

The Wealth of Cultures and the Problem of Generations

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EDUCATION IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT

I would like to present for your consideration a cultural wealth approach to education. Let me assure you that I do not stress the wealth of cultures and worry about whether it is preserved and transmitted to the next generation in order to justify the curriculum of an earlier, supposedly golden, age. On the contrary, a framework for thinking about education that takes into account the brute fact of cultural superabundance, illuminates the poverty of traditional education. I hope this will become clear as I first show the extent of our cultural riches, then explore what this means for education, and finally bring into focus the problem of generations.

Before I begin let me say that the approach to education I present here systematizes and makes explicit what is implicit in my earlier work on gender and education.¹ But the seeds of this new perspective can be found in Plato's *Republic*. Viewing the whole society as potentially educative but perceiving so much of what would actually be transmitted to the next generation as miseducative, Plato instituted a thoroughgoing system of censorship.² One problem a cultural wealth perspective must address is how to make use of Plato's insight about the dispersion of educational agency throughout a society without resorting to his totalitarian solution.

Given Jean-Jacques Rousseau's admiration of Plato, it is to be expected that he also viewed the whole society as educative and that he too worried about its miseducative potential.³ But where Plato tried to purify society by giving philosopher kings total control over what would be transmitted to its young, Rousseau tried to purify the boy Emile's environment by giving a tutor absolute control over him. It occurs to me that home schooling represents a kind of Rousseauian solution to the problem of school's miseducative tendencies — although not, of course, to the miseducative tendencies of the larger society, or even of home itself. Be this as it may, total control over the environment of our young is not possible in this electronic age — if it ever was. And if it were possible, the deceptions, the manipulations, and the infringements on a child's liberty, among other reasons, would make it unacceptable. Thus, another problem a cultural wealth perspective must solve is how to make use of Rousseau's profound insight that members of the older generation need to serve as intermediaries between children and society so as to protect them from the latter's miseducative forces without accepting his totalitarian solution.

Hints of a cultural wealth approach to education can also be discerned in the first pages of Dewey's *Democracy and Education*.⁴ That work actually begins with a discussion of cultural transmission but as one turns the pages, the cultural standpoint of the first chapter gives way to the perspective of the individual. I do not mean to suggest that Dewey espoused a philosophy of radical individualism or that his philosophy abstracted individuals from their political and social contexts. Certainly

not. My point is simply that, his opening remarks notwithstanding, Dewey's main concern in *Democracy and Education* was the growth and development of individuals.

Dewey's treatise also begins with an acknowledgment that school is but one method of cultural transmission. A cultural perspective on education reinforces this caveat about school. Interestingly enough, however, Dewey allowed school to take over his text. Had he retained *Democracy and Education's* initial emphasis on cultural transmission, I do not think this would have happened. Certainly, it has been my experience that one who ponders the vast amount of cultural wealth there is to transmit will eventually start to scan the cultural landscape to discover what institutions besides school are dedicated to its preservation. In any case, in taking far more seriously than Dewey himself perhaps did his affirmation of the importance of cultural transmission, I will also be following his cautionary advice about school.

In choosing the road that Dewey did not travel, I seek new insight into education. My objective is not to discredit the traditional focus on individuals but to supplement it with a different but equally important perspective. I need hardly say how disastrous it would be for philosophers of education to forget that individual students and teachers, parents and children participate in that thing called education. I hope to show, however, that it is dangerous to lose sight of other elements of the educational equation. As a firm believer in the division of intellectual labor, I would never claim that Dewey or any other philosopher was obliged to study education from all possible angles. Nor would I presume to say in advance of inquiry which angles are fruitful ones to explore. I simply offer this cultural wealth perspective on education in the hope that it may shed new light on old topics even as it opens up new ones for investigation.

THE WEALTH OF CULTURES⁵

The world has become so accustomed to adopting a framework of thought whose fundamental premise is scarcity, we forget that in the case of culture the issue is superabundance. We are used to there being too little wealth, but in this instance there is more than enough. For one thing, scholarly disciplines have multiplied in recent years and within each discipline there are also now dozens and dozens of perspectives. In addition, researchers have begun to find out about the works, experiences, practices, and achievements of people who have always been part of society but have never quite been acknowledged as members of culture.

Now I realize that the growing literature on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and so forth, does not in itself guarantee the worth of the research, let alone the importance of the practices and achievements discussed therein. Nonetheless, the new scholarship belongs to our culture's *stock*, a neutral category that includes both assets and liabilities. Moreover I, for one, believe that a huge portion of it is also a part of our culture's wealth. And I would say the same for the enormous range of things that both this work and more traditional investigations take as their objects of research.

