the standards that often drive certain educational systems, and an overemphasis on academics neglects educating the whole person, including aesthetic sensibility and nurturing emotions such as empathy (Robinson, 2001).

Robinson (2001) critiques the direction in which formal education is headed, and has been for some time now, referring to "narrow academicism", "sheer sterility", and "leading to the dehumanization of people", he draws attention to the concerns of many. Through this system, we are depriving our students of an opportunity to expand their imaginations. We have not recognized the important role empathy and compassion play in life, and have focused instead on competition and standardized grades. Our current system often encourages students to be followers, rewarding them for completing menial tasks, filling in blanks, and conducting themselves in only one acceptable way (Loui, 2006) When reflecting on the complexities of education, Maxine Greene asks, "What kinds of intelligences are required to remedy homelessness and addictions?" (Greene, 1995). Are the current objectives and competencies of our curriculums able to educate our students to contemplate and deal with theses issues? Robinson has spoken of the detriments of the current state of education, but he also speaks of hope for a more holistic education of the whole person, with emotional development being key (Robinson, 2001).

What is the purpose of education?

"What does it mean, anyway, to be educated?" (Noddings, 2006). Considering the enormous influence the education system has in forming "the hearts and minds of students, shaping their sense of self and their relation to the world"(Palmer, 2003, p. 57), we would be remiss not to begin by considering what the central focus of education should be. If we value the importance of education, then we need to reflect on what the purpose of education is, *why* people should be educated (Warnock, 1979). Undoubtedly, it is beneficial to have access to diverse forms of knowledge and courses. A rich education certainly includes exposure to an assortment of disciplines and subject areas. What concerns me is the heavy concentration of certain disciplines, of importance placed on some subject matters above others and what is viewed as success in education. Is it more important that all students know certain mathematical formulas, for example, than being able to articulate their beliefs? Is it more important that they are able to repeat back historical dates as opposed to engage with their peers in dialogue about important issues? As educators, we know that there is more to this complex life than "facts" found in a textbook. The question of what it means to be educated is an important one to reflect upon, perhaps one of the most important questions that educators can ask.

Rich contends that "if a society is going to grow and prosper – not only materially and technologically, but also in its creative potentials of its individual members […] it needs to be concerned with healthy growth and development" (Rich, 1968, p. 27) of the whole person. A belief in the importance of holistic development is one of the reasons I became a teacher. I chose to teach in hopes of facilitating critical and creative thinking, to attempt to create a safe-space for students to learn and grow, and to encourage my students to care more about being compassionate than about getting the highest grade in the class. Our society is supposedly based on the idea that people should be represented and cared for (Rich, 1968). In a pluralist society, where there are many cultures and beliefs,

"we need an education system that helps people to forge shared values, to understand and respect other perspectives, to take risks, and to work comfortably with people from diverse backgrounds and to continue to learn throughout life" (Greene, 1997). Education should challenge and inspire us to see things in a different way (Kumashiro, 2008). It should bring to our attention various ways of being in the world, to understand and celebrate diversity. Education should ask difficult questions and expose injustices in our world, and should seek to work against these injustices (Kumashiro, 2008).

Real education produces change (Freire, 1996; Kumashiro, 2008). We as educators must believe with great conviction in the role of education to create change, for without conviction education is not possible (Warnock, 1979). We cannot and should not attempt to rest in neutrality as so many schools promote, for even remaining neutral is a political act. It is important for educators to stand for something and to know what education is to them and why they choose to teach. At the root of education should be love (Freire, 1998); a love for all people and the earth, and a desire to nurture goodness. Hannah Arendt states that "education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin, which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable" (Quinn, 2008, p. 34). In this way, we should all be critical pedagogs, with the "intention to disrupt, contest, and transform systems of oppression" (Darts, 2004, p. 316). If we have concern for our world, we should encourage our students to see clearly and care deeply. We should see education as freeing, empowering and central to working for social justice (Giroux, 2006; Quinn, 2008).

As we consider the role of education and its relationship to transformation and social justice, some very basic but crucial questions arise. What type of education systems do we want to see in existence? Why should we care about empathy and imagination? What are the challenges to this type of focus in

education? What do we lose if we do not nurture our imaginations and capacity for empathy? What are we sacrificing if we do not exclaim how important empathy and imagination are? These important questions will be examined in the following chapter.

Chapter Two:
Knowing and Caring Through Empathy and Imagination

Strangers on this road we are on
We are not two we are one
- The Kinks, 1970

What is empathy?

In her article, *A Conceptual History of Empathy and a Question it Raises for Moral Education*, Susan Verducci (2000) thoroughly explores the concept of empathy, the history of the term and the various interpretations of empathy from a range of philosophers and educators. Although my goal is not necessarily to attempt to create or argue for the "right" definition of empathy, I think it is important to refer to some of the definitions mentioned in the literature, in hopes of constructing a definition of empathy that best fits the context of this work and the issues I will be exploring further on in my writing.

Since there seems to be some debate about sympathy and empathy, whether they are quite different or one in the same (Kristjansson, 2004; Verducci, 2000), I would like to begin by briefly discussing and perhaps clarifying what empathy is not. While I acknowledge that some people use these terms quite interchangeably, I consider these two words as referring to very different and distinct things. I would argue that when someone feels sympathetic there is a separation or distance from the one they feel sympathy for. Feelings of empathy, conversely, involve a deepness in understanding, a genuine attempt to know and therefore to be more connected. Another way of describing the characteristics that I see as setting them apart is the association of the feelings of pity (sympathy) versus equal understanding (empathy). When the word sympathy is used, it is often associated with "feeling sorry for" or feeling pity for someone's situation or misfortune. This gives a sense of hierarchy – the one sympathizing is quite clearly believed to be "above" or in a better position than the "sympathizee". While Kristjansson (2004) believes sympathy to be a more developed form of

empathy, I would argue the opposite. I would like to propose that empathy is the more developed capacity as it involves a meaningful engagement, a profound way of knowing, of understanding deeply. Sympathy involves a certain dissociation from the other and therefore creates a sense of pity as opposed to solidarity.

As noted in Verducci's (2000) article, empathy is often associated with a feeling of oneness or connection with other people and nature. The existence of empathy can be seen from a very young age. A child even as young as three days old, demonstrates empathetic ability by responding to the cries of another infant (Kristjansson, 2004). Various researchers believe empathy to be something that is automatic or innate, whereas others say it is brought forth consciously through "role-taking" (P. L. Jackson, 2004). Kristjansson views "empathy as the original developmental precursor of all moral concern" (p. 302), believing empathy to be an inherent quality that must be developed and educated. He states that there are two types of empathy:

> "Sometimes, 'to empathize with someone' means having the capacity to discern/understand another's psychological states, i.e. to be able to view things from someone else's perspective and to imagine how that person feels…In another and stronger sense, however, 'to empathize with someone' means identifying with another's emotional set-up, i.e. in a sense, to feel that person's own feelings…empathy as emotional identification" (Kristjansson, 2004).

This deep sense of identifying, of being "engrossed" (Noddings, 2005) with another person's feelings is the essence of care and empathy. Nel Noddings, who has written extensively on the importance of care in education, states that care is "what characterizes our consciousness when we ask another (explicitly or implicitly), 'What are you going through?'" (Noddings, 2005, p. 15). Asking this question shows concern and compassion and a desire to truly understand. Without this engrossment or intense engagement, empathy would not occur. Empathy is being fully engaged with someone and "emptying" ourselves so that

we can try to understand that person without judgement (Noddings, 2005). One of the best, most concrete definitions of empathy was one shared with me through reading Harper Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. One of the main characters in the novel, Atticus, the wise father to Scout and Jem, says to his daughter Scout that "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view—until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" (Lee, 1960). When we empathize, when we care deeply, we "really see, or feel what the other tries to convey" (Noddings, p. 16).

I most appreciate the definition provided by Rogers (1975) where empathy is a process in which we enter the "world of the other and [become] thoroughly at home in it" (Rogers, 1975). Rogers argues that empathy involves sensitivity and understanding, openness and acceptance (Rogers, 1975). This compassion, the understanding and acceptance, should drive us to want the best for those who we empathize with, or at the very least to see them as equals, deserving of respect and acceptance despite possible differences. Kristjansson (2004) states the importance of empathy when he quotes Hoffman: "To me, empathy is the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible" (p. 296). Indeed, when empathy is deeply connected with compassion, we are filled with a desire to end the suffering of others and to correct violations of justice (Kristjansson, 2004). When we empathize, we imagine, in order to feel and understand another's experience. In fact, without our imaginations, the ability to empathize may be not impossible. This is why our imaginations play a vital role in creating compassion and positive social change.

Imagination and its importance

Robinson (2001) defines imagination as "seeing in the mind's eye". Many scholars believe that our ability to imagine is an innate quality (Esbin, 2008; Greene, 1995; Rich, 1968; Robinson, 2001). Cross-culturally and throughout history, imagination and our ability to imagine is "something that [has been]

universally recognized" (Egan, 2007, p. 3). Historically, imagination has been viewed as being at odds with or counter to reason, with the belief that the more a person had of imagination the less they had of reason and vice versa (Egan, 2007). Although some people in the past and certainly in the present believe the imagination to be a place where people simply escape to, away from reality, a place where foolish ideas, perhaps even dangerous ideas are created, imagination is in fact where our reality is born (Greene, 1995). Both Hume (1711-1776) and Kant (1724-1804) "conceived of the imagination as being crucial to our ability to construct a coherent view of the world" (Egan, 2007, p. 6). It is through the encouragement of imaginative exploration that significant scientific insights have been made (Shepard, 1988). Sutton-Smith (1988) claims that "imagination is the source of knowledge, not its imitation" (p. 7). Over time, as we have learned more about the human brain and what it means to learn, we have realized how complexly intertwined the facts that we learn are with our emotions and memories (Egan, 2007). This requires our brains to shift and organize these facts, emotions, and memories in order to create meaning. Knowledge is formed through this process of building meaning and this construction of meaning is one of the primary actions of the imagination (Egan, 2007). Just as knowledge is created through the imagination, the imagination can only flourish and continue to create with the access of knowledge. The imagination is stimulated and further developed with the learning of various facts, pieces of literature, and other information (Egan, 2007). With these perspectives in mind, we could argue that imagination is not separate from but in fact a part of reason in that it helps to construct the world around us. We could argue also that imagination is entwined with knowledge in that it helps to construct meaning necessary to learning.

Many educators are now recognizing the important power imagination has in many aspects of our lives (Day, 2002; Deasy, 2008; Egan, 2007; Esbin, 2008; Fettes, 2005; Greene, 1995; Hetland, 2008; Leonard, 1968; Loui, 2006; Robinson, 2001). Through imagination we can see things anew and imagine other possibilities. We can create various scenarios and experiences. Imagination

stimulates our ingenuity and problem solving skills. The imaginative world "provides both a motivation for practicing skills and a safe way to try and fail at something new" (Rosoff, 2007, p. 62). Imagination is what allows us to be creative. Creativity is essentially imagination enacted and what leads to any type of change (Robinson, 2001). Imagination is considered by some to be one of the most important capacities to develop through education, as it is absolutely necessary for happiness and freedom to exist, and for transformation and action to occur (Sutton-Smith, 1988; Warnock, 1979). What I believe to be one of the most compelling aspects of imagination is the idea proposed in the previous section: the role that imagination plays in our ability to empathize. Drawing on another definition of imagination as "the ability to form images and ideas in the mind, especially things never seen or never experienced directly" (Esbin, 2008, p. 24) it should be quite simple for us to see an important connection between imagination and empathy.

Relationship between empathy and imagination

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, empathy is believed by some to be an innate attribute, one which can be developed and deepened through a healthy and enriched imagination (Jackson, 2004; Kristjansson, 2004). Encouraging the development of the imagination throughout childhood and adolescence has been identified as "essential to fostering empathy" (Esbin, p. 28). As educator Maxine Greene states, "of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities" (Greene, p. 3, 1995). Our ability to empathize is based on identification or knowledge of another's feelings or experience. It is through our imaginations that we are able to achieve this identifying or knowing (Phillips, 2003). We imagine in order to understand what the person is going through or to "feel" their experience.

Decety and Jackson (2004) examine and discuss an experiment conducted in 1969 that speaks to the power of imagination in generating empathy.

Participants in this study were asked to observe an individual whose hand was strapped to a machine. All of the participants were told that the machine emitted an immense, painful amount of heat. The participants were then divided into three groups. One group was told simply to observe the person strapped to the machine. Another group was told to imagine how the person was feeling and the third group was asked to imagine themselves in the place of the person being observed. Those who were asked to imagine showed significant responses of empathy, both verbally and physically (i.e. increased rate of breathing and sweating), in comparison to those simply observing, showing that "the deliberate acts of imagination produced a greater response than just watching" (Decety and Jackson, 2004, p. 84).

There are stories of the opposite situation occurring, where people are explicitly required to deaden or stifle their imaginations. An example of this would be those who train to go into the military. Leonard (1968) describes soldiers in war being encouraged to reduce or weaken their imagination and personal identity. He states that this lessening of self and the imaginative scope was done out of necessity in order for the soldiers to tolerate the horrible conditions of war and the atrocities and injustice which surrounded them (Leonard, 1968). Trainees are subjected to intense exercises and are required to focus on letting go of self and an independent, imaginative way of thinking. In this training, they are beaten down verbally and worked to physical exhaustion, dulling and hardening their emotional and imaginative capacities. Indeed, there has been and continues to be a wary attitude toward imagination, particularly by those in positions of authority (Dewey, 1916; Egan, 2007). From this perspective, there is a concern of how the use of imagination can powerfully threaten to disrupt "the established order of things" (Egan, 2007, p. 4). Clearly, imagination carries with it a powerful weight in its ability to envision and construct a new way of seeing or being, as well as to inspire compassion and empathy.

Returning to the question, then, of the relationship between empathy and imagination, it is clear that the ability to imagine is what allows us the capacity to empathize. Without being able to deeply imagine, how can we possibly "put ourselves" into someone else's position and try to understand them? Greene argues that is it "the imaginative capacity that allows us also to experience empathy with different points of view, even with interests apparently at odds with ours" (Greene, 1995, p. 156). Imagination helps us to envision other possibilities and experiences. Using our imaginations requires us to reflect on situations and allows us to see unlimited possibilities. It is when we can believe in these other realities and perspectives that we have the possibility of empathy, an understanding of what another person is feeling and of their experiences.

A rich, developed imagination is particularly valuable when it comes to trying to understand various perspectives that differ from our own. We must evoke imagination when we want to see things from outside of our own worldview. Through Greene's (1995) statement, on the ability imagination has in bringing understanding to conflicting ideas, we can come to understand why imagination is discouraged in war, even seen as a legitimate threat. If imagination encourages us to empathize, see from different perspectives, and to bring a compassionate understanding, wars waged against other nations and against groups or ideas within our own borders may not be so successful. This is precisely why, for those who desire and work for real peace, for equal rights, for true social justice, the nurturing of imagination and empathy needs to be a concern. In fact, Leonard (1968) speaks so boldly as to say that without empathy (and the imagination that deepens it) we as a society, as a species will not survive. It is important to note that although our ability to imagine does not automatically ensure that we will treat everyone with respect all of the time, it is still the essential precursor to the development of empathy (Egan, 2007). It is the imagination that "enables us to understand that other people are unique, distinct, and autonomous with lives and hopes and fears quite as real and important as our own" (Egan, 2007, p. 14). Without imagination, it will not be possible for

empathy to exist and for positive social change to take place. Without empathy, we will continue to have civil and international wars, to have devastating global poverty. Without empathy, we will continue to have violations of human rights, to choose money over life. Without empathy, we will become increasingly disconnected from Mother Earth, who sustains us, and we will continue lose sight of the fact that in poisoning the natural world, we are poisoning ourselves. If we are to truly attempt to put ourselves in another's position, to try to understand their perspective and their feelings and to really care about their experience we need a strong imagination that helps us to do that.

