

# The Passions of Pluralism: Multiculturalism and the Expanding Community

By Maxine Greene



# Maxine Greene

## Background Information

- Has made a career out of lecturing and writing about her philosophy of education and calls herself a philosopher, inquirer and an artist.
- She is past President of the American Educational Research Association (AREA), Philosophy of Education Society, American Educational Studies Association (AESA), and the Middle Atlantic States Philosophy of Education Society.
- Founder of the Maxine Greene Foundation: Foundation for Social Imagination, the Arts and Education
- Served as the executive council on the John Dewey Society
- Has made influential strides as a faculty member at Teacher's College of Columbia University in New York City.
- Received her doctorate from NYU in 1955 and went on to teach there, Montclair, and Brooklyn College.
- Presently, Maxine teaches at Teacher's College of Columbia where she is the William F. Russell Professor in the Foundations of Education.

# Dr Greene's Main Points

- Our nation continues to grow and expand each day with an increase in multiculturalism.
- As a nation have to come to grips with this and accept it.
- Every individual plays an important role in our society and the voices of all citizens need to be heard.
- With America's increasing cultural diversity, Dr. Greene stresses the need to recognize John Dewey's philosophy as a "Great Community"



# ..Main Points Continued..



- Dr. Greene wishes for people to rediscover or discover for the first time the uniqueness of each person.

She feels each individual is unique and he or she has a right to be heard and recognized in the national community.

We continue to damage our society when we silence people of different cultures, races, and sexes.

“We need to repair this social damage” (Greene, 1993, pg 351).

She feels the USA will never truly be a democratic country until everyone unites, listens to each other and has the true freedom to have their voices heard.

# Dr. Greene's Argument

*"In order to open up our experience to our existential possibilities as persons, to possibilities of many kinds, we must extend and deepen, and we must further develop our understanding of what it means to be brothers and sisters in a great national community" (Greene, 1993, pg. 351).*



# Greene's Writing Method

- Throughout the article, Dr. Greene references works of art by other philosophers, professors, and artists whether they be articles, books, speeches, etc.
- She keeps imagination, metaphor, and art in mind.

# Towards a Community of Persons

- Greene wishes to have communities take shape when diverse people speaking as who and not what they are come together in speech and action.
- She advocates not labeling people through outward appearances and getting to know them through dialogue.
- Recognizes that American faces a challenge in the next century of shaping a truly public culture, one that is responsive to the long silences cultures of color.
- Points out the lessons of Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
- “Education might be an invitation into the art of this conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices, each conditioned by a different perception of the world. Common sense says that you don’t bracket out 90% of the world’s cultural heritage if you really want to learn about the world” (Greene, 1993, pg. 352).

# Towards a Community of Persons

- Hopes our nation reaches a sense of plurality.
- “Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live” (Greene, 1993, pg. 352).

# Silence and Invisibility: The Need to Repair

- Points out that many people feel their stories aren't worth telling and that no one will wish to hear them.
- There have been many successful voices heard in our past history, but there have also been many voices that have remained silenced and absent.
- According to Greene, this is important because it harms society.
- These people "lie outside history" and diminish the community, leave an empty space, and leave their realities undefined.

# Silence and Invisibility: The Need to Repair

- Immigrants, minorities and women fail to be heard, are ignored, and their voices are silenced overlooked and ignored.
- Greene provides examples of absent cultures and voices: African Americans, women, immigrants and disabled people.
- She uses the character, Pecola Breedlove in Toni Morrison's (1972) *The Bluest Eye* to portray the unheard thoughts, feelings and silenced opinions of a minority during history.
- Pecola Breedlove is an unloved Black child who wished to look like Shirley Temple in order to be accepted in society and included in the human reality.

# Silence and Invisibility: The Need to Repair

- “To open up our experience (and, yes, our curricula) to existential possibilities of multiple kinds is to extend and deepen what we think of when we speak of a community. If we break through and even disrupt a surface equilibrium and uniformity, this does not mean that particular ethnic or racial traditions ought to replace our own” (Greene, 1993, pg. 354).
- Greene points out that what history has overlooked in the past has to be restored whether it has to do with Afro Americans, Hispanics, Asians, women, Jews, Native Americans, the Irish or Polish.
- Luckily, there has been an emergence of multicultural literature which helps diversify our experience and change our ideas of the time, the lives, relationships, and memories that we once construed.

# Representation & Ownership

- A memorable quote:
- “My point has to do with openness and variety as well as with inclusion. It has to do with the avoidance of fixities, of stereotypes, even the stereotypes linked to multiculturalism. To view a person as in some sense “representative” of Asian culture (too frequently grouping together human beings as diverse as Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese) or Hispanic culture or Afro-American culture is to presume an objective reality called “culture,” a homogeneous and fixed presence that *can* be adequately represented by existing subjects. Do Amy Tan's maternal characters embody the same reality as Maxine Hong Kingston's Warrior Woman? Does Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas stand for the same thing as Miss Celie stands for in Alice Walker's The Color Purple? Do we not *know* the person in the front row of our classroom, or the one sharing the raft, or the one drinking next to us at the bar by her/his cultural affiliation?” (Greene, 1993, pg. 357).

# Representation & Ownership

- Cultural background plays a part in shaping identity but it is not your only identity.
- At the same time, these differences are things that should be respected.
- Culture cannot only be defined in terms of oppression in discrimination; successes and accomplishments must be included.
- Greene points out that we should be open and willing to learn about other peoples' backgrounds to understand how a certain group of people may have felt at a specific time and sympathize with those feelings.
- Reference to Paolo Freire:
  - "Every person ought, on some level cherish her or his culture; but it should never be absolutized. When it is absolutized and a person is closed against the new culture surrounding him or her, you would even find it hard to learn new things which placed along side your personal history can be meaningful" (Greene, 1993, pg. 358).
- We must abandon racism and discrimination to fully succeed as a nation.

# Our Present: The Third World

- Greene points out that we cannot label silence and discrimination as “out of the ordinary” and occasional. She feels we also have to lose jargon like “free world, free market, equality and even democracy” (Greene, 1993, pg. 360).
- In order to make changes, one cannot do so until people recognize and become aware of the present deficiencies and flaws: There continues to be under-representation, discrimination, and silencing of minorities and women. These ignored people must recognize this ever-present, unfair treatment and see the possibility for a brighter future.

# Dr. Greene's Conclusion

- Greene feels that by learning to look through different perspectives of people with different experiences, our youth may be able to make amends with themselves and may be inspired to heal, transform and make a difference.
- We need to affirm plurality and differences at the same time in order to create a tight knit community.
- If we recognize diversity as in some way life affirming, our common ground becomes more clearly defined as well as multifaceted.
- Greene wishes for classrooms to be filled with many cultures and ethnicities, speaking to each other, learning, and forming relationships by being open to one another and being open to the rest of the world.

# Work Together: Reach for the Stars

- “Only if more and more persons incarnate such principles, we might say, and choose to live by them and engage in dialogue in accord with them, are we likely to bring about a democratic pluralism and not fly apart in violence and disorder. Unable to provide an objective ground for such hopes and claims, all we can do is speak with others as eloquently and passionately as we can about justice and caring and love and trust” (Greene, 1993, pg.360).



# References

Greene, M. (). Education and social change. In F. Schultz (Ed.), *SOURCES: Notable selections in education* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (pp. 350-361). New York: McGraw-Hill Dushkin.

Johnson, J. A., Musial, D., Hall, G. E., Gollnick, D. M., & Dupuis, V. L. (2008). *Foundations of American education: Perspectives on education in a changing world* (14<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson Educational.