It would be a terrible mistake, however, to suppose that in the United States today we have forgotten or mislaid or allowed to decay only those portions of our

cultural stock which relate to women and minorities. When, for instance, I read Wendell Berry's essays on farming — in particular, his description of the activities and attitudes of a good farmer of "the old school"⁶ — I thought mainly about the old agricultural knowledge and skill, attitudes and perspectives that are now at risk. I also wondered how much has already been forgotten and how much of that is perhaps irretrievable.

The diversified nature of our culture's assets is seldom acknowledged because this culture embraces a very narrow definition of its own wealth. There is an interesting parallel to be drawn between the eighteenth century's far too narrow definition of economic wealth and our own overly narrow definition of cultural wealth. When in 1776 Adam Smith inquired into the wealth of nations, he democratized that earlier concept of economic wealth as money or gold and silver by broadening the definition to include not just the wealth of kings, or even the wealth of the merchant class, but the goods that *all* people in a society consume.⁷ In rejecting the present definition of cultural wealth as "high" culture or the "higher" learning, I take similar action. Of course, high culture is a part of our cultural wealth. But there is far more to a culture's wealth than the acknowledged classics of art, music, and literature; more even than philosophy and economics, history, science, and psychology.

The sense of culture — and by extension cultural wealth — I have in mind is akin to that of an anthropologist or sociologist. Culture in the broadest sense of the term includes not just artistic and scholarly products. Nor is it limited to the practices and deeds of some privileged segment of the population. Rather, it encompasses the institutions and practices, rites and rituals, beliefs and skills, attitudes and values, world views and localized modes of thinking and acting of *all* members of society over the *whole* range of contexts. Not everything in a culture's stock counts as wealth, for the term "wealth" carries with it a positive assessment. But it is a far cry from acknowledging that a culture's stock contains liabilities as well as assets to the assumption that high culture or the higher learning exhausts its riches.

The definition of cultural wealth as high culture allows huge portions of our cultural assets to disappear from view. Were cultural wealth a concept devoid of practical import this might be of little consequence. However, the wealth of cultures constitutes the material out of which curricula are constructed: it is the source not only of curricular content and subject matter, but also of education's goals and its methods of instruction. Thus, what is not seen as belonging to the wealth will not — at least not intentionally — be incorporated into the curriculum of our young. Cultural wealth is not the sort of thing that will just sit and accumulate, however. Like an old farmer's know-how and a medicine man's knowledge of the healing properties of Amazon rain forest plants, if these assets are not carefully, even painstakingly, handed down by practitioners of them, they will be lost to posterity.

The problem with our own or any reductive definition of cultural wealth is that a culture's stock is broadly based. No single type of thing can possibly exhaust its wealth because so many types constitute its stock. Were cultural wealth a purely theoretical construct having no practical application, an exclusionary rendering of it would be of little consequence. Education's mandate to transmit the cultural

heritage anchors this concept in everyday affairs, however. After all, what is a culture's heritage if it is not its wealth? Of course, in the name of transmitting that heritage a culture may, in spite of its good intentions, hand down cultural liabilities to its young — for instance, the practices of child abuse and rape — as well as assets. Yet surely the object is to pass on to them whatever cultural stock is perceived to be of value. And just as certainly, insofar as cultural wealth is identified with high culture, a nation or society will be ignoring the greater part of its wealth.

It is a dangerous policy to reduce the wealth of cultures to high culture because no single institution of a society is the conservator of a culture's whole wealth. Suppose a portion of the whole were being squandered by one of the custodians; or, less melodramatically, that for reasons beyond anyone's control, its guardian could no longer preserve and nurture it. If the assets were not considered to belong to the culture's wealth, their loss would not even be noticed. If noticed, their disappearance would cause no alarm. On the other hand, if the items appeared on an inventory of cultural wealth, they would sooner or later be missed, whereupon decisions could be made about whether a new form of guardianship was required.

The supposition is not purely hypothetical. The guardianship of the old farmer's know-how was once a family matter but, for complex economic, technological, and sociological reasons quite beyond the control of any one individual or family grouping, the self-appointed caretaker of this portion of our wealth has for some time been unable to carry out its responsibilities. The fact that we are only dimly aware of this historic trend and quite unmoved by it is an alarming confirmation of the desperate need for a panoramic view of the contents of cultural wealth. Another case in point is, of course, the wealth that has historically been in home's keep.⁸

I do not want to paint too grim a picture of cultural loss, however. There are many wonderful instances of good conduct toward America's past — some as prosaic as cookbooks, others as uncommon as the living museum in Sturbridge, Massachusetts. In addition to institutions like museums that have been specifically designed to protect and preserve the wealth, ones like school, home, church, neighborhood, and workplace do so in the course of transmitting it to the next generation. Preservation and transmission may be theoretically distinct processes, the one directed to the protection of assets for the next generation and the other to handing the stock over, passing it down to them, yet these two functions are often so intimately connected in practical life as to be virtually indistinguishable.