Revolutionary Compassion

This compassionate empathy is necessary for a society (and world) of many different values, beliefs, and cultures that strives for equity and justice. This is the type of empathy that should be an important focus for educators. It is also a type of empathy that flourishes with a rich moral imagination. We are living in a world right now however, where this type of thought is not necessarily valued, in fact in some circles it is even vilified. According to some, even, we live in a culture where the other "is feared, exploited, reified, or considered disposable" (Giroux, 2006, p. 63) as opposed to being met with empathy and compassion. There are certainly some who might question if the creation of a truly caring and imaginative space is possible in education and if this is even the role of education itself. Some people in politically influential positions may believe that education should have a different focus, not valuing things such as imagination and seeing the world in a new way. Others might suggest that our education systems are not set up to foster imaginative growth and deep empathy. It is perhaps a revolutionary act to talk about care, compassion, empathy and imagination. It is probably quite a serious concern for those who are content with the current socio-economic and political climate, those who have perhaps lost their imaginations, when the idea of empathy and social justice is brought forth.

Perhaps this is why Noddings (2005) so firmly states that "there is nothing mushy about caring. It is the resilient backbone of human life" (p. 175).

Why care about empathy and imagination?

"We should reward creativity and imagination, for it is often better to imagine a possibility than to know a fact" (Loui, 2006)

Within the spaces of imagination and emotions we are encouraged to ask those important existential questions about ourselves and compassion: Who am I? Who will I become? Who do I want to be? What do I believe? Who do I care for? Why do I care? (Noddings, 2005). We are also encouraged to ask the important questions about the world around us.

Recently the Dalai Lama was in Montreal speaking to a group of future educators and I was fortunate enough to hear his speech to the public, entitled "Educating the Heart: The Power of Compassion". His message was simple and to the point: we are all born out of compassion, and compassion is what connects all of us together. It is what opens our "inner door" to become more connected to other people. Compassion and empathy is not pity, but respect. It is also what opens our minds to see other points of view. The Dalai Lama spoke about spontaneous, natural empathy, but he also spoke to the importance of a trained, reasoned empathy. He spoke to the power of intelligence and imagination, and noted that without a development of the heart and compassion, this intelligence and imagination can lead to disaster. He claims that it is possible and indeed necessary for schools to focus on educating the imagination and empathy of students in a positive and moral way. He encourages us to show our reasoned compassion to even our "enemies" in hopes of creating a more peaceful and just world. He asserts that teaching compassionate empathy in educational institutions is a very powerful beginning. From there, we can create a more global plan in

hopes of achieving genuine peace, genuine equality and begin to see all of humanity becoming more and more compassionate.

If imagination is what makes compassionate empathy possible, and this compassion is what works toward social justice, then imagination plays a very important role in bringing wholeness and healing to a community, on both a local and global level (Greene, 1995). I use the term democracy, in its best sense, to refer to a community that is always in the process of becoming, of changing, of growing (Freire, 1998; Greene, 1995) based on the voices and actions of its people. A democracy should be "marked by an emerging solidarity, a sharing of certain beliefs, and a dialogue about others, it must remain open to newcomers, those too long thrust aside" (Greene, 1995, p. 39). In a just community, all voices are represented and cared for. This is not the type of community or society we currently have, even though many might claim that we do. Nevertheless, through nurturing our imaginations and empathy, we not only impassion the desire to care for one another but we also begin to look deeply inside ourselves, finding our own voice and powerful images of justice. Through these images we envision a way to create real and positive change.

In the absence of imagination, there is an absence of the ability to understand another person or to feel a connection to their experience (Greene, 1995). It has also been noted that those who are incapable of imagining or compassionately empathizing with others tend to be politically indifferent and to be intolerant of diverse ethnicities, religions and sexual orientations (Egan, 2007; Giroux, 2006). If we are educators who value love, compassion and justice, we need to stand with Freire (1998) as he powerfully states "that nothing can justify the degradation of human beings. Nothing" (p. 93). If we vehemently oppose the injustice we see around us, we need to value the importance of educating and guiding the imagination in order to foster compassionately empathetic people. If we truly want to see our students become active participants in the creation of their world, we must realize that "at the heart of politics and political agency is

the necessity to imagine the impossible, to see beyond the given" (Giroux, 2006, p. 13). It is imagination and empathy, genuine care and love for all people, that leads to social action and change. It is this powerful imagination and sincere love that has empowered many social movements, from the past and present (Greene, 1995). The catalyzing power of compassion and the ability to envision change, justice, freedom is what leads us to plan and take action.

We cannot speak of unjustified degradation of human beings without also speaking about the inexcusable lack of compassion and absolute violence we have inflicted upon our natural world. In many ways, we have become so far removed from nature that many of us are suffering from what Richard Louv (2008) calls "Nature Deficit Disorder". As a result of being separated from nature there is a "diminished use of senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses" (Louv, 2008, p. 34). Louv (2008) argues that a severance from nature has lead to increased rates of depression and antisocial behaviour, as well as contributed to more aggression and less compassion in people.

We are fully and completely linked to the earth. The earth is what gives us life, and yet we ruthlessly damage and destroy her in countless ways. What does this say about us as people, about our respect for ourselves and each other, about our level of empathy and compassion? Noddings (2005) argues that our compassion and empathy must go beyond human beings and focus on non-human animals, plants, and other elements of the natural world. Her reasoning for this is twofold: 1) how we treat the earth and non-human animals is a good indication of how we treat ourselves, and 2) without the earth to sustain us, we would not survive (Noddings, 2005).

Inspirational environmentalist Wendell Berry expresses this reality in a compelling way:

"The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all. It is the healer and restorer and resurrector, by which disease passes into

> health, age into young, death into life. Without proper care for it we have no community, because without proper care for it we can have no life" (Noddings, 2005, p. 134)

When talking about empathy, compassion and social justice, therefore, it is important to include justice and compassion towards the natural world. For many reasons, there cannot be justice or compassion if we do not have it for our planet and other species and systems that exist upon it. All of humanity is fundamentally and inherently connected through nature (Louv, 2008), therefore it may even be the only thing that truly unites people in a cause, in taking action for change. As philosopher Fritjof Capra said, "We can never speak of nature without, at the same time, speaking about ourselves" (Palmer, 2003, p. 64). Our lack of empathy and compassion for the natural world, our damaging of the environment is quite literally killing us (Leonard, 1968) both physically and emotionally. When we recognize a direct link between our experiences with and in nature to our ability to be compassionate, we must recognize the importance of incorporating a care for nature into school curriculum.

The spirit and holistic education

In education, the teaching of the spirit should not be separate from the curriculum that is in place: "If we have any serious regard for what it means to be human, the teaching of contents cannot be separated from the moral formation of the learners" (Freire, 1998, p. 39). Perhaps pushing for a radical change in the curriculum to incorporate more specific issues of injustice and moral or spiritual development is necessary, but in the meantime, this perspective should be incorporated into all classes that currently exist. Focusing on compassion and justice can occur in classes studying Biology, History, or Physical Education. In all of these classes, we can encourage students to think reflectively, imaginatively, and compassionately. The effects of war on people and the environment, how we treat non-human animals, the relationship between our physical and emotional or spiritual health and what kind of impact we want to have in this world are such

important concerns (Noddings, 2006). If we are interested in truly educating people, in truly allowing them to think creatively and grow emotionally and intellectually, these types of topics need to be explored in our classrooms. If we believe in the role of education to nurture spirits as well as minds, to be a catalyst for positive social change, to empower people to think critically, and to care deeply for people and the earth, then we cannot forget the important role that empathy and imagination can play in education. If it is "our job as educators to offer a different view of reality, one that is not based on scores or measurements, but one based on the possibility of what can be created within each child" (Phillips, 2003, p. 46) then we need to consider how we might do this. If a central goal of education is to create happiness in our students and to improve the quality of life for human beings, it is imperative that we consider empathy and imagination in fostering care and creating solutions to relevant and important issues in life.

One of the most important pieces of education that focuses on social change, is nurturing the spirits of our students (Noddings, 2005). Our spirit is our essence. It contains our emotions and beliefs, our perceptions of ourselves and our world. Our spirits house our imaginations and empathy. Within our spirits is where we find hope and compassion and a desire for justice. However, if our spirits are not nurtured, or worse, they are beaten down, then we find darkness. We find a spirit that is wilting and bitter, angry and broken. These are the spirits of the oppressors, those who seek power and control. These are the spirits that use education to condition and manipulate. It is for this reason that feeding the spirits of our students is one of the most important task we have as educators (Noddings, 2005). Feeding spirits involves valuing the individual person and instilling in them a sense of worth and self-love. Feeding spirits is about helping to create deep and genuine happiness. In this world that worships material well-being, many of us look outward for happiness, but even when we have money and material possessions, if we allow ourselves we may begin to hear "a nagging spiritual emptiness whisper" (Ivey, 2008, p. 99). We need to start teaching our

students to look deep inside for happiness, to nurture and cherish their spirits. Once a strong, happy and compassionate spirit exists, people are able to share that with others, to understand them, to care for them, and to help them.

It is important to recognize that a focus on care and compassion in schools is not "flakey" or anti-intellectual; on the contrary, truly caring requires us to ask important and difficult questions, to look at issues critically and should be done so in all subject matters (Noddings, 2005). In order for this to happen in classrooms, teachers and administrators themselves to need to believe in the power of imagination, the importance of empathy, and to recognize their work as a form of art.

Imaginative, compassionate teaching

Although we may acknowledge the importance of empathy and imagination and now understand the necessity to nurture this in our students (and society), the first step in effecting change will be for teachers themselves to work to foster their own imaginations and show compassion and empathy in their classrooms. Educators should reflect on their teaching and interactions with students on a regular basis. They should be encouraged to see education and teaching as an art. This is crucial taking into account how many comparisons are being made between schools and business, and the push for high standards that follows only one path to success. Freire (1998) insists that our work must exist as an art because we are working with people in a way that involves many complexities, in that we are working with hopes and dreams, hearts and minds. By identifying education as a form of art "we are recognizing the beauty and importance of human interaction and creativity" (Barth, 2001, p. 227).

Berghoff and Borgmann (2007) discuss the concept of the "third space" that exists through education in the arts. Within this framework, the first space consists of the student, as viewer or reader, holding little to no meaning in relation

to the second space which is the piece of art or media (Borgmann, 2007). Inside the third space is the interaction between the student and art where meaning is negotiated and created. The result of this "third space work" consists of four parts: 1) resonance: the student relates to the learning that occurs because they begin to see a personal connection to the piece as a part of their own experience and what they value, 2) intentionality: the learner is not simply focused on completing a set task but on the meaning that he or she is trying to grasp and express, 3) social imagination: through the meaning created from engaging with the piece, the student can begin to imaginatively connect with other people's hopes, fears and intentions, understand more about the human condition, nurture a moral consciousness and social imagination, and can experience injustice, suffering and pain vicariously, 4) sense of community: through the interpretation of their vicarious experiences in the arts, the students are able to develop compassionate empathy, moral commitment and a sense of solidarity with a local and global community (Borgmann, 2007).

Considering the powerful learning that can occur in the third space of the arts, Berghoff and Borgmann make a strong case for the importance of art teachers being involved in creating curriculum that explores "life itself rather than the mastery of fragmented knowledge and skills" (Borgmann, 2007, p. 22). This type of holistic curriculum in the arts is a "deepening and expanding mode of tuning-in […] willing to feel and to imagine, to open the window and go in search" (Greene, 1995, p. 104).

Part of becoming a teacher, a process that is ongoing, is the practicing of reflection and development of the imagination (Fettes, 2005). The problem is however, that those who become teachers have also been through the system previously discussed, the system that aims to conform students and allows their imaginations to wither from lack of use. Although some emerge from this system with imaginations intact or at least able to be revived, many seem to have lost the ability to deeply imagine altogether. Believing in the immense value of

imagination in both teachers and students, educators at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia have begun a teacher education program based on this idea. The main tenet behind this program is that imagination is "fundamental to our becoming fully human. Where imagination has died, education cannot live" (Fettes, 2005, p. 3). Many of the students entering this program as graduates from the current education system show a very narrow view of education and lack of imagination in terms of envisioning various ways to deliver curriculum or how to relate to students on a personal level (Fettes, 2005). Several of these students saw the use of imagination as more of a "hook", a technique used to introduce a topic and to get students interested before the "real" learning took place (Fettes, 2005). Most of the students believed there was room for imagination in the classroom but only on the periphery, so as not to take time away from the important information needing to be covered in the curriculum.

It was during workshops and conversation with these future teachers that the facilitators of the program truly saw how profound the influence of our current education system is in devaluing imagination and destroying creative ways of thinking (Fettes, 2005). According to Fettes, these students found it very difficult to think abstractly or in varying ways, to come up with unique methods of doing things or presenting information. Another observation made by the facilitators connects back to the earlier discussion of the importance of nature. They found that the future teachers were quite oblivious to the magic and beauty in the natural world around them, and did not see the possibilities in experiencing nature or incorporating nature into their lessons (Fettes, 2005).

A lack of creativity and imagination in teachers should be a concern, and I believe that other teacher education programs should follow Simon Fraser University's lead in promoting and nurturing these abilities. Creative, imaginative teachers are effective because they are able to "create" as they go, giving them more of a flexibility and responsiveness to students' needs and they are able to make classes meaningful and engaging (Barrell, 2003). Strengthening

the imagination will help with the process of personal reflection which, as stated earlier, is very important for teachers to engage in. This imagining and reflecting can help prospective and beginning teachers to gain a deeper understanding of pedagogy and the curriculum (Fettes, 2005). Imagination in a teacher usually accompanies a "kind of critical awareness: an alertness to alternatives. The belief that there is only one best way to do things seems to us to be one of the most deadening in all of education" (p. 10). When we engage with our imaginations and with the process of reflection we also begin to know our own self and beliefs in a deeper way. As a result, we become more genuine in our classrooms. We are more open to changes and alternatives, we are more open to authentically connecting with our students.

Just as it is important for teachers to have empathy and imagination, it is also important that they engage in various forms of the arts that help to nurture those two capacities (Barth, 2001). Based on several studies, Deasy (2008) notes that, it is apparent that the public is aware of and believes in the power of the arts to build imagination. Other studies have shown that arts based classrooms create positive, empowering and safe spaces for students to learn and seem to be directly linked to an increase in self-esteem and empathy among students (Deasy, 2008). Palmer (2008), too, states that in order to engage in a more profound way, to do the important work of educating for imagination and empathy, "we must learn to work with images, with metaphors, with poetry, with stories, with music […] We must tap into a deeper layer of human knowing that can be reached by the intellect alone, a layer evoked by intuition, emotion, aesthetics, and soul" (p. 16).

When we teachers imagine, we are able to break with convention and we are able to see other perspectives. Through imagination we are able to connect with our students and understand their varied experiences (Freire, 1970; Greene, 1995). If we believe in the necessity to foster imagination in our classrooms, we need to realize that,

> "imagination is as important in the lives of teachers as it is in the lives of their students, in part because teachers incapable of thinking imaginatively or of releasing students to encounter works of literature and other forms of art are probably also unable to communicate to the young what the use of imagination signifies. If it is the case that imagination feeds into one's capacity to feel one's way into another's vantage point, these teachers may also be lacking in empathy" (Greene, 1995, p. 36).

It is nearly impossible to have a classroom that is a safe space for students to learn, a caring community where people are willing to participate if a teacher lacks empathy or compassion. The teacher plays an essential role in developing the culture and climate of a classroom and the learning that is able to take place within it. Of course there are factors outside of a teacher's control that can have a negative impact on learning as well, such as class sizes, teacher workload, lack of preparation time, poor physical condition of the school. In terms of setting the tone in the classroom, however, the teacher plays a pivotal role. As such, and if we are serious about cultivating imagination and social justice through education, it is crucial that a teacher be a model of empathy and compassion (Noddings, 2005). This of course does not mean that the teacher is perfect, that she or he never loses their temper or patience. It does not mean that the teacher will always be having a good day or will always be in a bright mood. It does mean however that they will aim to always be authentic and genuinely caring. That they will treat their students with respect and show each of them value as a human bring. It also means that they will attempt to create a caring community with all members of the class, encouraging the students to be empathic and compassionate participants.

