

A Dualism Revisited: Education for Comfort and Discomfort

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Helen Anderson develops a hybrid theory on school environment between Jane R. Martin's comfortableness of home life and Cris Mayo's concept of discomfort in recognizing a structural problem of society. Anderson argues that, even though they seem to be very different in their argument and background, they can correct each other's deficiencies when read as complementary. Anderson made a journey to join these two theories together in an attempt to create a comfortable/uncomfortable space for embracing the three Cs at the same time as encouraging students to question their assumptions about social inequality and power. She argues that the school will be an ideal place when it allows discomfort while students feel welcome and at home. Anderson renovates Martin's *Schoolhome* with Mayo's concept of discomfort. In this article, I will discuss several points based on Martin, Mayo, and Anderson's arguments in the pursuit of a better education for all students, regardless of the differences they might have.

First, let us think about a question Mayo poses, "Is the creation of a school that is the moral equivalent of home an adequate method for addressing the inequality and systemic oppression in society?" Mayo argues that education should allow for students to experience uncomfortable moments in discussion of power and privilege instead of feeling comfortable in school. We should be willing to give up "home" in order to engage in difficult relations for a better world. Leaving a comfort zone of home life can be a beginning of anti-oppressive education. Mayo brings Socratic education with a concept of *aporia* into the discussion. *Aporia*, the state of confusion, opens up the mind toward a new perspective. In an uncomfortable situation, we are able to recognize social problems that are unnoticeable in our natural comfortable surroundings.

However, Anderson raises some doubts based on the fact that *aporia* might not be able to persuade students in positions of privilege to abandon their fundamental beliefs. The method might help them to recognize the problems, but initiating the change requires more than recognizing the issues and problems. This could be possible with the compassion toward other human beings and caring for the world that come with a trusting relationship. Anderson also makes sure that Martin does not ignore the value of discomfort in her *Schoolhome*. The notions of caring and concern do not necessarily require constant comfort, but discomfort may be necessary occasionally. Without care, concern, and connection with others, students holding dominant positions in society may feel little motivation to challenge social inequality. If students do not feel a kinship with their classmates or members of a society, they may be hesitant to question or relinquish the privileges they are bestowed upon and enjoy.

Second, if the school indeed needs three Cs to recognize and change social inequality and injustice, then the next question is how to develop a trusting

relationship between students with difference social backgrounds and interests. We can not assume that everyone is somehow willing to open up to develop trusting relationships. Trust is the very foundation of the *Schoolhome* or any significant relationship. Developing a trusting relationship across social differences can be a challenge. Learning to treat each other as a member of a family would be the foundation for any healthy family, big or small. Without compassion and connection with others, social issues can be very abstract and remote, with no concrete solution in sight. As educators, creating school environments that support trusting relationships will be a priority if we intend to make a better world for all students.

One thing to note at this point is that Martin, Mayo, and Anderson redefine education based on the concept of relationship. The question is, what kind of relationship we are looking for in an educational situation? Whether our answer is Mayo's discomfort or Martin's comfortableness or Anderson's hybrid of these two, teaching students in connection with the rest of the world and having caring for the others as a kin or a family member is the foundation of education. Instead of education for comfort for underprivileged and marginalized group and education for discomfort for the privilege and the advantaged, a trusting relationship is possible when we educate all students for both comfort and discomfort. The family and the school are composed with people who care for each other, but disagree occasionally. Some sense of connection across social differences can be established if both the underprivileged and the privileged are going to make a commitment to challenging systemic oppression. Education for comfort and discomfort are for all students.

Third, it seems that Martin, Mayo, and Anderson envision an ideal classroom as a democratic and caring community and a liberally educated person as an integrated person capable of opening up to a new possibility and experience. The school is a place for learning and understanding ourselves and a society around us. Most of all, Martin's distinction between the public and private sphere of life and Dewey's lifelong battle to fight Platonic dualism or any kind of dualisms — including mind and body, intellect and emotion/feeling — make Anderson's attempt to develop a hybrid theory more significant. Knowledge and understanding alone are not enough to change the society. True revolution comes from when we have connection and compassion for other human beings. Philosopher-queens can be truly heroic when they understand, not only the Form of Ideas, but also the real significance of three Cs and relationships in education. Understanding ourselves and the world around us in the perspective of relationship makes it possible to have compassion and caring. A truly educated person is equipped with intellect, feeling/emotion, and body. Becoming educated can be a journey of integration and wholeness, not alienation or separation. Education is not about separation or isolation, but unification and integration.

Before closing this article, let me share my personal experience with a very uncomfortable situation. I took my students to the New York Tolerance Center where we witnessed representations or records of various forms of discrimination throughout history. It was truly uncomfortable and disturbing to look at those photos, to listen to stories of inhumanity, and most of all to discuss issues that

concern our personal life and belief system. We were expected to unveil our personal belief in the discussion. At the end of the tour and the interactions with other students and experts, I had myself gained a new perspective on the issues and felt a new hope for humanity. Where did this hope come from, I asked myself? I can safely say that it comes from compassion and the kinship I share with other human beings. This experience made me more certain that education for comfort and discomfort is a necessary condition to redress social injustice and make our world a better place for everyone. If I had not been in that uncomfortable situation % even though I did not expect to be that way when I signed up for the trip with my students % I would not have expanded my perspective and furthered my motivation for a better world. Education for comfort and discomfort go hand in hand. We, as educators, try to make a situation more comfortable in order to enable students to open up their minds; we act as a sort of Socratic gadfly or a torpedo fish in order to make everyone uncomfortable or uneasy with their own skin and make the familiar unfamiliar. Anderson did well to attempt to develop a hybrid theory between Martin's education for comfort and Mayo's education for discomfort. Anderson did well to argue for school as a place to meet the needs of every student considering their socio-economic background or any differences they might have. The school should look like a home where disagreement and argument are an essential part of any family, either functional or dysfunctional. As long as we accept each other as a kin or, at least, as fellow human beings, the world will become a better place. The world will become a better place with our effort to make a school a home where we are comfortable enough to bring discomfort into it.

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