Despite the number and variety of custodians, however, our assets are not secure. Smith wrote, "It can seldom happen that the circumstances of a great nation can be much affected either by the prodigality or misconduct of individuals; the profusion or imprudence of some, being always more than compensated by the frugality and good conduct of others."⁹ Perhaps a nation's cultural wealth will not be threatened by the prodigality of a few individuals so long as their imprudence is compensated for by the frugality of the majority. But the prospect of such compensation scarcely seems warranted when the greater part of a people have no knowledge of what cultural assets they possess and, in any case, exhibit a devil-may-care attitude toward that inheritance.

THE POVERTY OF EDUCATION¹⁰

Try now to imagine Adam Smith proposing his broad definition of the wealth of nations and at the same time giving tacit consent to the old mercantile system. The discrepancy between the traditional ways of thinking and acting and his new, enlarged vision of a nation's wealth would have been painfully apparent. A similarly jarring experience is in store for those who adopt a broad definition of cultural wealth while leaving intact the present false equation between education and schooling and the obsolete definition of the latter.

In the United States, the culture I know best, the reduction of education to schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon. Schools existed in the early colonial period, but they played a relatively small role.¹¹ Even when, in the mid-nineteenth century, a system of free, universal, public schooling was under construction, most people took school to be a minor part of education.¹² It was only in the twentieth century that school came to be seen as the sum total of education. As we reach the millennium, the conflation of education and schooling to which Ivan Illich so dramatically drew attention continues to govern this culture's educational thought.¹³

A broad definition of cultural wealth requires a broad conception of *educational agency* so that large quantities of stock are not lost to posterity. When school is considered to be "the" educating agent, it is only natural to see it as "the" one true or legitimate transmitter of the heritage. But then, even if the assets in school's custody are assured safe passage, whatever is in the keep of other custodians is all too easily overlooked.

As it happens — indeed, as befits school's history — the assets that our culture has placed in school's keep represent but one small portion of the wealth. When as a result of the Industrial Revolution, occupations left the household, school eventually took on the task of preparing young people to enter the workplace — something home gave up doing with work's exodus.¹⁴ School also shouldered what had once been the local community's job of initiating children into the larger society.¹⁵ With home continuing to be held responsible through its domestic curriculum for educating members of the next generation for life in the world of the transformed private home, school's duty became that of educating them to take their places in the world of politics, work, and the professions.

Needless to say, this division of responsibilities had gendered implications. It stands to reason that since the world of work, politics, and the professions was culturally identified as men's realm, school would not be held responsible for transmitting that portion of the wealth relating to the world of the private home that had traditionally been created, accumulated, and preserved by women. In *The Schoolhome* I argued that because of the revolution in gender roles and relations, this division of educational labor between home and school is now obsolete. Here I will simply indicate how that now unwarranted division contributes to the poverty of educational theory and practice today.

Taken by itself, school's reductive definition of the life for which it prepares our young may seem of little consequence. But recall that school is considered to be our one and only educator, and then the fact that we expect it to transmit a very limited

portion of our culture's wealth looms large. It looms even larger when one remembers the assimilationist policies to which our nation has subscribed. Full-fledged members of the world of work, politics, and the professions were — and to a great extent still are — expected to shed whatever minority religious, ethnic, and racial identities their families might have and to take on those of the dominant white, Protestant, middle class, male tribe. Add to all this the tendency of educators to reduce flesh and blood children to disembodied minds, to equate the development of mind with the acquisition of knowledge, and for the most part to limit knowledge to the portion called “propositional” and the extent of education's impoverishment becomes apparent.

Lest it be thought that Dewey's advice to educate the whole child is at long last being taken seriously by schools, let me remind you of the following: Children do poorly on tests of geography facts: Press and public condemn the nation's schools. Seventeen-year-olds cannot come up with the dates of the Civil War or the name of the author of *Leaves of Grass*: The experts consider this reason to overhaul the entire system.¹⁶ Those same youngsters run drugs, vandalize neighborhoods, and kill their peers and no one blames their education. What accounts for the wildly divergent responses? Our culture's assumptions that the object of school is to train the mind and that this amounts to the transmission of knowledge effectively precludes holding the educational system responsible for the behavior of the nation's young.