Educators should be guides who truly listen to, care for and empathize with their students:

> "Children who feel their voices have value will be more willing to become active participants in their learning. They are more likely to learn how to

> listen to others and, in turn, understand the viewpoints of other people. Once we allow dialogue in our classroom and model ways to care, we allow our students the freedom to imagine how others should be treated, ways things should be, and solutions to problems that plague our society" (Phillips, 2003, p. 47).

When we allow ourselves and our students to exist in this imaginative, compassionate, and authentic space, truly holistic education, the development of the entire person, both teacher and student, can occur. It is in this space that "the beautiful, the decent, and the serious form a circle with joined hands" (Freire, 1998). It is in this space that we can begin to see and express the realities of injustice around us, and that our empathy and compassion compels us to work towards creating justice.

Influence of political and economic ideology on education

Before moving on, I would like to return briefly to the issue of crisis in education today by looking at a few of the major political and cultural forces that inevitably impact and shape our schools. Awareness of societal issues and their effects on education and the lives of students should also be a priority for teachers. It has been suggested that particularly those "teachers who are committed to examining social justice issues and fostering democratic principles through their teaching are obliged to consider how their pedagogical practices attend to the complex connections between culture and politics" (Darts, 2004, p. 314). As Darts (2004) very clearly states, it is imperative that educators be aware of the political and economic realities that shape our world. For years, the education system has been a part of "transmitting capitalist ideology" (Cole, p. 10). For this reason, I feel it is essential to bring this perspective into the discussion about educating for social change. Several educators have written about the enormous influence of capitalist ideology over the education system (Apple, 2006; Farahmandpur, 2005; Freire, 1998; Giroux, 2006; McLaren, 1995).

Education has helped to encourage the acceptance of capitalism and consumerism in various ways (Apple, 1996; McLaren, 1995). In order for a new and more equitable system to exist, education needs a radical shift. Cole states that the first step is to critique the current political and economic systems that are in place. Questions of how well the systems are working and who they are benefitting are key questions to be asked (Cole, 2005). It is also important to examine what kind of knowledge is really useful in society. Is the information being taught, in a formal and informal way, really helping people to be free and empowered? Does this curriculum help them to be caring citizens working for justice? In the same way that teachers need to demonstrate compassion in order to teach empathy, do schools need to be democratic in order to nurture a true democratic system? Is it the case that schools must value and foster creativity and imagination in their students and teachers in order for another world to be possible (Cole, 2005; Freire, 1998; Greene, 1995)?

In his discussion on globalization and its effects on education and social justice, Cole (2005) discusses Tony Blair's vision of globalization. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, President Bush was not the only one pushing for an increase in consumption and continued growth of global capitalism. Blair was adamant that globalization and modernization could be used "as a force for good" (Cole, 2005). He declared openly his vision of the world community coming together in a globalized way to create justice for all. This raised a fundamental question for me: Is it possible for there to be equality and justice in the global capitalist system? Cole's response to this question is explicit – global capitalism and social justice do not go hand in hand.

Globalization is not a new phenomenon. Despite the fact that the term has been used more frequently in recent years, globalization is not a new trend but a continuation of the capitalist agenda for growth and accumulation of wealth for a select few. Although proponents of globalization assert that it is a movement beneficial for all, we have seen time and time again that globalization is creating

more disparity than justice in the world. Those who advocate the type of globalization that is occurring in the world today often associate it with "democracy" and "freedom". They are very careful when choosing their words while addressing the issues and concerns surrounding globalization. These enthusiasts of globalization still operate under the Western hegemonic belief that capitalism, free trade and Western style democracy is the only way to conduct political and economic life. As a result, "any attack on capitalism as exploitive or hypocritical becomes and attack on world freedom and democracy itself" (Cole, 2005, p. 7).

If we listen to the voices on the other side of the globalization debate however, those voices who do not believe that global capitalism is benefitting everyone, we begin to hear about the destructive nature of this movement and the competition without restraint. We begin to see not the justice, fairness and equality that proponents of globalization claim, but rather destruction, greed and disparity, a growing competition between the largest companies for low-wage labour, natural resources and production output. We see small scale, local businesses around the world closing shop because they can no longer compete with these massive corporations, communities fighting against the industrial pollution of an outside company, a world that is becoming more polarized (Cole, 2005).

This is the world that our students will, and perhaps already do, face. This is a system that appears void of any real imagination to see a different way, and certainly a system that appears empty of any genuine empathy and care for all human beings and the earth. If it is true that capitalism is not "natural" (Cole, 2005) and that it is a system that will always be faced with economic and political injustices, what is the alternative? How do we convince a society of people who, for generations, have been indoctrinated into believing in the infallibility of capitalism, that there may be other systems that would work better, more justly? How do we assure these same people that a change is not something to be feared or seen as a threat to their freedom and quality of life? How can we bring hope to

those who believed in a better way, to those who have become cynical, or perhaps still long for a positive change? According to Cole, this is where education plays a vital role and where I would again argue the need for imagination and compassionate empathy.

Hope and imagination for a better world

Fishman and McCarthy (2007) recognize the need for teachers to have hope in order for them to teach effectively. They look to Paulo Freire for that hope. In doing so, they delve into what Freire's main ideological influences were, how these ideas informed his pedagogy, and how this model of pedagogy can help to give hope to educators and shape the way we teach.

Freire was very much influenced by the writings of Karl Marx. He especially identified with the idea that "class conflict [is] central to understanding human history" and that "only a fundamental, revolutionary transformation of society will bring about justice and equality" (McCarthy, 2007). His ideals were also shaped by neo-colonialism, understanding that the oppression in his country of Brazil was directly related to years of colonial oppression by Portugal (McCarthy, 2007). As a result, Freire put his energy into helping workers see themselves as valuable human beings. He found it extremely important that the workers empower themselves, "to appreciate the wisdom they already possess by renaming the world in light of their experience of oppression so that they can end oppression" (p. 37). This is where Freire's important concept of "conscientization" comes from; the idea that the oppressed really need to uncover the roots of their reality so that they can understand, unpack and change the myths that the dominant structures have perpetuated (p. 37).

This idea is applicable wherever oppression exists. Freire's existential ideas helped to deconstruct the role that the oppressor plays in ending oppression as well. The reality is that while oppressors exert their power, they themselves are imprisoning their own humanity. This is because the oppressors construct

their lives around the desire to "have" and "control" as opposed to "being" and enjoying life (p. 38). Freire asserts that this desire to control comes from fear and distrust, so in essence the oppressors are oppressed by this fear of not having control. It is important, therefore, for the people in power to also experience "conscientization" so that they too may be free. Freire uses the Christian belief of "death and rebirth" to call for an inner, individual revolution and change. In order for a radical social revolution, individuals must first change their hearts and minds. Like Christ, Freire stands in solidarity with the poor and believes strongly in valuing their wisdom and knowledge.

What relevance does Freire's influences and pedagogical philosophy have on teachers and schools today? Freire's ideas challenge educators to see teaching as a political act and to recognize the power structures that exist in the education system. He believes, as do others (Apple, 2006; Cole, 2005; Farahmandpur, 2005; Giroux, 2006; McLaren, 1995), that those in power use the education system to perpetuate the status quo. It is important that the educator be educated about oppressive social structures (p. 41) and that they challenge the power structures that are in place as they work towards creating a more just system. Teachers should be humble and willing to learn along side their students. In this way, teachers demonstrate an openness and solidarity with their students. Freire's ideology really challenges us, as educators, to create spaces of respect and justice building. We are encouraged to value our students' knowledge and experiences that exist outside of the classroom. Reading Freire's words can bring inspiration to a tired and frustrated teacher. Believing in Freire's ideas can bring hope to teachers working against oppression and for social justice. Embracing Freire's pedagogical ideals can help to support those engaged in creating strong communities and deep, meaningful change.

As educators, is it our responsibility to be critically aware of the world around us. Apple (1996) writes about the anger he feels when he sees the unjust political and economic structures in our world and the negative effect it has on education on a local and global scale. I, too, allow space for that anger when

witnessing and reflecting on these issues, but I cannot rest in the anger. I am inspired by Cole's (2005) call to reclaim our education systems. I do believe that change needs to occur and that another way of doing things is possible. As Freire asserts,

> "I have a right to be angry, to show it and use it as a motivational foundation for my struggle, just as I have a right to love and to express my love to the world and to use it as a motivational foundation for my struggle because I live in a history at a time of possibility and not determinism" (Freire, 1998, p. 71).

In order for others to see a need for change and to develop a desire for a truly just world, I insist again that they must have imagination and empathy. Empathy, the combination of understanding and compassion, is not possible if we do not have the ability to imagine. In genuine and transformative education, we are called to view teaching as a political and moral practice (Giroux, 2006). We should work towards making our classrooms compassionate places, where each student has a voice, where they care for one another and the world around them, and see possibilities for a truly fulfilling and just future (Greene, 1995). Imagination allows for us to have a vision for creating this type of world and equips us with the courage to act (Wilson, 2003). As teachers we can and should support our students in becoming and being "agents of institutional change" (Palmer, 2008).

Creating spaces to dream

To summarize the arguments presented in this chapter, then, in order for people to envision how a just world might be created, they need to be able to dream unlimited dreams. We must create more spaces and support those that already exist, where students are free to imagine and dream and express themselves. Spaces where they imagine what it is like to live, as much as possible, someone else's experience, so that they can be compassionate and understanding; spaces where ideas for a new and better world can be shared and collectively created. A transformation like this requires a "denouncing of the

process of dehumanization and an announcing the dream of a new society" (Freire, 1998, p. 74). Resistance to oppression in the name of compassion and justice is "both disruptive and creative" (Darts, 2004). In order to manifest change, we need to develop our languages of feeling so that we can express certain knowledges of empathy, understanding and justice (Robinson, 2001). Finally, if we recognize that change needs to occur and that both a moral imagination and compassionate empathy are crucial components of this change, what role does education have in this development? How do we teach compassionate empathy and nurture the growth of moral imagination? In what way can we lead our students to live courageous, loving and engaged lives? Is it possible to teach these things, and if so how do we do this in an effective and compelling way? I aim to explore and answer each of these important questions in the following chapters.

Chapter Three:
Acting for Change Through Art in Education

The kids today
They got nothing to say
They got nothing to say
Because they taught 'em that way
They mess with their hearts
And they mess with their minds
And they plug up their ears
And then they make 'em go blind

- *The Brian Jonestown Massacre, 1998*

Importance of guiding the imagination

Although it is believed that our ability to care and empathize is a natural response for most people, it has also been said that empathy is an ability that needs to be nurtured (Jackson, 2004; Noddings, 2005). Decety and Jackson (2004) refer to empathy as a "flexible human capacity […] a method of gaining knowledge of understanding another" (p. 94). This flexibility allows room for empathy to grow and deepen. In order for people to feel and respond in a genuine and compassionately empathetic way, the imagination can and should be educated (Greene, 1995; Warnock, 1979).

Empathy is perhaps a natural component of caring for others, but there are varying degrees of this capacity. It is an educator's responsibility, I would argue, to help their students develop a deeper capacity to care and empathize (Noddings, 2005). As this thesis has shown, part of this process of deepening empathy involves deepening the imagination. It is not enough, however, to simply have a vivid and well developed imagination. Some view imagination as being in connection to mere frivolous escapism or fanciful ideas, or more seriously as the catalyst to many atrocities, after all, "where else but from the dark recesses of imagination springs forth the evil of concentration camps, mustard gas?" (Esbin,

2008, p. 25). As a result of these perspectives, the imagination has been marginalized by some out of fear or simply viewing it as having no value, something that should not be encouraged. If we recognize the power of imagination to create malevolence and destruction, however, we must also see that the imagination has extraordinary possibilities in creating justice and healing. Like empathy, imagination is considered to be flexible and as such, can and does grow and deepen morally (Takaya, 2007). In order for people to be caring and moral beings, "imaginativeness is crucial" (Takaya, 2007, p. 29). Teaching in a critical and compassionate way means calling for "an ethical imagination", which leads to a deep empathy and a "suffering together" (McLaren, 1995).

In addition to exploring issues of injustice critically, which is very important, it is also necessary that we teach to imagine hope and the possibility of change (Greene, 1995). Knowing about injustices, the root causes of various forms of oppression, caring deeply about their effects, and having deep compassion for those oppressed by injustice can begin to mean very little without hope. Without a dream for change and a vision of a better world, we may begin to feel helpless, paralyzed in a way. Moreover, if we rest in that helplessness too long we may become hardened and cynical, giving up on the dream of making change. As compassionate educators, we should want to encourage community in our classrooms, awaken our students to the realities and possibilities of the world around them, promote "imaginative action, and [a] renewed consciousness of possibility" (Greene, 1995, p. 43). Education that both nurtures the imagination and hope as well as encourages criticality and questioning, invites its students to "write and rewrite their own lived worlds" (p. 147) and make new creations within the larger world around them.

I propose the use of two very powerful mediums in our society as a means of guiding the imagination in an ethical way and fostering compassionate empathy within our students. The first, which will be the focus of the remainder of this

chapter, is the arts, and the second, which I will focus on in the following chapter, is mainstream and independent or alternative media.

If we educate for social justice in hopes of real change, it is important that we value the role of imagination and creativity in this process. It is necessary also to recognize the need to guide the imagination in a positive way, to acknowledge the fact that art and compassion should be taught together, "beauty and decency, hand in hand" (Freire, 1998, p. 38). These qualities should be nurtured in all people with the idea that "purposeful imagination can transform reality" (Esbin, 2008, p. 26) in a very genuine and powerful way. Ethical imagining and compassionate creativity can and has led to revolutionary change. This reality can be "unsettling", perhaps even terrifying, particularly for those who hold power and do not want to see a change occur (Robinson, 2001).

As established in the previous chapter, a key element of empathy is perspective taking (Jackson, 2004); capturing, through imagination and emotions, another's point of view or experience. There can be several circumstances or stimuli that trigger an empathetic reaction, "for instance, when one sees another person in distress or in discomfort, when one imagines someone else's behaviour, by the reading of a narrative in a fiction book, or when one sees a moving television report" (p. 84). Art can be used in an educational setting, both formally and informally, to induce empathetic reactions. We can use art to foster the imagination and encourage compassionate understanding in regards to various issues of social justice. Art can be used to go beyond established borders of perception and feeling and lead "those who are willing to risk transformation to the shaping of social vision" (Greene, 1995, p. 30). The arts can be "powerful ways of unlocking creative capacities and of engaging the whole person" (Robinson, 2001, p. 11). Because promoting imagination and creativity is about the "freedom to learn, to create, to take risks, to fail or to ask questions, to strive, to grow" (Robinson, 2001, p. 195), this focus is essential to the common good of society. Imagination is what allows us to be creative and envision new

possibilities; creativity itself is not just an internal mental process, it is the application of imagination (Robinson, 2001). Work in the arts aiming to develop the imagination and empathy is done with the hope and intention that students will be compelled to act. Esbin (2008) discusses the term "imagineering", a combination of imagination and engineering, in which people picture an alternative way of doing or being and then work towards making it a reality.

Recognizing society's disregard for the arts

Considering the importance of imagination in creating empathy and change, and the potential role of the arts in strengthening the imaginative capacity, it is unfortunate that the arts are not valued more in education and society as a whole. When a culture is studied by historians, an important sign of development is its artistic accomplishments (Rich, 1968). What then, would be said of the development of modern Western society? Why is the term "struggling artist" so well known and accepted in our culture? Why is it that parents discourage their children from pursuing art as a career? I share the belief with Ivey (2008) that our society shows its respect and value for a particular vocation through monetary reward. This is why in a capitalist society such as ours, we have our highest paid individuals working in private companies and large corporations. Yet, we have those who work in the service industry, or non-profit organizations, or artists who are barely able to make ends meet.

