Teacher as Stranger: educational philosophy for the modern age

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<td>Author</td>
<td>Maxine Greene</td>
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1) Significant Quotes

- "But the point of finding out is to learn how to engage in philosophic activity oneself. The point of finding out is to learn how to confront educational contexts with a sense of responsibility— with a capacity to clarify, to order, to disclose. But it begins in wonder; philosophy always begins in wonder." (21)
  - Philosophy's role in the classroom is to provide different perspectives on how to think, and how to structure one's lessons to ways of thinking.
  - If it were not for curiosity, or for a need to learn and discover, there would be no point to philosophy.

- "His 'habits of mind' must be such that he is alert to the models and paradigms affecting his vision, so that he can break through the screens of seductive abstractions when he confronts the individuals in his classroom—and takes the risk of intervening in their lives." (80)
  - A teacher must have more than one view, and in fact be open to multiple points of view, if he is ever to be a quality educator, because he cannot conform an entire classroom and the lives of children to one singular point of view.
  - When he confronts his students, the teacher already takes a risk by intervening in his students' lives; he must therefore seek to understand them, and different ways of thinking.
• "Ivan Illich says that the institution of the school is, by definition, repressive. Because young people are compelled to attend, they can in no sense be considered free to initiate their learning experiences or to create themselves." (64)
  o Green seems to be calling for teachers to break free from the repressive mold they are forced into by the system.
  o It is important for young people to be free to "create themselves," even though the nature of the school is repressive and conforming.

• "The teacher who believes that his students can indeed develop their potential, if equipped to do so, must break with conventional thinking from time to time. He might, for example, attempt to think of his students' futures in other than vocational or professional terms. What might they imagine themselves to be outside their jobs and careers? What of the 'quality of life' about which so many people speak today?" (91)
  o It is never enough to simply teach classroom material; one must also learn how to be.
  o It could be helpful to encourage students' hobbies outside of school, and more importantly, their dispositions for when they are not working later in life.

• "Children are brainwashed by 'a social machine not interested in persons, except to man and aggrandize itself.' Unique, vigorous persons are transmuted into 'personnel.' Most appallingly, teachers too often serve the system blindly and help it render human beings into hollow, inauthentic, resigned creatures with no hope of becoming independent or free." (62)
  o Schools can be perceived as cages to keep children in during the day, while "the system" converts children into products of a selfish, self-absorbed society that calls for conformity.
  o Teachers should strive to embrace the diversity and individualism of each student, without making a student a hollow slave to the world.
2) **List of Key Concepts**
- individuality
- Education
- philosophy
- wonder
- disposition
- quality of life
- abstraction
- paradigm
- teaching
- teaching as stranger
- knowledge
- learning

3) **The Author’s Main Argument:**
Maxine Greene makes the point that a teacher must not simply resort to one viewpoint when teaching; rather, he should encompass a wide range of mindsets and ideas when teaching his students and reflecting on his work, all the while metacognizing on what influenced his mindset and why.

4) **Examine Author’s Stance**
a) Maxine Greene does not simply make one statement on the nature, roles, and responsibilities of teaching; rather, in her book she seems to be making a point that there is no such thing as one single viewpoint. It is the educator’s responsibility and duty, in this age of significant thought and ever-changing mindsets, to educate the self on multiple viewpoints and to not necessarily adopt one singular viewpoint when teaching, thinking, or even living. Greene goes on and on about different perspectives in philosophy, knowledge, psychology, literature, and so forth. She seems to be open to the idea of viewing education through different lenses, all of them significant, not one of them more important than the other. The worst thing an educator could do, in fact, would be to not even explore a variety of ways of viewing the world, but to remain stagnant and stubborn in one line of thinking. If an educator falls into that misguided ravine of thought, most likely his students will fall in with him.

b) Maxine Greene would probably agree with David B. Tyack’s views that there needs to be some kind of educational reform. Tyack argues that educational reform can be a good thing, but not all reform is
constructed to necessarily benefit the students. Change is viewed as “scary” and unknown by a lot of people; therefore, a radical change in the school system can be harshly criticized if it does not work. Tyack’s view of reform is largely political, yet Greene’s view of reform can be both political and psychological in nature; she seems to be calling for teachers to reform their ways of thinking, and for schools to reform the ways they mold students into individuals rather than mindless robots serving a system, without a range of thought. Likewise, Tyack would argue alongside Greene’s work in that a change of mindset for educators and administrators can lead to positive reform that can be beneficial for the school system. A range of thought and internal processes could bring about change designed to help students, rather than render them helpless to a poorly constructed framework. As Tyack claimed, “We favor attempts to bring about such improvements by working from the inside out, especially by enlisting the support and skills of teachers as key actors in reform.” (Tinkering with Utopia)

5) What do you learn from the author about yourself?

Maxine Greene’s book is highly condensed with a wealth of information regarding philosophy, the sciences, and self-reflection. In reading this, I found myself understanding many of the sources she pulled her information from, most notably Plato and the philosophers of the Scientific Revolution. I realized that teaching involves confusing frames of mind that one cannot always come to understand, or draw a definite conclusion from; teaching in itself is a philosophy with no clear-cut answers or solutions, only endless circles of thought that require people to reflect on continuously. I myself cannot stand philosophy for the very reason that there is no definite answer, no justifiable “this is it” moment as in science or mathematics. However, I can appreciate the philosophical nature of teaching because it will always require me to reflect on my own teaching, on my own frames of thought, and why and how they all came about. Furthermore, it is through being cognizant of my internal processes through which I will come to grow and improve as a quality teacher, thereby avoiding the hole of ignorance I could blindly fall into.