No one is born knowing how to be kind, let alone how to withstand contrary peer pressures. No one at birth is able to take pride in positive achievement or feel ashamed of wrongdoing. No one comes into this world with the skills needed to resolve conflicts nonviolently or the desire to take other people's needs and points of view into account. Nor do these traits and dispositions emerge full blown as a person matures. On the contrary, to be human is to acquire them through education, or not at all. Nonetheless, we have somehow become convinced that being educated has nothing to do with behavior — except verbal behavior on tests. It is as if, through an assortment of conjuring tricks, a wizard had managed to convince us that only knowledge is implicated in the process of education — and a very small portion of knowledge, at that.

Education is so central to the preservation and transmission of cultural assets that it is as imprudent to conflate it with one of its institutional forms as it is to reduce the wealth itself to one portion thereof. It is equally unwise to allow partial definitions of the aims, the subject matter, and the societal role of education to represent the whole thing.

MULTIPLE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY

In *The Schoolhome* I called home and school partners in the education of this or any nation's young. What I did not say enough about there is that, for all their importance, these are but two of society's educational agents. Church, neighborhood, museums, libraries, zoos, symphony orchestras, banks, businesses, the stock market, newspapers, magazines, book clubs, record companies, publishing houses, sports organizations, billboards, government agencies, TV, the internet, and the media in all its multitudinous forms: These and all the other institutions of society educate young and old alike.

Rousseau wrote in *Emile* that education comes to us “from nature or from men or from things.”¹⁷ More recently Illich called things, models, peers, and elders the resources a child needs for “real learning.”¹⁸ A cultural wealth approach does not deny that learning derives from people and things. In real life, however, things and people are embedded in one or another cultural context, which is to say that we never encounter them in the abstract “as such.” Recognizing the contextual nature of education, this approach designates as a culture’s educational agents the various institutions (where this term is understood broadly to include associations, groups, cultural settings, and so forth) that transmit the culture’s stock.

But do institutions have the requisite characteristics to qualify as educators? In a 1972 essay, R.S. Peters distinguished two concepts of education. Originally, he said, the term “had a very generalized meaning” in that it marked out “any process of rearing, bringing up, instructing, etc.”¹⁹ With the rise of industrialism and the development of compulsory schooling, however, the term was increasingly used in connection with “the development of knowledge and understanding” — or, as Peters put it, with “the ideal of an educated man.”²⁰

In the broad sense, said Peters, education “must have included passing on things that were thought valuable, but probably also included a lot of other things that were of little importance.”²¹ He maintained, however, that a value condition “is indissolubly connected” to the narrower, school-related sense. Actually, the value condition he spoke of was two conditions: one requiring that what is transmitted is — or is thought to be — worthwhile; and one requiring a willingness and voluntariness on the part of the pupil since “to say that we are educating people commits us...to morally legitimate procedures.”²² Peters’s narrow concept of education also presupposed intent on the educator’s part. For although he acknowledged that for education to take place it is not necessary that the learner acquire the knowledge being transmitted, he appeared to take it for granted that the educator must be trying to produce this happy state in the learner.

I introduce Peters’s two concepts of education here not to provide yet another exegesis of his work, but because I am so struck by the fact that he considered the broad concept of education that a cultural wealth perspective requires to be philosophically uninteresting. After acknowledging this sense of education and admitting that he had not perhaps appreciated how widespread it is,²³ Peters turned his back on it. By linking it to the “instrumental” view of education that he so obviously deplored, he implicitly urged his audience to spurn it too. And many of us in the field — perhaps most of us — did just this: Despite the fact that the greater part of an individual’s learning does not begin to conform to Peters’s preferred concept of education; despite the fact that not even the greater part of school learning conforms to his school-related concept.

The concept of educational agency that a democratized definition of cultural wealth calls for presupposes a broad conception of education of the sort that Peters rejected. Would that the major TV networks saw themselves as engaged in educating the public! Would that the advertising industry and mass market publishers aimed at the transmission of what is worthwhile! One who adopts Peters’s or any other

narrow definition of education will have the satisfaction of withholding the label “educator” from such institutions, but the pleasure comes at a price. To begin with, what is not considered an educational agent cannot in good logic be held responsible for its miseducative acts. In addition, what falls outside the definition of education for all practical purposes falls outside our field. If we decree that what is daily being passed down to the next generation is no concern of ours, how can we possibly determine what their education, in the narrow sense, should consist in? Finally, if we in the field of philosophy of education do not look at education in the broad sense through philosophical lenses, who on earth will?