This speaks volumes in regards to what we value in society. In some circles, artists are seen as unpredictable, troublemakers, and the types of individuals who warrant suspicion (Ivey, 2008). In both the United States and Canada, there have been millions of dollars in cuts to art programs (Ivey, 2008), and we can see a connection between the lack of support for the arts in schools and society in general (Ross, 2005). Many people, educators included, see the arts as a fringe benefit. I have heard some teachers say that the arts, theatre in particular, hold no specific value in comparison to the importance of academics

and things such as sports in building school spirit. These same teachers do however acknowledge that it is "fun" to see an art show or a play. The reality is that "many people still consider the arts to be mere entertainments, without practical use" (Greene, 1995, p. 134). Even teachers who are more supportive of the arts, with good intentions, often view art as an afterthought, only including it into their lessons if there is time (Rich, 1968).

The implications of cutting arts programs and keeping the arts on the edges of education instead of valuing them as a crucial component are immense. The devaluing of the arts does not just lessen the richness and development within schools but society in general, as we will be losing out on fostering creative, imaginative people who are the "artistic creators" of the present and future, and who will be the "innovative leaders who will improve the world they inherit" (Hetland, 2008, p. 29). Interestingly enough, in recent years, some members of the business community have emerged as strong supporters of the arts. When I was studying to get my Education degree, I worked part time as a bartender in our campus theatre. One weekend I was working for a conference being sponsored by a collection of large companies and corporations. The target audience for the speeches and workshops that weekend was specifically arts students. The main theme and message from big business that weekend was how valuable the art students were to business in terms of their ability to relate to others, their strong interpersonal skills and their creative ability to express themselves and generate new ideas. Freire (1998), too, writes about a new movement promoting arts programs in schools because of their valuable contribution to business.

But what of the human and emotional value of the arts? Many people can appreciate art but often do not fully grasp what art and the artists themselves really offer. They do not realize that the arts "feed an important part of our expressive life" (Ivey, 2008, p. 58). It is in our expressive life that we dream, imagine, create and love. Having a rich and meaningful expressive life is important for authentic happiness. It is when we develop our expressive

capabilities that we are able to show care and concern for other people. Far too often, the arts are placed in the margins, neglected or entirely forgotten, and given the current focus on "achievement", standardized testing, and the ability to compete in the global market, a call "to bring the power of the aesthetic learning to the forefront of the curriculum seems almost ludicrous" (Borgmann, 2007, p. 38). However, what are we sacrificing if we do not? Perhaps, we need to make our call, this desire for an education focused on emotional development and the arts, more loudly than ever before.

What can the arts accomplish?

> "Art, planted in a field of education and social action, is that seed – it can crack our classrooms open, and make possible a rich and wholly humanizing and vision-expanding education for every child. That is the catalyzing power of the arts" (Quinn, 2008, p. 37).

Through art, we can create "ideas in language and images that surprise and inspire" (Ivey, 2008, p. 64). The arts can lead to a balanced and high quality of life and a greater sense of connection to other people (Ivey, 2008; Rich, 1968). In the arts, people can reconnect with their own voices and the value they have as a person (Wilson, 2003). Responding to the question of why the arts and the use of creativity is important for all people, author Brenda Ueland responds: "Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects and money" (Ivey, 2008, p. 123). Willis (2004) lists nine characteristics that art in education would help to develop and that are much needed for an inclusive democracy (Willis, 2004). The first of these characteristics is *purposive attention*, which is when people become fully aware of their own realities (Willis, 2004). In our world of media-madness, this is probably the most crucial and difficult characteristic to create. People need to turn off their televisions, close their magazines, and look at the reality around them, not at the world created by

corporate media and advertising agencies. They need to create their own hopes and dreams and not simply accept those created for them. Once people emerge from this media-induced coma, they can start to really see and feel deeply again, and once they have their hearts and minds back, making changes for a just world becomes possible.

Willis argues that the arts will build the ability to be aware of ones physical body and desires, an awareness and appreciation of the natural environment, and becoming more emotionally affected and responsive to various forms of art (2004). From there people begin to feel "a constant feeling of connectedness" to themselves and others, no longer alienated or fearful of the "other" (2004). When the connectedness is there, people feel the sense of belonging and a desire to take action because of the deep sense of compassion felt for all of human and non-human beings (2004). Once a person has reached the point of developing this characteristic, in some ways there is no going back, they are filled with "a permanent desire for fairness and justice" (p. 270) and have the ability to embrace and celebrate differences, as opposed to fear or merely tolerate those differences. According to Willis, this is the power that the arts hold in helping to create a more just and sustainable way of life.

The arts and academic development

It is important to note that in addition to an intrinsic value, the arts can also contribute to educating in other ways. In 2002, an American organization, the Arts Education Partnership (AEP), published an extensive study on the relationship between art in education and various academic achievements. This study, *Critical Links: Learning in the Arts and Student Academic and Social Development* (Deasy, 2002*)*, contains 62 studies and various essays focusing on the effect of arts education in the areas of Reading and Language Development, Mathematics, Fundamental Cognitive Skills and Capacities, Motivation to Learn, Effective Social Behaviour and School Environment. The study found that when

students participate in dramatic enactments of stories and text, their reading comprehension and ability to read new texts improved (2002). Through the study, there was found to be a connection between various skills learned in music and helping to organize and produce more effective writing (2002). These skills also helped to generate reflective and creative writing as well as helping to understand certain mathematical concepts (2002). Studies focusing on the use of multi-arts education showed an increased capacity for "organizing and sequencing ideas…theorizing outcomes and sequences…problem solving…creative thinking (originality, elaboration, flexibility)" (p. 2).

There are also significant by-products of arts in education. Often, because experiences in the arts help to create meaning for students, they are more likely to attend class and work hard. There was shown to be a direct link between the arts and creating student ownership of their learning (2002). Some of the positive outcomes for students were "productive social membership, critical and higher-order thinking, and commitment to the skills for life-long learning" (p. 99). One study showed that students involved in the arts generally scored higher on standardized tests, those involved in music achieved higher in Math, and those involved with theatre were at a higher reading level and demonstrated higher self-assurance than those students not involved with the arts (2002). This same study also found that there was an important "relationship between arts involvement and academic performance…for students from low-socio-economic backgrounds" (p. 71). All of these findings show positive effects on academic achievement.

Several studies in *Critical Links* indicate that the arts also play a role in the important issue of student retention and graduation. In their essay *Promising Signs of Positive Effects: Lessons from the Multi-Arts Studies*, Horowitz and Webb-Dempsey (2002) note the significant effect the arts have on the school community. In the arts education classrooms, they observed a "relevancy of activities, respectful climate, and opportunities for learners to take responsibility…a context for learner-risk taking and increased motivation and

engagement" (p. 99). Another particular study in *Critical Links* on student retention revealed the arts as being one of the key reasons "at risk" students remained in school (Deasy, 2002). These students were asked if participation in the arts were a part of their decision to not drop out of school and eighty-three percent of them replied yes (Deasy, 2002). Those conducting the study found that the students' experiences in the arts helped to keep these students in school because of the ability of the arts to create "a context that promotes the constructive acceptance of criticism, a positive and supportive social environment where it is safe to take risks, meaningful opportunities to achieve artistic and creative satisfaction, and the development of self-discipline" (p. 75).

In my own teaching experience, I have had many students tell me that their Drama or Visual Art class was the main reason that they came to school. Other students have shared with me that because of their experiences in theatre, they were able to gain self-confidence and express themselves in ways they had never been able to do before. These students noted that this growth in self-assurance carried into their other classes, where they put in more effort and began to take more pride in their work. They were more willing to ask questions, take more risks and as a result be more fully engaged in the subject matter. Both teachers and administrators have commented on the positive effect of the arts in helping to create an encouraging and unified school culture (Deasy, 2002). With all of the positive discoveries in the study, Horowitz and Webb-Dempsey assert that "administrators and policy-makers can be secure in supporting strong arts programs based on the evidence presented" (p.99).

Finally, and again for me, most importantly, a common theme throughout the *Critical Links* (2002) report was that of personal growth and the nurturing of empathy. Along with noting improvements in academics, many of the individual studies in *Critical Links* refer to the remarkable connection between the arts and a culture of understanding and acceptance (Deasy, 2002). This theme was one addressed in a commencement speech given to Harvard graduates by author J.K.

Rowling, in June of last year. Rowling (2008) spoke in great detail of her experience working in the African research department of Amnesty International, the heartbreaking letters she read and the ex-political prisoners and torture victims she met (Rowling, 2008). She makes it very clear in her speech that there is a distinct connection between imagination, empathy and positive social change:

> "I have learned to value imagination in a much broader sense. Imagination is not only the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and therefore the fount of all invention and innovation. In its' arguably most transformative and revelatory capacity, it is the power that enables us to empathise with humans whose experiences we have never shared… The power of human empathy, leading to collective action, saves lives, and frees prisoners. Ordinary people, whose personal well-being and security are assured, join together in huge numbers to save people they do not know, and will never meet. My small participation in that process was one of the most humbling and inspiring experiences of my life" (Rowling, 2008).

Sharing Rowling's views, Greene (1995) echoes the sentiments of Rowling's speech and states that at the root of many societal and political problems is an absence of imagination. According to Greene, the arts are a catalyst for "active learning" (1995), inviting students and teachers to see everything in a new way, to question their assumptions and prevailing societal myths, to be moved to action and seek "more vibrant ways of being in the world" (p. 5).

Art as a catalyst for social change

As people living in an individualistic society, we often do not see ourselves in relation to the whole, or understand our role in connection to other people (Palmer, 2003). Part of this lack of awareness, of the realities of interconnection and roles we can play as individuals affecting the lives of others, is a result of lack of personal reflection and a very deep sense of apathy. In the

type of consumption fuelled culture we have set up for ourselves, many people are exhausted and overworked, trying to gain access to the latest goods and services, and others are working constantly to survive. This has left many people with little time to sit in silence, walk slowly through nature, and breathe deeply while pondering the world around them, to say nothing of developing meaningful relationships with those around them. A great many people just feel that they don't have the energy to care, or perhaps even worse yet, they have never be encouraged or taught to care and so apathy rests heavily within them.

Another aspect that prevents us from seeing ourselves as part of the whole is a lack of agency or sense of importance or power. As a result of feeling particularly inconsequential in the realm of formal politics, many people have given up on participating in the creation of our world realities altogether. A clear indication of this, both a lack of agency and an abundance of apathy, is the embarrassingly low voter turnout numbers here in Canada. In order to encourage participation and empowerment, people need to see themselves as part of something, to see themselves in connection to other people and the natural world.

Through the arts, we see both a reflection of and a guiding of society (Ross, 2005). Art is what helps us to uncover a thing's essence and moves us out of the routine and taken for granted (Barrell, 2003; Darts, 2004; Greene, 1995). The arts "teach us new ways of thinking, feeling, and perceiving" (P. Jackson, 1998, p. 33). If one genuinely engages in art, in a meaningful way, a change of some kind occurs; art can expand our perspectives, alter our attitudes, heighten our awareness, deepen our knowledge, and intensify our emotional range (P. Jackson, 1998).

Art should lead to an aesthetic experience, of heightened senses, emotions, and perceptions and because of this, "art is intrinsically worthwhile" (Rich, 1968, p. 127). Participating in the creation of art can lead to greater mindfulness (Serafin, 2007) which is something rare in our fast paced society, always looking

ahead to the next meeting, next point in the agenda, next paycheque. Being mindful asks us to be in the present moment, we are asked to be fully engaged in the content and context, and be open to the process of learning to see things anew (Serafin, 2007). I echo Quinn's sentiments: "For me, the right direction in education is always art" (2008, p. 34). Just as we all have a natural curiosity and ability to learn (Barth, 2001), so too do we all have natural desires and abilities to create. I am reminded of a version of a quote by Pablo Picasso where he said, "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once the child grows up". This statement supports the belief that creating and expressing ourselves through art is more instinctive and universal as opposed something that needs to be taught or is a talent belonging only to a select group of individuals.

Picasso's statement also addresses the issue discussed earlier about education and society neglecting to foster our imaginations and creativity. If we agree with the idea that we are all inherently artists and value the importance of the arts in our lives, we should work to have it take a more prominent place in education. The use of art in education has been shown to increase and develop our imagic stores, which are "mental constructs retained from lived or imagined experiences" (Borgmann, 2007, p. 24), which in turn deepens our senses, our range of aesthetic compassion and develops diverse ways of expressing and feeling (Rich, 1968). This broadening of aesthetic understanding is what leads to empathy. This type of aesthetic education requires direct awareness and involvement, reflection and critical thinking (Greene, 1995).

Because the arts and social justice often seem to go hand in hand, many teachers in the arts instinctively teach "for social imagination by choosing art works to interpret that are provocative and teach hope and possibility", in doing so "the arts can help students find their individual capacity to feel and imagine" (Borgmann, 2007, p. 26). If we are to teach in a way that asks our students to fully engage in the development of their emotions and imagination in a compassionate way, choosing art to explore that is deemed as "acceptable" or

"appropriate" is likely not going to be enough (Greene, 1995). Choosing safe, mainstream art for our classrooms will not necessarily lead to the kinds of questioning, feeling and growth that we might hope for in our students. We must be willing to have the courage to choose art that will challenge and move our students to wake-up, to question, to resist. In order for there to be an opportunity for immense and deep transformation, we must be sure to include the voices of those artists (and issues) who have been silenced or pushed to the margins (Greene, 1995). In this way, "aesthetic education transcends art for art's sake, for it contributes to creating a participatory culture that promotes the rights of everyone to fully participate in the organization, maintenance, and transformation of daily life" (Picher, 2007, p. 79).

Throughout history, both professional and amateur artists, on both a local and global level have worked towards revolution and social change. These artists have been critics of governments and various injustices. For centuries, "oppositional artists have utilized their work to inspire, offend, and enrage audiences, to awaken the conscious, and to communicate ideas and emotions otherwise difficult to articulate" (Darts, 2004, p. 318-319). Social movements from all places in time and all over the world have "benefitted from the work of artists who were passionately engaged with and often enraged with the issues of the day" (Quinn, 2008, p. 33). One such contemporary art form today is the political art of Culture Jammers, seen in the streets, on billboards, in shopping malls, in an attempt to reclaim public space and culture. These jammers take images and objects that have bombarded the public by corporate culture and reform them in an artistic way to provoke questioning in their public audience, in hopes of creating dialogue and rethinking the oppressive structures of corporate culture. Some culture jammers refer to themselves specifically as "space-jammers" and use nature in their formation of art, by planting flowers, for example, in the middle of a large, concrete parking lot as a statement about our disconnection from nature but also speaking to the resilient power that nature holds.

The arts can, and Greene (1995) argues *should*, shock us into awareness of the realities of injustice in our world. Worthwhile art is not always pleasant and enjoyable. In fact, many times, art will leave us feeling uncomfortable or disconcerted but without the arts to challenge us, we become thought-less and complacent (Greene, 1995).

Art and democracy

In his article *Popular Education and the Democratic Imagination,* Willis (2004) explores the relationship between imagination and renewing democracy. He asserts that we are at a time in which capital profit is more valued than community, creativity, equality and justice and because of this we need to rebuild and cultivate a truly democratic society (Willis, 2004). Genuine democracy strives for compassion and fairness; it is when people "seek to construct a shared life of freedom, equality and inclusivity" (p. 265). In order for this life to be created, we must first imagine and reflect on the possibilities (Willis, 2004). We currently live in a society where competition is encouraged and many people look out for only themselves. We have lost a real sense of community and caring for one another. In order to rebuild a sense of community and compassion for a democratic society, we must nurture our imaginations. Through our imaginations we can "allow the imagination of another to enter our own" (p.267). Once we have a deepened sense of empathy, Willis states that we will then be motivated internally, naturally, to be conscious of what is best for everyone, not just ourselves (2004).