From a cultural wealth standpoint something can be an educational agent without seeing itself as engaged in educating or teaching; without aiming at the development of knowledge or understanding; without transmitting what is, or what it takes to be, worthwhile; without its learners exhibiting wittingness or voluntariness. To say this is not to say that the conditions Peters put on education are irrelevant to this discussion. If a society’s educational agents are to act responsibly and be held accountable for whatever miseducation they promote, it is vitally important that they see themselves as educators. If we do not wish to bankrupt our young by passing down our culture’s liabilities rather than its assets, it is crucial that the whole range of education’s agents transmit what is worthwhile. Thus, at least two of the conditions that Peters placed on education are goals that this society ought to work for. Given the vast extent of our cultural stock, the incredible number of custodians thereof, and the very real danger that the United States is blithely transmitting its liabilities to the next generation, we cannot, however, afford to build these into the very concept of educational agency. To do so is to turn our backs on the world.

The broad concept of education that I am reclaiming leaves us with the problem of the individuation of educational agents. How many educational agents are there in the United States? in Canada? in the United Kingdom? Where does one stop and another begin? I cannot possibly do justice to these questions here, but I can and will say a bit more about the characteristics of educational agents.²⁴

As I see it, every educational agent has in its custody some portion of cultural stock — which is not to say that it is necessarily the sole custodian of any item of stock. Thus, for example, a symphony orchestra, a recording company, and a music publisher may all be custodians of Beethoven’s symphonies. Over time, moreover, an educational agent can acquire new and dispose of old stock. For example, the Boston Symphony Orchestra can commission a new cello concerto, a publisher can take a book off its lists. Now the fact that every educational agent has some cultural stock in its keep does not mean that every custodian of cultural stock is an educational agent, yet I tend to think that this latter is also true. Consider an archive that does no business: It preserves the letters and journals stashed away on its shelves but no one ever reads them. Even it is an educational agent for its very architecture, not to mention the absence of patrons, transmits myriad messages to those who work there, and so do the archivists themselves.

One problematic aspect of Peters’s preferred definition of education is that it rests on the false equation between education and schooling. Another is that it totally

ignores the hidden curricula of school and society. Yet hidden curricula are everywhere. Granted, an educational agent that does not define itself as such and does not aim at learning will not have a formal curriculum — or “curriculum proper” — as I have called it.²⁵ However, so long as the agent transmits cultural stock — be this through the services of nature, things, models, peers or elders — it will have a hidden curriculum. But hidden curricula do not presuppose willingness and voluntariness on the part of their recipients. They do not require self-awareness and intentionality on the part of their transmitters. They do not necessarily transmit stock that is, or is thought to be, worthwhile.

I am aware that it greatly simplifies a philosopher of education’s work to ignore this ubiquitous and often very troubling fact of life. However, if a culture as complex as ours is to act responsibly toward the next generation, it has to keep track of its stock. It cannot possibly do this if its concept of education hides from view the very existence of hidden curricula.

FOUR KEY QUESTIONS

Given, then, that an educational agent is guardian of a portion of cultural stock, four crucial questions remain to be asked.²⁶ In regard to the first question, “In what form is the stock preserved?” I propose that we think of both cultural assets and liabilities as falling along a *preservation continuum* whose two poles are dead relic and living legacy. The location of any item of cultural stock on this continuum is, of course, an empirical question: One cannot simply infer a stock’s location from the fact that it is, for example, a ballet or a set of agricultural techniques or an ancient people’s burial practices. Nor, I should add, can one infer a stock’s location on the continuum from the identity of the stock’s guardians. I suppose it is possible for all the stock in one educational agent’s keep to be at precisely the same point of the continuum, but my guess is that differentiation is the rule: that it is far more likely for one guardian’s parcel of cultural stock to be distributed along the continuum than for it to cluster in one spot. Once again, however, this issue is not to be decided in advance of inquiry.

The second question is, “By what mechanisms is the stock transmitted?” Before I elaborate, I should explain that I use the language of transmission here to denote the transfer of cultural wealth — and cultural liabilities too — by its guardians to one or more segments of the population. This terminology should *not* be taken to imply that schools or other educational agents play a passive role in either the selection of the stock in their keep or its valuation; nor that those to whom the stock is transmitted are passive recipients of it.²⁷ Nor is the term “transmission” meant to prejudge either the type of process by which that transfer occurs or the nature of the people and things implicated therein. I should add that I also use the term “mechanism” in its most general sense: That is, as the means by which the transfer is, or is intended to be, accomplished.

The *transmission mechanisms* at an educational agent’s disposal range from deliberately designed educational activities like teaching and training, instructing and explaining, lecturing and demonstrating, indoctrinating and brainwashing to

less formal but equally effective transmitters of both wealth and liabilities. Philosophers have analyzed many of the deliberately designed activities in some detail. Studies of school's hidden curriculum yield insight into the less formal mechanisms. Among the sources of learning cited in these inquiries are school's rules, its social structure, its physical layout, teacher-pupil relationships, the games played, the sanctioned activities, textbooks and audio visual aids, furnishings and architecture, disciplinary measures, timetables, tracking systems, and curricular priorities. With the appropriate adjustments, the list applies equally to the whole range of educational agents.

I once tried to compile a list of all the sources of school's hidden curriculum only to realize that I had set myself a never ending task. New practices, procedures, and environments carry with them new "learning affordances."²⁸ And since school is forever changing, the list of school's transmission mechanisms will have no clear end. The lesson I learned about school can be generalized.

Of course, a given agent may avail itself of only a small sampling of the totality of transmission mechanisms. Still, there is no telling in advance just how extensive an educational agent's repertoire is. Nor in advance of inquiry can one definitively match up cultural stock and transmission mechanisms, for a given asset or liability can be passed along by different mechanisms even as different items of cultural stock are transmitted by the same mechanism. To complicate matters further, the transmission mechanisms for a particular item of cultural stock can change over time. If an educational agent undergoes significant alteration, it stands to reason that its transmission mechanisms will be affected.

Now when philosophers of education distinguish knowing how from knowing that or learning with understanding from rote learning they address the third question, "In what manner is the stock held by those to whom it is distributed?" But although we have devoted a fair amount of time and energy to this research, I fear we have only begun to scratch the surface. Be this as it may, at present I wish simply to distinguish questions about the *manner of holding* some portion of cultural stock from the question, "What is the pattern of distribution of the stock?"

Because educational agents have custody of different portions of cultural stock, because there are different forms in which they can preserve their stock, because they can pass their stock down by different transmission mechanisms, and because they can bestow it on different individuals or groups, each agent will have its own pattern of distribution. Of course, one agent's *distribution pattern* may closely resemble another's. But the distribution pattern of any given educational agent is apt to change over time as the custodian takes charge of new stock, drops old stock from its lists, or moves the stock in its keep to different point on its preservation continuum. Thus, there seems to be no *a priori* reason to suppose that whatever likenesses one discovers are permanent.

Now just as the distribution patterns of different educational agents can display a relatively high degree of uniformity *vis-à-vis* some particular portion of stock, the distribution pattern of a given educational agent can exhibit a high degree of uniformity across its own holdings; by which I mean that it can transmit all its stock

in the same form to the very same beneficiaries. But it can also exhibit a high degree of differentiation, passing down different portions of cultural stock to different groups or individuals. It is this latter phenomenon, particularly in the case of school, that has commanded the attention of those theorists who focus on cultural capital and cultural reproduction.

Briefly and roughly put, “critical cultural capital” or “reproduction” theorists argue that schools are not the neutral, objective observers of the cultural, economic, and political scene most people think they are. On the contrary, in stratified societies like our own, schools distribute cultural capital unevenly, thus reproducing the existing class structure. More particularly, through intricate tracking systems and other mechanisms, schools pass down the cultural capital of the dominant class to the children of that class while denying the children of other classes access to that capital.

Different reproduction theorists offer different formulations of this *Reproduction Thesis*, but the details of these need not detain us, for my objective here is simply to spell out the relationship I see between reproduction theory and my own cultural wealth perspective. If nothing else, the fact that both approaches import the languages of culture and economics into educational contexts more than justifies this attempt.

From the account I have so far given it should be clear that in both scope and intent a cultural wealth approach to education differs significantly from that taken by reproduction theorists. My approach is guided by a desire to know the extent and nature of both our cultural stock and our culture’s educational agents, and to discover whether and how our assets and liabilities are being preserved and transmitted to the new generation. The object of cultural capital theory is not nearly so broad.