In his article, Willis discusses ways in which education can foster the imagination in order to allow compassion and democracy to grow. Like other skills that can be developed through practice, we also need to practice imagining. Willis names two processes that are essential to this type of pedagogy. The first is the "visioning process" where people use their imaginations to formulate new ways of creating equality and the second process is the "grounding process" of putting oneself into another person's position, attempting to understand their

experiences and emotions (Willis, 2004). Willis asserts that these processes are not just limited to a small, local sphere but it calls to "evoke compassionate understandings and fellow feelings for others in the local, national and world community" (p. 269). Through these *visioning* and *grounding* processes we can use education and the arts to:

> "evocatively – not analytically – draw from learners an empathetic and compassionate 'feel' for inclusive democracy… [use] stories of inclusive democratic life to encourage learners to create their own inclusive visions and to withdraw from and reject the grand narratives of competitive consumerism" (p. 270).

Willis feels very strongly that another way of living needs to be imagined in order for there to be justice and true democracies; societies in which people no longer tolerate oppression but live in community with one another. He believes that before any type of change can occur, people need to be inspired in their hearts and minds (Willis, 2004). In my view, art in education can do just that. Art can allow people to feel deeply and express themselves in ways they might not otherwise, asks us to see beyond our own experiences and challenges us to look at the world in a new light (Kertzner, 2000). Art can express for us, in a language other than words, our fears, our concerns and our dreams for change. Art reaches us on a level that moves us to look for "new combinations, new interpretations" (p. 4) necessary for positive social change. It is because "the arts 'incite, excite, and irritate' that they can instigate change in people and events" (Quinn, 2008, p. 32).

In his essay, *The Arts And Public Talk: Rejuvenating Democracy Through Imagination*, Daniel Kertzner (2000) also argues that we live in a world of isolation, one in which we do not know our neighbours much less understand them. We are missing our connection and knowledge of one another and as a result we often neglect or seem unable to partake in dialogue, which is vital for achieving deep compassion. Genuine and transformative dialogue is "a common search for understanding, empathy or appreciation" (Noddings, 2005, p.23). It is

crucial to have love, compassion, and empathy in dialogue and revolutionary change; it is through this sincere dialogue that people have the opportunity to "learn and grow by confronting their differences" (Freire, 1998, p. 59) and their similarities.

Noddings (2006) laments the fact that there is very little genuine dialogue in schools and classrooms as it is essentially this dialogue that brings us collectively together. Authentic dialogue requires us to be reflective and hopeful in envisioning positive change (Freire, 1998). This pursuit of justice for all humanity and the natural world that we inhabit must be sought together, in solidarity. In order to reconnect with one another and ourselves, we can use art as a place to begin to foster necessary dialogue. Through film and photography for example, we can be "left with huge and provocative questions […] the kinds of questions that can be refined only by sensitive inquiry, by dialogue, by connectedness" (Greene, 1995, p. 102). In the arts, we can come together in public spaces and discuss how to create understanding and positive change for the common good (Wilson, 2003).

Incorporating literature and theatre

While, many forms of the arts have a powerful role to play in the dialogue and work for change, I would like to specifically focus on literature and theatre, two art forms that I have had the most personal experience with. I will consider how we can make use of these forms to powerfully engage emotions and imaginations in order to deepen empathy and understanding.

Literature

In my third year of teaching I was already tired and frustrated by the lack of support for the arts in the education system. During our Teacher's Convention that year I went to hear a local author speak about the connection between

Literature and Democracy. I drank in his words as he articulated for me what I had always held to be true about the arts. It was so revolutionary yet so obvious! In a democratic, pluralist culture there needs to be empathy, understanding, dialogue, creative solutions and the ability to always imagine a better way of doing things; and literature can be used as a way of bringing us to this place.

Literary imagination is an "essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own" (Nussbaum, 1995, p. xvi). Both Johnson (1993) and Nussbaum (1995) believe that unless we work to nurture the growth of this type of imagination, we will be unable to have a real respect for others or to seek and promote social justice in a compelling way. In much of her writing, Greene (1995) cites examples of the powerful possibilities of literature. The primary purpose of literature is to help bring meaning to various issues and experiences by "inducing feelings in the reader" (Wilson, 2003, p. 214). Novels, in particular, with their rich character and story development, are often successful in cultivating emotions and meaning. A novel often begins with a theme, and within this theme the author places a story of human wants, needs, and struggles within the context of a certain social situation (Nussbaum, 1995). Even though the specific situation created by the author usually differs from that of the reader, the reader still connects with the characters and issues based on the basic human emotions that both they and the characters share. This sharing of emotions creates a connection and identification with the characters and the situations they are in, allowing the reader to draw parallels and contrasts between the world of the characters and of their own (Nussbaum, 1995). Of course, not every piece of writing is going to provoke a sense of justice and reflection on important issues in the same way and this is why it is important to consider and be mindful of which works to use in the classroom.

Hilder (2005) is a strong proponent of using literature as a way of developing the moral imagination. We go about doing this by "creating

compelling literary experiences of moral goodness" (Hilder, 2005, p. 43) based upon the literature we choose to use in our classrooms. The goal of using literature in this way is to foster "competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (Hilder, 2005, p. 43). As we engage in texts that are meaningful and based around moral goodness or injustices, realizations, questions, and concerns begin to come to life within our students. When this begins to take place in the imaginations of students, the teacher is responsible for guiding these realizations and for helping their students to form their own interpretations and convictions (Greene, 1995). This is an important part of teaching for social justice and moral courage. Those who teach in hopes of bringing positive change to the world have a responsibility in choosing pieces of study that will help to foster this type of change. As influential author Madeleine L'Engle asserts,

> "we either add to the darkness or indifference and out-and-out evil which surrounds us or we light a candle to see by […] Our responsibility to [children] is not to pretend that if we don't look, evil will go away, but to give them weapons against it" (Hilder, 2005, p. 43).

Literature can be used as a spotlight to focus on the realities of injustice, as a mirror for personal reflection and as a vehicle to acquire other perspectives and ways of viewing the world. If we are teaching for compassion and social change, this requires us as educators to choose literature in which the protagonists act out of moral courage, choosing what is the right, not necessarily the easiest action (Hilder, 2005). This does not mean, however, that we shy away from pieces of writing that are controversial or include violent or oppressive characters and events. Part of teaching for justice is enabling our students to see what it is that needs to change. Nussbaum argues that good literature is good because "it summons powerful emotions, it disconcerts and puzzles. It inspires distrust of conventional pieties and exacts painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions" (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 5). Literature, particularly fiction, can help students to see problems and inequalities, developing compassion and understanding for the characters and situations, and create possible actions and

solutions. Greene (1995) discusses using literature (and other forms of art) to incite students to think more deeply about issues in all subjects, across the curriculum. Engaging students in writing activities that extend their analytic and imaginative capabilities, such as creating an interview with one of the characters, writing a speech or journal entry from a characters' point of view, developing a conversation between a few characters or writing a letter as or to a character in a novel, asks that the student be intensely engaged, understanding and empathetic (Hilder, 2005).

The act of writing can be seen as a political one, in which we are allowed to dream, to bring to light injustices and to rewrite more equitable and compassionate stories (Freire, 1996; Wilson, 2003). Narrative can have us exercise our moral imaginations, change the way we view right and wrong, and can prompt us to act in a more just manner (Johnson, 1993). We are invited by literature to be active participants in creating our own lives, the kinds of people we want to be and the type of world we want to exist around us. This is passionately proclaimed in the film "Dead Poets Society" by the charismatic teacher, John Keating:

> "We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for. To quote from Whitman, "O me! O life!... of the questions of these recurring; of the endless trains of the faithless... of cities filled with the foolish; what good amid these, O me, O life?" Answer. That you are here – that life exists, and identity; that the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. That the powerful play goes on and you may contribute a verse. What will your verse be?"

Literature should encourage us to ponder this question of how we will live our lives, of the effect we will have on the earth and other people, to consider what our verse will be.

In my own personal experience with literature, I would (and still do) devour pieces of fiction, stepping into the world of the characters that come to life for me. Some of these novels, being written in such a rich way, have brought me to laughter and at times even to tears. I have not merely been entertained or emotionally moved by the novels I have read but I have learned so much about injustices, politics, history and love. I am reminded specifically of one of my favourite novels, *Ecotopia* by Earnest Callenbach when I reflect on this learning. In the book, a group of citizens have broken away from the rest of the United States to create their own utopia, living in balance with one another and nature. They are not against "development" and technology but they question overconsumption and blind acceptance of the way things operate in the rest of the United States. They rely on human creativity and ingenuity to redesign their political, social and economic system. In this system people have a true voice in how life is lived. It is a world that as I read deeper and deeper into the novel, I wanted desperately to experience. It is a world I hope to one day witness in similar existence. It was through reading this novel, among others, that I found myself vividly imagining new ways to live and was challenged to see the possibilities of creating a better world.

Theatre

Theatre can be an art form that is equally powerful. While in University, I was in several plays with social or political themes and I saw how these plays affected the audience and created dialogue as people gathered in the lobby after the show. The scenes and messages in the scripts had a powerful effect on us, the actors, as well. In one particular play, *Bousille and the Just*, by Canadian playwright Gratien Gélinas, I played the role of a woman who had been abused by a man on trial for murder. This role was one of the most difficult roles for me to play. Before going on stage, I sat, imagining this woman's life; falling in love with this man, trusting him and feeling connected to him. Then I imagined both the physical and emotional pain, the fear so great it was almost paralyzing. While

on stage as this woman, I had to tell her story. Every night, after getting off stage, I would go to the green room and cry. Every night. I would think of this woman I had embodied over the months and I would think about women who had similar stories, and I would cry.

By no means do I believe that this experience lead me to knowing exactly how women in this situation feel and or how they are able to cope. I am fully aware of the fact that their realities did not end as soon as the stage lights went out, providing them with relief that it was all over and a knowledge that they could return to their safe homes. An experience like this did, however, challenge me to broaden my imagination and deepen my sense of understanding and empathy. This type of imaginative role play, taking on a perspective or experience of another person, can be a powerful tool in the classroom. By "acting out" or "through" various situations, students can reflect on and develop their own identity and attempt to gain an understanding of other people and the complex world around them.

Palmer (2003) argues that theatre can encourage us to see ourselves as a vital part of the action. Through theatre, participants are encouraged to take on emotions felt by certain characters or experience various situations, in a safe and controlled environment. We can use this imaginary playing as a way to step "out of the confines of reality to imagine new identities and scenarios" (Rosoff, 2007, p. 59). In this way, various social issues can be explored and the important ability of perspective taking is practiced.

As with the teaching of literature, it is important in theatre for the educator or facilitator to choose scripts, other works and scenarios which explore topics that can lead to moral growth. By allowing students to explore and experience a variety of emotions and issues through dramatic guided play, we aid in the expansion and deepening of their empathetic range (Kristjansson, 2004). Instead of shielding or "protecting" students from certain topics, I would argue that the

arts, particularly literature and theatre, are ideal places in which to safely and critically explore controversial and important issues. Delving into these issues can play an important role for the individual and for the community as a whole.

Examples of theatre effecting change

A very strong first example of theatre working to impact understanding is one referred to by Amy and David Goodman (2008) in their book *Standing up to the Madness.* They share with the reader a story of a high school teacher and her students in the U.S. creating a play based upon interviews with and writings of soldiers who have personally experienced the war in Iraq (Goodman, 2008). Particularly because of the differing views in regards to this war, from people within the U.S. and around the world, the students felt it was a very important issue to explore and present to their community. The play was entitled *Voices in Conflict* because it aimed to represent all perspectives and points of view pertaining to the war. Despite this, some members of the community heard about the students rehearsing to perform this play and deemed it anti-war and therefore unpatriotic. Although the students and their teacher allowed the script to be publicly viewed and insisted it was not taking political sides but was an attempt to bring to light the realities of war and to encourage people to contemplate the issues involved, the play was banned from being performed in both the school and centers around the community. In spite of the community attempting to silence these students and any dialogue surrounding the war, word did get out and a larger dialogue began to take shape. Professional actors from the Dramatists Guild of America heard about the attempt to ban the play and sent letters to the superintendent of the school condemning this type of censorship. As word began to spread, more voices from the public were urging for the performance of the play, claiming the need for the important issues addressed within it to be heard. Through controversy, this theatre group and the play they created brought a larger community of people together to discuss important ideas about war and peace, censorship and dialogue, and about the human experience within all of these

issues. In the end, they were invited to perform their play in the Public Theatre in New York City and were given the "Courage in Theatre Award" from Music Theatre International (Goodman, 2008).

Another example of theatre effecting change, (in this case seeking to bring together community and dialogue) is Ping Chong & Company, a New York based theatre and art company. The group focuses on a " 'talk, reveal, and seek to understand' approach to theatre [that] 'moves us toward unification, toward diminishing the barriers between peoples, and thus toward embracing all that is good in civilization'" (Samson, 2005, p. 71). Along with many others involved in educational theatre, Chong believes strongly in the idea of "learning by doing", as such he uses various theatre games in his workshops to teach and evoke certain emotions and realizations (Samson, 2005). One game in particular is used to form circles within the group, using tape and string, having some participants in the main group and some outside, as a literal way of showing inclusion and exclusion. From what seems like a simple and perhaps meaningless exercise, participants said they became aware of their own feelings and were able to express those feelings and thoughts about how it felt to be either and "insider" or an "outsider" (Samson, 2005).

According to Chong, this type of work "leads us to look at ourselves critically and nurtures and increases our empathy for others" (Samson, 2005, p. 80). The company creates and performs a type of "documentary theatre" that explores and presents issues of social injustice. These performances are based upon actual experiences of people who have lived through civil wars, work camps, hate crimes, etc. During these performances, "the people on stage are having a communion with the audience. And a communion with a group of people is a very powerful act. Consequently, documentary theatre can inspire and educate" (Samson, 2005, p. 72).

Similarly to the idea I mentioned earlier in this chapter about a lack of seeing outside ourselves and our connection to others, a woman interviewed after seeing one of Chong's pieces on the atrocities experienced by people in Liberia, Iran, and Kosovo, stated that" In America, we are not comfortable knowing 'too much information' …We often have 'tunnel vision' … This presentation, even for the short time [it] lasted, pushed aside my tunnel vision … the horror that [these] people went through is mind-boggling" (Samson, 2005, p. 77). In many instances, theatre can open our eyes, renew our sense of connection with others, and provoke a very real emotional response. It is nearly impossible that this type of theatre leave an audience unaffected or unaware of a need for change (Samson, 2005).

As established earlier, through art, a real life change can occur when we really see and hear other people's experiences, how they see the world and realize it may not be like our own. Quite often when we are awakened by art in this way, when we are forced to take the blinders off, we see the oppression of others and we may become aware of our own privilege. This recognition of injustice and privilege is for some, an uncomfortable place to be. It is, however an important step in making change. Theatre can be used to get us to that point of reflection and uncomfortable realization. By viewing and creating art that addresses issues of horrible injustice, we are exposed to "images and figures that speak directly to our indignation, to some dimension of ourselves where we connect with others. They open our eyes, they stir our flesh, they may even move us to try to repair our world" (Greene, 1995, p. 143).

Theatre of the oppressed

The medium of theatre, in both a formal and informal context can be a powerful tool in engaging the imagination and offering emotional experiences. When I was taking my Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Drama, I was briefly

introduced to Popular (sometimes known as Guerrilla) Theatre. This style of theatre is often used as a form of protest, a tool for education and a catalyst for dialogue. It is effective in evoking genuine responses from the audience, since usually the audience is not aware of the fact that they are witnessing (and sometimes participants in) a piece of theatre. The "performance" often takes place in public spaces – in streets, schools, shopping malls, or business centres. As part of a Theatre History class, I did a group presentation using Guerrilla Theatre. The professor, being in on the "play" that our group members had scripted, came into class announcing a pop quiz. A few minutes into the quiz, one of my group members vocally called attention to my "cheating" and let her disapproval known. Soon, the professor joined in, threatening to take my quiz away and give me a zero. As planned, I flatly denied that I had been cheating. Fellow students, not aware that they were involved in a piece of theatre, responded to the situation before them with passion and intensity. A few students came to my defence, not believing that I would cheat and were appalled by the unfair accusations of both the other students and our professor. After a few minutes of this, we revealed that this had all been a performance and what they had all just witnessed and participated in was a form of Guerrilla Theatre. Fuelled with a desire to discuss and debate, a discourse began as we all strove to reach an understanding of the issues brought forth through our presentation. This short performance, as simple as it was, brought up complex issues of fairness, blame, injustice and oppression.