To be sure, reproduction theory’s contribution to the study of education extends well beyond the *Reproduction Thesis*. There is, in the first place, the central insight that the distribution pattern of schooling is highly politicized. To this must be added both the claim that decisions about what gets included in school’s curriculum are themselves politicized and a critique of that educational research which creates the illusion of objectivity for both itself and school by abstracting school from its cultural and political contexts. Nevertheless, reproduction theorists have tended to concentrate on one dimension of the overall perspective that I am formulating — the distribution of a culture’s stock; on one portion of the stock — what is referred to as cultural capital; and on one educational agent — namely school.²⁹

Insofar as different transmission mechanisms appear to be implicated in the uneven distribution of stock that they discern, reproduction theorists also attend to these, but this interest derives from a primary concern with distribution. The burning interest of reproduction theorists in the question, “Whose knowledge is it?” also derives from a concern with distribution. For to demonstrate that, in distributing knowledge according to class schools engage in cultural reproduction, it is necessary to show that the knowledge being transmitted by school is already class property.

In saying that reproduction theorists do not study the whole range of cultural stock or array of educational agents, I do not mean to suggest that they could not. Nor

do I mean to imply that their approach and mine are incompatible. On the contrary, I take reproduction theory to be one potential source of empirical grounding for a cultural wealth approach to education, even as I see this framework as a potential source of conceptual clarification for reproduction theorists.

I call reproduction theory a “potential” source of grounding because, for the moment, I am leaving open the question, “What is the distribution pattern of school?” Indeed, I am leaving open the question of whether *any* educational agent is classist, racist, sexist, homophobic, or discriminatory in some other respect. Ultimately, however, it will be important to document what school’s and all the other agent’s distribution patterns actually are. At that point it will be important to decide if reproduction theory has gotten school’s distribution pattern right and if the class-based pattern it discerns is repeated by education’s other agents.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEM OF GENERATIONS

In *The Problem of Generations*, Karl Mannheim asked his readers to imagine what social life would be like if one generation lived forever and no new generation took its place. He maintained that in this “utopia” there would be no cultural loss. In contrast, he said,

Our culture is developed by individuals who come into contact anew with the accumulated heritage. In the nature of our psychical make-up, a fresh contact (meeting something anew) always means a changed relationship of distance from the object and a novel approach in assimilating, using, and developing the proffered material.³⁰

Such changes entail cultural loss.

When I read this passage, I could not help but think of the controversy over George Ballachine’s ballets. Ten years before Ballanchine died he began filming his dances for archival purposes. Clearly, he was thinking of his works as artifacts to be preserved for posterity, but he also wanted to hand them down as a living legacy:

People dance while I’m here, they dance a certain way. When I’m gone, they will continue dancing, but somebody will rehearse them different and it will all be a little different, with different approach, different intensity. So a few years go by and I won’t be here. Will be my ballets, but will look different.³¹

Ballachine not only established a school in which to train dancers to his ideal, he named his successor. Still, just ten years after his death a critic described the “catastrophically swift decline” of Ballachine’s repertory. The master had forecast that his work would live in some recognizable living form until the first decade of the twenty-first century. His disciple could see that its ruin was “all but complete” as of June 1993. The ballets, she said, have not suffered the deterioration that is to be expected over time. Rather, they “have had their hearts torn out.” They live on “not as ballets that have changed but as empty demonstrations of formerly meaningful spectacles.”³²

I take this to be an extreme example of the kind of loss that Mannheim was talking about.³³ But there is another kind, too. Mannheim spoke of “the accumulated cultural heritage” without saying that a society’s cultural stock is composed of liabilities as well as assets. As I write, my daily newspaper reports on an attack on a school bus in Algeria that killed 16 children and the driver, a search for the body

of a kidnapped 10-year-old Massachusetts boy, the stabbing of an elderly New Jersey woman by a home health aide who coveted her savings, a hit and run fatality, an epidemic of youth suicides and suicide attempts, a city that bears the scars of war, and much, much more. All of which is to say that the superabundance of cultural stock belonging to the Western and Eastern, the Northern and Southern worlds includes: murder and rape, torture and war, prejudice and discrimination, and poverty and greed. If the existing generation does not take action to prevent these liabilities from being passed down to future generations as living legacies, it may well place the next generation in a kind of cultural bankruptcy.

It is not uncommon for economists and other social analysts to express concern about the financial burdens my generation is bequeathing to future ones by its military spending, its unwillingness to invest in social welfare, its disregard of the natural environment. The cultural debt we impose because, for example, we are unwilling to interfere with the electronic media's transmission of violence, callousness, consumerism, racism, sexism, and pornography is just as troubling.

For me, reading Mannheim's *The Problem of Generations* is akin to taking a Rorschach test in that so many different interpretations can be given of exactly what he thinks *the* problem really is. What is very clear, however, is that Mannheim took sociology to be the key to understanding the problem. In a way he was right, for his explication of the "fundamental facts in relation to generations" is positively breathtaking. Nevertheless, the problem has an educational dimension that, perhaps because of his own generational position, Mannheim quite overlooked.