It was through this experience that I realized the power of this form of theatre. Many other examples of Popular or Guerrilla theatre that I have witnessed or that friends of mine have been involved in have had a much more explicit social or political message. One example that comes to mind is of a group of activists who gathered in a GAP store, when there was first being pressure put on this company from some members of the public to end the use of sweatshop and child labour. The activist actors brought with them a child and placed him in a visible area of the store. While the child sat sewing an article of

clothing, the actors, posing as shoppers, reacted in horror to this child making the clothes they were about to buy, while others defended the reality, claiming necessity for the child to work. Other (actual) shoppers began to be visibly uncomfortable and either left the store or began to dialogue with the actors about this issue, a few stating that they were not aware of the issues of sweatshop labour. Before the manager of the store became aware of this disruption and realized it was in fact some sort of act, the actors were able to discuss with a few of the customers the complex issue of sweatshop labour and the need for just working conditions for all people. Another example is the story a friend of mine told me about a piece of Popular Theatre they did in their school cafeteria to draw awareness of both poverty and wastefulness in our society. In this case, the actors used costumes to aid in their statement but the effect on the "audience" was still powerfully obvious. A few of the actors dressed in expensive business attire, donned pigs snouts and sat at a table with hoards of food, while the majority of the actors, wearing tattered and dirty clothing walked through the cafeteria looking for scraps and digging perfectly good pieces of food out of the garbage. After barely touching their food, the "pigs" made a huge production out of throwing it all away. While this piece of theatre could be criticized for reducing the issue of poverty and greed to stereotypical representation and not addressing the real complexity of poverty, a point was still made and reactions were evoked. One girl interviewed afterwards was visibly appalled at not just what she saw but by the realization of how she herself was wasteful. This piece of theatre brought into her consciousness this issue and as a result this student was moved to make changes in her own life.

Guerrilla Theatre falls under the larger title of Theatre of the Oppressed. Sometimes known as Forum Theatre, Theatre of the Oppressed was created by Brazilian activist and popular educator, Augusto Boal. This form views theatre as a political act, citing it as tool for developing community and constructing direct democracy (Picher, 2007). In this way, we can use "theatre not as spectacle but as a learning process that fosters critical thinking" (Picher, 2007, p. 79). Theatre of

the Oppressed is a political and participatory form of theatre that is based on six major beliefs. These tenets are as follows: 1) human beings are innately creators and artists, 2) we are inherently actors and life is "theatre", through dialogue and transformation of self and surroundings, we experience and create what Boal called "essential theatre" , 3) it is the responsibility of society to help all people develop their innate capacity to create and dialogue, 4) we should have a concern with the "ethical poverty of capitalism" and this global economic system emphasizing profits over the well-being of people and the environment, 5) this global system is responsible for the creation of class and dominant ideology that validates exploitation and domination (by making them appear natural and necessary), and 6) transforming images of reality and creating genuine dialogue is in itself a transformative act and can lead to real and lasting change (Picher, 2007). Theatre of the Oppressed focuses on making theatre accessible to all people and encouraging them to see that everyone can "act" and that they can be actors of change and empowerment in their own lives (Picher, 2007).

Another type of Theatre of the Oppressed is Forum Theatre, where issues of morality and justice (or injustice) are the focus. This type of theatre is the "art of organizing and community building and brings us another step closer to a just and compassionate society" (Picher, 2007, p. 87). These issues are presented and discussed in a non-threatening way, and audiences members are presented scenarios relating to their own lives and experiences (Picher, 2007). The play presented is scripted by cast members, based on their own personal experiences. Many of the themes addressed through Forum Theatre revolve around various issues of oppression, violence, racism, homophobia, sexism. Since the main purpose of this type of theatre is to provoke dialogue and participation, in hopes of creating a better way of life and methods of combating oppression, a vital component of the experience is the workshopping that occurs throughout the presentation. Although the order can be varied depending on the group and situation, Forum Theatre always includes a presentation of the play, a workshop (facilitated by the actors, usually in small groups) creating dialogue about the

issues, and a second performance of the piece in which the audience members are invited (by the main facilitator of the group, known as the "joker") to be participants in the action on stage. Day (2002) writes about Forum Theatre presentations given to secondary students in London, England. The play created by the group of actors centered around issues confronted by refugee students and youth, as well as the issue of poverty and homelessness. As such, the group recruited actors who lived on the street or in shelters and those who had the personal experience of being a refugee (Day, 2002).

Along with promoting empowerment, one of the hopes of Forum Theatre is to foster a sense of empathy and solidarity with those who are oppressed. One of the students interviewed after the workshop noted that the play was realistic, making it easy for her and others to imagine themselves in the situation of both oppressed and bystander (Day, 2002). While the play is performed a second time, students are invited to stop the action and take their place on stage to make the scenario better or to deal with the situation in a more just way. Day notes that "during the interventions the students 'join the adults, they become the teachers and activists, they're the ones making the change and become part of the teaching group'" (p. 26). Those involved in the process also observe that what begins as sympathy in the students transforms into empathy, a deeper understanding and compassion, while dialoguing and processing during the workshop (Day, 2002).

In the small group discussions, students related the empathy they felt for one of the refugee characters on the stage to refugee students they knew at school (Day, 2002). It was found that students also transferred this feeling of empathy to human experiences in general when they began to consider that it may not only be refugees or people who are homeless who are marginalized, but also anyone seen as "different". These students may have already known of the importance of empathy and compassion but the Forum Theatre presentation and workshop certainly seemed to reinforce it (Day, 2002).

Another result of the students participating on stage and trying out certain behaviours or tactics within the fictional setting of the play, is that the students were able to realize "the forces in real life situations which inhibit these behaviours" (p. 29) that work for change. According to Day, it was very clear that the presentation and workshop "provoked a desire among students to 'do something'" (p. 29). Interviews conducted two months after their Forum Theatre experience revealed that several students were interacting more with refugee students, a few had broken off friendships with those who were bullying other students, some had started a collective action of fundraising for certain organizations for refugees – all stated that it was a direct result of their engagement and participation in Forum Theatre (Day, 2002).

Despite the fact that the students were energized and inspired when interviewed directly after the workshop, frustration was very apparent during the two month interviews. It was explained that the reason behind the frustration was that the teachers did not continue to follow up with what had transpired through the workshop. The students were infused with empathy and felt compelled to act but they felt that they needed more adult support to really be successful in some of their actions (Day, 2002). Clearly, teacher empathy and support is an important aspect of helping to cultivate change and to nurture compassionate action.

While I studied to obtain my Bachelor of Education degree, I was part of a theatre collective called Mirror Theatre. This group used Forum Theatre to educate youth on various social issues. One show that we developed and brought to schools throughout the province was based on school violence. Through the script and work-shopping we explored issues of power, hierarchy, gender construction, homophobia, and silence being implicit acceptance of violence. Again and again, through dialogue in small groups with the students, I witnessed students express feelings of empathy with both those who were oppressed and those who stood by to watch the oppression take place. Through this process, another moment of discovery was when certain students identified themselves as

the oppressor. It was in these moments that a powerful dialogue and healing began between the oppressor and the oppressed. Some of these students said that the oppressive characters on stage resonated with them, and until seeing the play had not fully realized the suffering that they had caused for some of their peers. A few students countered this realization with the claim that some of their peers know that they are being oppressive and violent and yet they do it anyway. I posed a question to the group that if we are aware of the suffering we can inflict because of our violent words and actions, why do we do it? One of the girls in the group responded that she did not really know many of the people she went to school with and as a result did not really care how her actions or words affected them. She claimed to only care about her friends' feelings or people she knew. I was surprised by this response and believe it speaks to the importance of fostering community and empathy.

We often speak about the fact that aspects of our culture desensitize people, and I agree with this sentiment, however it also seemed to me in talking with this particular group, that these youth had missed out on being sensitized in the first place. I led the students through a guided imagery exercise of various scenarios of oppression and violence, requiring them to imagine in the place of a stranger, one of their friends or family members. When we reflected together on the exercise at the end of the workshop, the girl who had spoken earlier said that through the experience of imagining, she was better able to understand the feelings of others, even if they were "strangers". This is not to say that this realization changed her behaviour towards others immediately or consistently, but it did spark in her an element of empathic understanding. If we were all to adopt this practice, this way of imagining in our day to day lives and interactions with people, to see all people as friends and family, perhaps it would bring about more compassion and social change.

A necessary part of this education is the engagement of dialogue and debriefing after viewing this type of theatre. Especially after witnessing or

hearing about injustices that people have and do face, or being exposed to issues that some may deem as controversial, it is crucial to process the thoughts and feelings that arise through the piece. A very important part of emotional and moral educating is that we critically analyze the issues and our reactions to them. Just as this process is important for the audience, it is equally important for the actors or participants of workshops or drama classes to have the opportunity for this debriefing after these types of exercises or performances as well.

Diverse art forms, diverse expression

In my own life and in the lives of my students, the arts have played a crucial role in expression and creation, in building understanding and compassion. In my teaching, through theatre and writing we have opened up important dialogues about difficult social and political issues. Exploring music and poetry has allowed us to imagine a better world and has given us hope for change. Delving into rich novels has brought us into the experiences of other people and has helped us to see from a different perspective. We benefit from the arts for all of these reasons and more. With benefits on both an emotional and academic level (Deasy, 2002), it is important that the arts become more valued in schools and society in general. As we see from the examples discussed in this chapter, the arts are essential for nurturing and developing the imagination, which is a key factor in initiating personal and social change, in working to rebuild a compassionate and democratic society.

Education should nurture the growth and development of our emotional capacities and ability to imagine. This type of growth is often only apparent through various types of expression, therefore education should aim to nurture and create various types of artists (Rich, 1968). This brings me to my final chapter on media. When discussing the issue of art, imagination, compassion and social change, an exploration of media is crucial. Certain forms of media have had a tremendously negative effect on our hearts and minds, our abilities to

imagine and empathize. Like art, however, media can also have the potential to nurture compassion and social action.

Chapter Four:
Media: Impediment or tool for social change?

and i had to leave the house of television
to start noticing the clouds
it's amazing the stuff you see
when you finally shed that shroud
- *Ani Difranco, 2006*

Media is a dominant institution in our society that holds both positive and negative power. In many cases media misinforms, indoctrinates, and numbs our senses but it also has the ability to educate, inspire, and heighten our emotions. Media has become one of the most prominent influences on our culture, our imaginations, our identities and our beliefs. Media has had an impact on our relationships with ourselves, each other, and our natural world. With this in mind, the following chapter will address the question of what then, is the relationship between media and education? What is the role of media in fostering imagination and empathy? Can the arts and media in education to help to create a more just world? This chapter will examine media influence and explore ways in which media can be used, like art, as a tool for positive social change.

Society in crisis

In the fast pace of our contemporary Western society we may have become accustomed to relying on superficial stimulation to ward off boredom. Some, when faced with silence or a time to reflect, are left with a feeling of emptiness or fear. We are a society of paradox. We can seem to be exhaustingly busy yet bored, technologically available to anyone at anytime yet lonely, and surrounded by material possessions yet filled with an insatiable desire for more. In this culture, "society is plotting its own brain death, […] human relationships are becoming impoverished and the creative spirit emaciated" (Robinson, 2001, p. 161). McLaren (1995) states that we are currently "witnessing the hyperreal

formation of an entirely new species of fear" (p. 148). Many are in agreement that mass media has had an enormous effect on creating this culture of fear, isolation, anxiety and emptiness (Darts, 2004; Giroux, 2006; Greene, 1995; Louv, 2008; McLaren, 1995; Rich, 1968; Robinson, 2001). More and more, our lives are influenced by the visual images, the sounds and the words of media. There are very few aspects of our lives left untouched by media (Orlowski, 2006; L. Semali, 2003). Even forty years ago, Rich (1968) cited technology and mass media as having a fundamental role in eroding certain moral values and generating feelings of anxiety and insecurity. Although new technologies have been created to keep us "in touch" and available at all times, as noted in earlier chapters there is often a general sense of isolation and loneliness, a lack of true connection and community. In this chapter I will explore some of the root causes of our general communal disposition, by focusing on the influence of mass media in relation to our emotions, imaginations and sense of empathy. I will then examine the need for critical media literacy and the importance of alternative media in creating social justice. Finally, I will discuss the significance of participating in media and art creation.

General effect of mass media

Mainstream media has become the reality that many believe in and as a result we are much more disconnected from ourselves and each other. Many people watch stories of families instead of nurturing the relationships of their own. Many are more concerned about what is happening in the lives of certain celebrities than what is happening in their own lives. We are all constantly receiving messages of consumption assuring us that this is the way to fulfillment, and many believe we will be happy if we consume. Our obsession with media, particularly television, has detached us from community and our natural world. Giroux (2006) urges that we must "consider the impact of modern mass media on [our] state of consciousness" (p. 60). He is very concerned with the media's ability to incite fear and even hatred, given that our current media culture has a

certain hardness to it, leaving us to feel a sort of detachment or indifference towards the suffering of other people (Giroux, 2006). On the other hand, those involved with the media have found a way to stimulate beliefs in certain causes and a desire for certain products, and in our media entrenched society, we create many of our values and beliefs about society in isolation:

> "The pulsation beams from the T.V. screen become the shifting and perilous ground on which we form judgements and decisions which forge our communal vision; a ground in which desire is infantilized, kept separate from meaning, and maintained in a state of narcissistic equilibrium" (McLaren, 1995, p. 60).

I am fascinated by the media's use of specific words and images, color and music to evoke in us particular emotional responses. Along with this fascination, however, is a concern about the psychological and emotional effects media has on the public. I watch television commercials sometimes and cannot help but react in shock, confusion and disgust. Associating such words as "love" and "freedom" with an SUV, or using the words "believe" or "imagine" in a commercial for Shell oil is manipulative; we have strong emotional reactions to these words, these words have meaning for us. I feel offended when advertising companies take these words and use them in an attempt to move me in some type of emotional way so that I will purchase their product or support their company. Mainstream news media is no different. They, too, have usurped our language for their own interests. They use specific words, imagery, and music to create fear and support for specific causes. The media is also used as a way to keep us from really seeing the world in which we live.

Mass media and the "Predatory Culture"

We live in a culture shrouded in a new set of myths; it is a culture in which we look to celebrities for guidance, identity and happiness (McLaren, 1995). In this culture, "celebrities are valued over intellectuals, consumer goods over ideas,

fashion over social justice, and profits over human need" (Giroux, 2006, p. 14). The media of this culture has stolen our agency and compassion and left us with overwhelming consumer desire (McLaren, 1995). We feel not only fulfilled but proud when we make a new purchase because many of our beliefs, our identities, and our relationships have been reduced to how we participate in the marketplace (Giroux, 2006). We are good public citizens if we participate as consumers, in the way we are told we should (McLaren,1995). In this media, words such as "democracy", "freedom" and "independence" are declared repeatedly, as if trying to convince us. And we are convinced – we believe we are free. However, this is perhaps because we are a culture that has been constructed by "new and sinister structures of domination" (McLaren, 1995, p. 1). Our reality currently exists according to the reality created by mass media. Our real lives have been "co-opted by the spectacular media events and commodity consumption of the modern world" (Darts, 2004). This media produced culture is what McLaren (1995) calls the "Predatory Culture". This is a culture that has lost its imagination and ability to dream, it preys on and exploits our fears and desires (1995). It is a culture created by the New Right, using the mass media to inculcate their agenda (1995). We are entranced by our televisions, making bizarre and hideous acts the norm; in this culture, war and serial killers are glamorized (1995). This use of media has been used to "seduce U.S. citizens into cultural nostalgia and social amnesia" (p.7). We do not question the reality that is placed before us. We do not question the acts of government or question our insatiable desires to consume. In this way, Predatory Culture has been successful in achieving its goals.

Contenta (1993) refers to the mass media as the conveyer of "society's hidden curriculum" (p. 168). The mass media essentially has two main objectives: to pass on the current cultural status quo and to construct and shape culture (Davies, 1996). Generally, our televisions have become a source of comfort for us and a main source of information. People spend hours a day in front of their televisions, sometimes turning it on just to have that comforting background noise. According to McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005), almost one

in four children under the age of 6 has a television in their room. With the knowledge of how prevalent televisions are in homes, restaurants and other public spaces, television has been used as one of the main propagators of Predatory Culture. Government, corporate advertisers and media have created the ideal partnership within this powerful medium. Government takes the stage on one of the news stations, which operates more like a soap opera or mini-series drama, with their flashy backdrops, catchy titles and theme songs for the latest tragedy or top story. The government, or news anchors on behalf of politicians, speak to the already hyped up and emotional audience (thanks to the "pre-show" introduction) about flu epidemics, the spiralling economy, terrorism attacks, and threats to democracy. The show cuts to commercial and the audience is bombarded with images of products to buy and reasons why buying them will make them feel better about life. According to McLaren, this is exactly why the Predatory Culture is so successful in breeding consumption - advertisers respond better to the desires and fears of people than any other societal group or association (McLaren, 1995).

In Predatory Culture, we have political and celebrity leaders (1995). We derive much of our identity from these celebrities and follow these people in a fanatical way. This "cult of celebrity" (Davies, 1996) was created with North America's "shift from a producing society to a consuming society" (Davies, p. 165). The celebrities' role in the Predatory Culture is to glamorize consumer culture, encouraging the public to go to movies, concerts, wear what the celebrities are wearing and buy what the celebrities are buying (Davies, 1996). Particularly in the sphere of education, there is a growing concern about the targeting and "consumer socialization" of youth (Davies, 1996). This type of socialization serves to develop in young people very little else but "the knowledge, attitudes, and skills relevant to their functioning in the marketplace" (Davies, p. 173). Children and youth represent a substantial portion of the consumer market. They spend millions of dollars a year on various products and forms of entertainment and have been found to have a huge influence on their

parent's spending patterns (1996). As a result, advertising firms create campaigns aimed specifically at this group in particular. In this way, youth are exploited by the media as "advertisers prey on the insecurities [and vulnerability] of young people" (Davies, p. 178).

The advertising reaching this demographic is not limited to one venue but over time, has also crept into the education arena. Over 12,000 schools in the United States subscribe to Channel One, which is a network designed specifically for schools (Davies, 1996). This channel broadcasts a news program, segments on culture and sports and also contains ads promoting various corporations and products (Davies, 1996). Some textbooks used in schools even contain subliminal and blatant advertising for companies such as Nike, MacDonald's and Sony (Farahmandpur, 2005). Public schools and university have advertising all around their campuses – in cafeterias, hallways and even inside bathroom stalls – leaving very little space free of media influence. The media and youth have developed a co-dependent relationship: the media needs the youth for market reasons and the youth population need the media for the "guidance" and nurturing they receive – as apposed to receiving this from other societal organizations that would have helped to nurture these youth in the past (Davies, 1996). There has become an emotional dependency on the media and the messages and products it promotes. We are held in a form of captivity as we are at the same time frightened and soothed by the mass media. Our focus on consuming is so strong that we are blind to the real tragedies that are occurring in the world. Any glimpse of reality that may break us out of this consumptive and cozy slumber is quickly covered up and reworked so that we are kept from the truth or from truly feeling our emotions.

Media as a political weapon

The mass media does an excellent job of perpetuating Western hegemonic beliefs and propagating stereotypes of various minority groups (L. M. Semali,

2002). All of this is done in order to maintain both local and global power structures that are currently in place. Governments have taken great advantage of the use of mass media to control and manipulate society. In their book, *Standing Up to the Madness* (2008), Amy and David Goodman provide an abundance of examples in which the government has worked with corporations and mass media to distort issues and events in the world. In their chapter on climate change, the Goodmans discuss the financial connection between the Bush Administration and the oil industry. From the moment the Bush Administration came into power, they "set out to undermine, distort, and suppress science that didn't serve their political ideology and financial backers" (Goodman, p. 79). In press releases, the government has downplayed the seriousness of climate change and have included oil companies in the creation of their new energy policies (2008). Statements have been delivered through the media claiming that climate change had nothing to do with an increase in natural disasters, was not a serious threat, and in fact can have various benefits to human health (2008). Language was directly shared between the Bush Administration and Exxon Mobil, both parties publicly stating that signing climate change policies "would be unjustifiably drastic and premature" (Goodman, p. 80). Statements similar to this have been made through the Canadian media in order to protect the wealth being generated in the Alberta tar sands.

Media mirroring the language of the government is common in the corporate realm. When both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars began, the news coverage titles were identical to the names given to the military missions. The language used by the government was "parroted by the media" (p. 203) and left no room for other voices of dissention to be heard. The continuous repetition of words such as "terrorist", "enemy", and "evil" were used to frighten Americans into supporting the wars. They were made to believe that certain groups were "enemies of freedom" and "American democracy" and that at any moment there could be another attack. Because of this constant threat, the people needed to trust that what the government was doing was utterly necessary.

Even though he first published his essay "Politics and the English Language" in 1946, George Orwell's words are as relevant today as they were then. According to Orwell, all issues have become political, "and politics itself is a mass of lies, evasions, folly, hatred, and schizophrenia" (Orwell, 1950). The government, along with the massive corporations of our time, have joined together with the media to produce stories and myths that help dictate how we see ourselves, how we see our world, and how we live our lives. These institutions have taken our language and used it to their own advantage. They have distorted certain words, created mantras for us to believe and follow, and as a result their agenda can move forward, unquestioned. Politicians, the corporate elite and members of the mass media "will construct your sentences for you - even think your thoughts for you, to a certain extent - and at need they will perform the important service of partially concealing your meaning even from yourself" (Orwell, 1950). Democracy, freedom, peace, liberty, enemies, terrorism: In political speeches as much as in advertisements, we hear the same words over and over again –. so often that we believe them in the context in which they are presented. Politicians and the mass media use specific words to unite us with their cause. They use certain language to justify their actions "to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable" (Orwell, 1950). They use particular expressions to create a desire in us to consume, to create a certain way of life and at the same time to create a fear in us that ensures that we will be controlled, that guarantees that we will think and behave the way they would like us to. Put bluntly, media is so cunning and so effective that we have been lied to, scared into submission and manipulated to believe the myths created for us. Mass media, along with our political institutions have essentially created a system with the goal of producing mindless consumers who lack imagination and empathy.

A need for alternative and independent media

Governments and corporations also use their power to censor information in the media, once again controlling what we see and the voices and stories that we hear – or do not hear. Voices of dissent are often not allowed into the mainstream media, and if they are, these voices of opposition are often ridiculed (Goodman, 2008). Anyone seen as a threat to government or corporate agendas are either demonized or made a mockery of. In 2000, I attended a weekend long rally in Calgary, Alberta where the World Petroleum Congress was holding its international trade and policy meetings. Since it was only a few months after the infamous Seattle protests, Calgary was abuzz with riot police and media. The first day consisted of peacefully gathering, singing, and marching with people from all over Canada and other parts of the world, from all ages and walks of life. The following morning, the front cover of the Calgary Herald contained a full page close-up photo of a menacing looking protester behind a chain-link fence donning a gas-mask. The caption, in bold, read: "PROTESTERS PEACEFUL. SO FAR." We shook our heads at the picture the media was attempting to paint of the people we had been rallying with. The day before, I had been walking and conversing with a family with two small children and an eighty year old retired teacher. These were not the violent types – they were people who genuinely cared about the health and future of our planet and wanted to have a say in the decisions that would affect these issues. The next few days of the rally consisted of guest speakers from Sudan and Venezuela, street theatre and workshops. The evening of the last day, both newspaper and television news coverage barely commented on the events and issues being addressed at the rally.

The amount of information that was presented in the media was embarrassing at best. Protesters were referred to as "clowns" who were just playing around in the streets and had no idea why they were protesting. Not one person from the protest was quoted or interviewed. The media failed to present important information about the dialogue and the learning that occurred during

this rally, and certainly neglected to explore and present the reasons why people were protesting in the first place. As a result, the general public not only saw a distorted view of the protest, indicating how "ridiculous" protesting is, but they were also kept uninformed of the real issues and information at the root of the protest. This failure to include other realities and perspectives in the media only serves to perpetuate the views held by those in power.

Last year I was fortunate enough to hear Amy Goodman speak at McGill about the importance of Independent Media. According to Goodman, two of the most important issues currently being misrepresented by the corporate media are the realities of climate change and what is actually happening in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are two very serious issues, that are not only American, but global issues. It is because of this that Goodman stresses the dangers of censorship and hearing only one distorted perspective in the media. She claims that the media is the most powerful institution on earth and it needs to be "taken back" by the people. Even in democracies, Goodman warns, messages are carefully crafted, worded with specific intention. She argues that people delivering the news on mainstream networks are not journalists but "network personalities", created to satisfy our entertainment-crazed culture. These networks are owned and funded by massive corporations who "have nothing to tell but everything to sell" (Goodman, 2008) and silence anyone who speaks out against the government and status quo. Goodman claims that independent media "is the sanctuary of dissent" and that dissent is what will save us (2008). She calls on us to challenge the corporate media and demand an end to censorship. She urges us to support alternative media, allowing genuine stories of real people to be heard and boldly contends that if for just one week the world actually saw what was happening in Iraq and Afghanistan, both wars would be over (2008). Her belief is that we can appeal to the powerful compassionate empathy within human beings in order to create change.

This compassion and the courage to work against injustices in the world has not been overlooked by the producers of Predatory Culture, as it preys upon our imaginations, weakening our ability to empathize. It is clear that we have become disconnected from ourselves and from other people; we have slipped into a type of collective unconsciousness, preventing us from creating change in our unjust world (McLaren, 1995). This culture created by the mass media, "marks the ascendancy of the dehydrated imagination that has lost its capacity to dream otherwise" (p. 2). This loss of imagination has lead to our inability to see things in a new and better way, has left us to feel unable to act in order to create positive change (Greene, 1995). We are currently living at a time where the needs of many people are being falsely filled (McLaren, 1995). We have been convinced by politicians and mass media that we are "free" and "fighting for democracy" but in truth, we have lost sight of these ideals and what they really mean, lost sight of what is important. In many ways, we have become disconnected from our community, from ourselves and from our natural world.

We are at a point where we desperately need an independent, democratic media where everyone is included in the discussion, where everyone is given a chance to share their voice in a global media forum (Giroux, 2006; Goodman, 2008). It is precisely because of the powerful role media culture has played in numbing and distorting our imaginations, in limiting our ability to ask questions and empathize, silencing our voices and paralyzing our actions, that we must now use media in a different way, to rejuvenate and heal our imaginations, to build empathy, to release our voices.

Critical media literacy

Our world is saturated by the media and technology but in many cases, schools have not kept up with technological advances or have not recognized the importance of including media in the classroom (Share, 2007). In light of the media's predominant role in society, it is extremely negligent not to analyze its

use in the process of socialization and education (Share, 2007). We need to foster ways of thinking that critically explore the media messages around us, that question the information presented, how it has been created and what possible information has been left out (L. Semali, 2003). Media, as it has been created, has such a powerful role in public pedagogy that it is crucial to empower students (and all people) to "read media messages […] in order to be active participants in a democratic society" (Share, 2007, p. 3). Media literacy helps us to critically examine mass media and encourage us to become active participants in creating our own media. The purpose of media literacy is to create an "awareness of the multitude of messages received daily from the media and the effects they can have on attitudes and behaviour" (Semali, 2003, p. 274). As such, critical media literacy is important for a more just world and healthy democracy. Much like art, "media literacy aims to move audiences from awareness to action, from passivity to engagement, from denial to acceptance of responsibility for what each of us can do as individuals" (p. 275).

As many theorists have noted, education takes place both in schools and in public spheres, and media is one of the largest and most influential of those spheres (Davies, 1996; Farahmandpur, 2005; Giroux, 2006; Goodman, 2008; McLaren, 1995; Share, 2007). Considering the magnitude of this influence on individuals, and as a result on political, social, environmental, and community issues, critical media literacy should be considered a vital component of education. Classrooms need to be spaces where students can deconstruct and question the world around them – particularly the dominant images and ideas that are presented to them on a daily basis through the mainstream media. Educators should encourage students to be fully aware of issues and in tune with their emotions, refusing "to allow conscience to look away or fall asleep" (Giroux, 2006, p. 249). Often, people are not even aware of the fact that they are being positioned and educated by the media, having a limited understanding of how media manipulates and controls public discourse (Orlowski, 2006; Share, 2007). It is extremely important for all people to become media literate, in order to

"avoid the seductive traps" (Freire, 1998, p. 123) of the mass media. Education can play a role in fighting to regain a connection with community and nature. It can help to fight against corporate media's indoctrination and the consumer socialization that students are engulfed in. Instead of maintaining the skills and ideals of a consumer, teachers can help to share and nurture the skills needed for compassion, creativity, and critical thinking.

Being literate is not simply about "reading and writing but [gaining] the ability to think critically and to use language…as politicized action" (Goldfarb, p. 3). Through critical pedagogy, media can be used as a tool of empowerment as opposed to oppression (Goldfarb, 2002). McLaren argues that there is a danger for teachers to fall into the trap of "advertising for a common culture" (1995, p. 233), to not question, to watch passively and simply absorb the myths conveyed to us through media (1995). This is why media literacy programs are so essential for schools who truly want to develop critical, creative and independent thinkers (Contenta, 1993). The goal of media literacy programs is to "demystify the mass media, to demonstrate that its tales are nothing more than the subjective constructions of individuals" (Contenta, p. 197). These media literacy programs should begin at a young age and should help to break down and deconstruct myths created by media and government (1993). Through these programs, students can learn to "decode what they see" (p. 167) and "construct their own personal meanings, instead of passively accepting television's images" (p. 167).

It is important for educators to be aware of the fact that schools are not immune to corporate messages and advertising, as is the case with Channel One. For this reason, teachers need to be critical in their practice and work to protect classroom spaces from blatant media infiltration. Some educators have been resistant to the use of media in the classroom, perceiving it as a threat to other forms of traditional literacy, however, given the reality that media pervades most areas of our lives and culture, we cannot afford to simply ignore it. As Brian Goldfarb states in his book *Visual Pedagogy: Media Cultures in and beyond the*

Classroom (2002), using media and critically analyzing its' mainstream forms is essential.

An example: Critical analysis using semiotics in the classroom

Semiotics is essentially the study of patterns, symbols and codes used in society (Semali, 2002). In his book, *Transmediation in the Classroom: A Semiotics-Based Media Literacy Framework*, Semali asserts that our world consists of objects, symbols and images that become meaningful to us "according to how others relate to them" (p. 9). Thus, social and cultural reality, and the symbols and codes within, are not created in isolation, but are collectively constructed. In our present society, media controls most of the objects and images we see and those creating media present these objects and images in ways which create the type of meaning and beliefs they want us to hold. Semali states that "all media are symbolic sign systems that re-present (not reflect) reality" (p. 108). An understanding of semiotics is important then, in understanding the visual and verbal signs which appear in media regarding world events and various aspects of identity. We can use semiotics to deconstruct the myths that have been created by the media, to bring an understanding of why we feel the way we do, why we believe what we believe and why we respond to these symbols in particular ways.

With the use of semiotics in the classroom to analyze media in our everyday lives, we encourage our students to become more diversely literate and aware of the messages constantly surrounding them. Take, for example, a commercial for Hyundai's Tuscan, a sporty new SUV. The commercial begins with an attractive, young couple sitting together, intertwined lovingly, in their spacious and modern living room. They are staring with uncertainty at a rather bland painting on the wall, when peaceful music in the background begins: "Dream, dream…spirit in your heart", sings the voiceover. The couple looks at each other knowingly and the man moves to the painting, taking it off of the wall. Suddenly the couple's couch morphs into their Hyundai Tuscan and they are

driving with the painting as the song goes on to sing, "Dream, dream…the happiness in your life". The music then takes on a more upbeat, fast paced and exciting feel as the couple freely drives through what looks to be a cornfield and then a tranquil country lane, lined with trees and flowers. The young, beautiful, white woman smiles, sticks her hand out of her window, in a cool and carefree way, reaching out to the open air. We then see her hands go up and out of the sun roof as colourful petals and leaves splash against a blue canvas. At the end of the commercial, we are brought back to the original living room, the beautiful couple, once again seated together on the couch looking at the painting, this time much happier and satisfied. The camera shows the painting on the wall covered with flowers and leaves. A pink petal slowly, almost seductively, falls from the painting toward the window, framing the vehicle parked outside, and the voiceover exclaims, "The Hyundai Tuscan – make your day full of adventure!". The commercial uses symbols and images of people, nature and the open road to create meaning for its audience and potential customers.

The advertisers in this example are not simply trying to sell their product, they are also selling values and beliefs. As a simple analysis, we could say that the couple represents the image of what a real relationship should look like, the type of love that society finds acceptable and that is of course, between a woman and a man. The fact that I have yet to see a commercial in which a same sex couple is featured, reveals much about the marginalization and intolerance of homosexuality that continues to exist in society and therefore the exclusion of homosexuals from the mainstream media. The use of natural landscapes and flowers in the commercial may have been chosen to bring a balance, considering the product being promoted is not deemed harmonious to our natural world. It is as if the couple in the commercial are saying "Even though we drive an SUV, we love nature too!". This may bring the audience a sense of comfort, especially during a time where we are to be hyper-aware of protecting and caring for our planet by choosing "eco-friendly" products. Certainly, the footage of continuous driving on the open road gives the audience a sense of release, of freedom –

which many people may not feel in their day to day lives. Through this couple, viewers are able to vicariously experience this freedom and may even believe that if only they had a Hyundai Tuscan, they too could be free to dream and have a day full of adventure! When this short commercial is viewed and analysed from a critical perspective, all of these underlying messages and values can be visibly presented. By teaching our students to view media through a critical lens, we hopefully encourage them to question the beliefs that are taken for granted, those that may impose stereotypes, misconceptions, and perpetuate unjust aspects of our culture.

Media and art – Independent and student created

In the previous chapter, I spoke of the arts in the traditional sense, however in the age of digital devices, many other forms of art are being created. In many ways art and media have always gone hand in hand. In many ways, they are one in the same. Media, like art, plays an important role in the creation of culture and political views (Furness, 2007). We are influenced intellectually and emotional by both art and media. Now, more than ever, there are many powerful artistic tools that can be used in the classroom. Digital cameras, camcorders, image manipulation and design programs, and video editing software are often quite readily available or free online (Darts, 2004). Through the use of these mediums, the classroom can be a place where students are free to "narrate their own identities outside of marketplace identities and the politics of consumerism, a space where individual identities find meaning in collective expression and solidarity" (McLaren, 1995, p. 105). This creation of art and alternative media can be used to counter the rhetoric of the mainstream media (Rich, 1968). If we are educating for justice, we should consider that teaching our students to critically analyze media must be accompanied by a fostering of creativity and compassion (Orlowski, 2006). With a focus on nurturing imagination and compassionate empathy, injustices can be challenged through art and media creation with "a concern for liberation and social justice" (McLaren, 1995, p. 105).

Internet and film creating dialogue and community

Film has long been a prominent medium in our culture. It has the power to entertain and enlighten. Film can be used in classrooms as a text (viewing and analyzing) or as a created product of expression. When given the opportunity and support, students can construct stories and meaning through creating their own films. Poyntz (2006) elaborates on a compelling example of a student made film entitled "Meg's Father". The film was a documentary contrasting the life of Meg with that of her father, who, after a series of events, turned his back on the standard conventions and expectations of society and ended up living on the streets. The film presented homelessness in an unconventional and enlightening way, revealing a lack of structural support for those who choose not to buy into the traditional way of life. Dialogue amongst the members in the class who viewed the film lead to a deeper understanding and empathy for those living on the streets (Poyntz, 2006). The realizations gained from the film and dialogue afterwards served as a guide for further discussion about the complexities of this issue and a questioning of dominant social, political and economic formations (Poyntz, 2006).

In terms of easy communication and access to information, we are quite fortunate in this part of the world. The internet plays an important role in distributing independent and alternative art and media to a vast audience (Ivey, 2008). Through this forum people are able to share their creations, their messages, borrow from one another to create new media and engage in dialogue about issues of social justice. The organization Eyes Infinite Films (2006) is one of many independent film companies that have utilized the internet to share information about their films and encourage the flow of information regarding various issues of social justice. As stated on their website, they have used art and film as tools for encouraging and facilitating dialogue. Aware of the power that this medium holds, most of their films focus specifically on the conflict in the Middle East. Their film "Art and Apathy", for instance, records and presents the complex issues of life in Israel and Palestine through the eyes of various local

artists. On their website, they state that as a result of the ideas, biases, and violence perpetuated by the mainstream media they have chosen to produce films that show alternative perspectives and incite dialogue. Through exposure to various viewpoints and realities of conflict, there is also hope that the audience will gain an empathetic understanding, inspiring alternative possibilities and change. In reference to this type of education, Greene (1995) states that,

> "Students can be provoked to imaginatively transmute some of their stories into media that can be shared in such a fashion that friends can begin looking together and moving together […] given their expanding sense of diversity, their story telling and their joining together may be informed now and then by outrage too – outrage at injustices and reifications and violations" (p. 42).

This outrage is what many youth hold when they first come to the organization Leave Out ViolencE (http://www.leaveoutviolence.com/English/quebec/index.htm). The organization was born out of the tragedy and violence experienced by founder, Twinkle Rudberg. On a September evening in 1972, the Rudbergs were a witness to a young man assaulting an elderly woman. Coming to the rescue of the victim, Rudberg's husband was attacked and killed by the fourteen year old boy (Katz, 1999). After the murder of her husband, Rudberg was understandably devastated and angry, however much of this pain and anguish had as much to with her loss as it did with the reasons behind the death of her husband (Katz, 1999). During the trial, Rudberg heard the young man's story, about the poverty and violence he experienced in his own life. Instead of seeking retribution or vengeance, Rudberg was filled with compassion for the boy (Katz, 1999). Years later, Rudberg felt compelled to not just tell her story but to take action, to fight against the root causes of violence, in hopes of prevention. She founded LOVE, a program that encourages youth, ages 13-21, to participate in an after school photojournalism class.

Participants in this program are both victims and perpetrators of violence who have been referred to the program by educators, counsellors or social workers (Katz, 1999). Through the program, students discuss and analyze film, music and other forms of media that portray various forms of violence. The group has defined violence as: "Substance abuse, bullying, racism, hate crimes, self-mutilation, theft, suicide, eating disorders, domestic abuse, physical and verbal abuse" (LOVE). The program also has a strong focus on the use of photography and writing as a means of expression and healing. Through these mediums, the youth are encouraged to work through the anger and pain they possess as a result of the violence they have experienced in their own lives. The program works on anger management, conflict resolution and leadership. Within LOVE, these youth have been given a community and a voice. They have been empowered to make changes in their own lives and the world in which they live. Without the compassionate empathy and understanding of Ms. Rudberg, this valuable program would not exist. In the midst of violence, confusion and anger, compassion brought healing and hope for change.

Media and art creation in teaching for moral courage

Returning to the writings of McLaren and Farahmandpur, they insist that teachers are important activists in creating positive social change (2005). Educators have a responsibility to use media in a productive and critical way. McLaren (1995) urges educators to work against the Predatory Culture of the mass media. He believes that it is essential that schools become spaces working towards real media literacy, so that students are no longer kept captive by what they are inundated with on a daily basis (1995). He warns of the danger of not seeing the relationship between politics and education and stresses that schools needs to be places where people deconstruct and rebuild the grand narratives created by the media and government (1995). He urges educators to help students to "critically engage in the politics and ideologies" (McLaren, 1995) that shape

the world reality around them. McLaren points out that, as a result of constant exposure to sensationalized images, students are essentially paralyzed by both boredom and terror (1995). The media both "enslaves and liberates at the same time" (Contenta, p. 131) but we only remain paralyzed if we are not able to analyze, contextualize and dissect the messages we receive. McLaren urges us as educators to move our students to reject the set ideologies of politics, economics, class, gender and race (1995). Yes, at times, students are bored, however, when we push them to see beyond, to question what they have been told again and again, it can also become uncomfortable for them, even terrifying. Yet, in that state of uncomfortable confusion, there begins real questioning and true learning. Pushing students out of the terror and boredom is necessary so that schools are no longer places that perpetuate the "social ugliness" (p. 4) that currently exists.

Our "expressive" and creative life is important to our overall happiness and for our ability to compassionately empathize (Ivey, 2008). This aspect of our lives is most strongly developed through our active participation and creation in the arts and media as opposed to "playing the passive role of receivers" (p. 121). In the words of poet Allen Ginsberg, "Whoever controls the media, the images, controls the culture" (Goodman, 2008, p. 153). If we want to see an end to injustice, we need to be a part of creating that change. We must encourage critical analysis and awareness, and foster imaginative thinking and compassion. Critical pedagogy, art education, and media literacy have a fierce competitor in the Predatory Culture. Mass media, government and corporations have the resources and manipulative power to create a society of consumption and fear, perpetuating injustices, dulling our imaginations and compassion. This coalition between corporate media and government has been successful in breeding one dominant ideology and building structures of power that will not easily be toppled. However, it is possible and indeed necessary to move towards shifting this power and to commit to a deeper awareness of ourselves and each other. It is important for us to create our own meaning again, take our language back, and create our own images. Teachers can help to initiate this change by using critical pedagogy

in the nurturing of media literate citizens who will not mindlessly consume the myths created by the corporate media and government but will actively challenge these myths and work towards building new and diverse stories based on justice and hope.

Chapter Five:
Conclusion

What good is a man
Who won't take a stand
What good is a cynic
With no better plan
- Ben Harper, 2006

Through this thesis, I have attempted to explore issues in relation to educating for compassion and social justice. Specifically, the relationship between imagination and empathy were considered and determined as necessary, vital capacities that should be developed within the classroom. Empathy can be understood as a way of deeply knowing and feeling. An active, compassionate empathy creates a genuine sense of care for others, moves within us a desire for justice, and prompts us to take action in creating positive social change. The previous chapters examine both the arts and media in terms of their role in fostering a moral imagination and compassionate empathy. I have identified aspects of media that might damage, distort or impede the growth of imagination and empathy. Finally, I have emphasized the importance of independent and student created media and have argued strongly for critical media literacy to be fostered in schools.

If we want our world to flourish with people who can think critically and creatively and care about one another, a lack of empathy in education should be a concern. If we want our students to be able to deal with real social issues I believe we need to rethink schools that neglect to nurture the empathy and imagination of our students. This system that only knows one way of doing things, is slow to change (Noddings, 2005) but a change is necessary to prevent further destruction. If we do not change education, "humanity sooner or later will simply destroy itself" (Leonard, 1968, p. 125).

The most important component in our ability to empathize is our ability to imagine (Greene, 1995). Throughout much of Freire's writing, he too speaks of imagination as a necessary agent of social change. Knowledge of self, others or information is not enough. Without a developed imagination, we are unable to truly empathize, to understand another person's experience or point of view (Greene, 1995). In order for justice and equity to be sought, there must be deep care and compassion. If Greene (1995) is correct in stating that hope for humanity and community does not lie in "new projects" or "initiatives" but more specifically in caring for and loving one another, living in solidarity, with empathy and understanding, perhaps this should be the focus of education.

There is something quite powerful about a group of people coming together in the name of compassion and justice. It is in this coming together, with engaged hearts and imaginations that people see another way, a better way. It is in this open and imaginative, understanding and empathy-filled space that people begin to ask why and seek an end to injustices (Greene, 1995). This space, which aims to create justice and life, can only truly exist if it is "empathetic, loving, communicative, and humble, in order to be liberating" (Freire, 2000. p. 171). I believe in the very real and deep implications of a world filled with imagination, empathy, and a desire for social justice. Along with many others, I believe education can play a powerful role in helping to create this space.

Many scholars have "claimed for the arts the ability to educate the imagination, improve sensibilities, increase awareness, organize men's [sic] energies, provide peak experiences, and transform consciousness" (Barrell, 2003, p. 14). Exploring various forms of the arts, for example dance, poetry, and music, encourages a more engaged type of learner and often leads to a more empowered and active student (Greene, 1995). As mentioned earlier, the arts should and often do provide a safe space for students to question and express themselves. Particularly in a society with diverse cultures, religions and beliefs, this safe space is very important in order to really explore potentially uncomfortable or

controversial topics (Orzulak, 2006) in a way that promotes understanding and compassion.

Creating art and media is an effective way of increasing awareness and mindfulness, in that it requires active engagement (Serafin, 2007). Powerful imaginations and creativity, which are often neglected by our schools, are important for students to become strong and compassionate leaders. Having students create their own media encourages them to be active participants in the creation of the world around them, allowing them to envision and construct a more just culture. Entering into these spaces of imagination, art, empathy and understanding requires us to be willing "to resist the forces that press people into passivity and bland acquiescence" (Greene, 1995, p. 135). As educators we must have the courage to stand against injustices and teach for compassion and social change. Teaching compassion can and should begin in educational institutions – and this is such a powerful start (Dalai Lama, 2009). Working towards the development of compassionate imaginations and empathy is done so with the "sense that something can be done in the name of what it decent and humane" (Greene, 1995, p. 35) and based on this belief we will be moved into action. Freire (1998) states that "the world is not finished. It is always in the process of becoming" (p. 72) and that the future "is constructed by people engaged together in life" (p. 72). By working to develop moral imaginations and compassionate empathy, we strive to deeply know, to truly care and to passionately act.

Implications for further research

In order for this vision of education based on compassion and creative action to be realized, there must be consistency within the education system. By consistency I mean that there must be a commitment to this philosophy by the system as a whole, not just by one teacher. This might begin within a specific department and move to a committed focus of the entire school. If this philosophy, based on a shared goal of fostering caring imaginations and

compassionate empathy becomes a committed focus of school boards and the government, the possibilities of truly creating a caring and just society may become a reality. I join others (Apple, 1996; Cole, 2005; Greene, 1995; Noddings, 2005) in the call for a change in education, specifically a change which focuses more on developing compassion through the arts and media. This is not to say, however, that this is separate from academic rigour. Teaching to the spirit, the imagination and empathy requires criticality and should be done in all subject areas, in connection with the curriculum. It is important to note as well, that when I suggest more of a focus on the arts generally in the education system, that I am not calling for a dissolve of specific art classes, such as Band, Drama, or Photography. I believe it is important that each of those forms, with their own unique richness, remain classes available to all students. I believe strongly in the need for educators and those involved in the education system to assess where we are at as a society and the role that education plays in the creation of culture and change. It is necessary for those who strive for positive change and social justice to question what the focus of education should be. I argue that the fundamental concern and goal of education should be to encourage and develop compassionate empathy and moral imaginations. I suggest that this should be the foundation of all courses and curricula, and advocate the use of the arts and media as a tool for this development of care and community.

With these issues having been explored, questions arise in regards to further research or action. Is it possible for this philosophy and vision of education to be infused and implemented into the classroom? If so, what needs to be in place in order for this to be achieved? What are the implications for Teacher Education? Does a program exist, wherein imagination is tied to empathy in the training of future educators? If not, how can a program such as this be designed? If yes, what impact does (or would) this program have on future classrooms, on student development and success? A more difficult question perhaps is how do we get not just teachers, but schools boards, administrators, politicians to see the value in this philosophy and approach to education? In other words, what changes

need to take place in society and the current system in order to effect change that would be reflective of the recommendations in this thesis? This is perhaps the most important question. Although I do believe that one person can, has, and does make a difference, I also believe that particularly in the case of education, in order for change to occur on a larger scale, in a meaningful way, administrators and members of society who are involved with education, need to come together in support for this approach to education; that those in positions of power and authority within the education system stand together with teachers and students in creating a more compassionate system that nurtures both hearts and minds, in hopes of creating a more compassionate and just world.

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