One big part of the sociological problem of generations, as formulated by Mannheim, is how to make up the losses that naturally occur when cultural wealth is transmitted to the new generation. There is, however, another part, namely how to maximize the transmission of assets and at the same time minimize the transmission of liabilities.

The recognition that in educating the next generation a culture confronts two problems — one of omission and one of commission — is central to a cultural wealth perspective. On the one hand, there is the grave danger that the older generation will fail to pass down valuable portions of its wealth. On the other hand, there is the equally serious risk that it will pass down cultural liabilities instead of assets. Place a worthwhileness condition on the cultural stock being transmitted and the sin of commission is rendered invisible. Refuse to acknowledge the existence of hidden curricula and we will not be able to see the vehicles by which liabilities are conveyed to the next generation.³⁴ Remove these barriers and the structure of the educational problem of generations is laid bare.

In view of the dispersion of educational agency throughout society, one vital step toward the achievement of the end of maximizing the next generation's cultural assets and minimizing its cultural liabilities must be the acknowledgment by the whole range of educational agents that they are guardians and transmitters of our culture's stock and their acceptance of a principle of accountability. One of the worst by-products of the false equation of education and schooling is that no unacknowledged educational agent can, in good logic, be charged with *miseducating* our youth.

Yet in bombarding young people with unwholesome, anti-social models of living, and in making these appear fatally attractive, the print and electronic media are guilty of doing precisely this. A beginning to holding them accountable for the damage they are doing in preserving and transmitting our culture's liabilities rather than its wealth is to make public their actual status as educational agents.

A second vital step is to establish an ethos of mutual cooperation and shared responsibility across the full range of education's agents. Among other things, this will mean that when one agent is no longer able to preserve and transmit the wealth in its keep, others will be willing to step into the breach. And if in so doing they become overtaxed, they in turn will feel free to share or shed some of their responsibilities. Application of this ethos to the case of school means that even as school shoulders some of home's custodial responsibilities for our domestic wealth, it can start sharing some of its present functions and custodial responsibilities with other educational agents: for instance, vocational education with industry; science, social studies, and art education with museums; music education with symphony orchestras and opera companies; physical education with health professions.³⁵

For a spirit of cooperation to prevail, however, education's agents will have to have some way of determining how their own curriculum — hidden or otherwise — relates to those of others. Thus, the third vital step on my list is the establishment of a system of *cultural bookkeeping* whose object is the tracking of the culture's wealth and liabilities.

It goes without saying that this bookkeeping project entails a vast amount of research. Just for starters, both the culture's educational agents and its stock would have to be identified, assets and liabilities would have to be distinguished, and the distribution pattern for each agent and for each portion of cultural stock would have to be determined. This enormous research effort would necessarily be interdisciplinary. At the very least it would include: *historical research*, for example of the life and times of the various educational agents and portions of cultural stock; *philosophical analysis* of key concepts such as "living legacy," "preservation," "educational agent" and the "wealth-liability" distinction; *normative philosophical* work on, for example, what cultural stock should be preserved as living legacy or dead relic and what the various distribution patterns should be; *social scientific research* on, for example, the workings of the various educational agents, cultural definitions of cultural wealth, the actual as opposed to the intended distribution pattern for some portion of stock.

If you are thinking that a cultural bookkeeping system of this sort sounds wildly ambitious, let me just say that you are right. As I envision it, it is analogous in many ways to the human genome project — an ambitious undertaking if there ever was one. But consider this: If a system of tracking could be developed, our culture would be in a position to decide which portions of its wealth are at risk; for those at risk it would be in a position to decide which portions should be put in the custody of different agents, and to determine if some of the cultural liabilities now being transmitted as living legacies could be moved to a different position on the relevant educational agent's preservation continua. In other words, we would be in a position to solve the educational problem of generations.

1. Jane Roland Martin, *Reclaiming a Conversation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Jane Roland Martin, *The Schoolhome* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); and Jane Roland Martin, "What Should We Do with a Hidden Curriculum When We Find One?" in *Changing the Educational Landscape* (1976; reprint, New York: Routledge, 1994).
2. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974).
3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom (1762; reprint, New York: Basic Books, 1979),
4. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1961).
5. This section draws heavily on Jane Roland Martin, "There's Too Much to Teach," *Educational Researcher* 25, no. 2 (March 1996): 4-10
6. Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 152-61.
7. Robert L. Heilbroner, *The Worldly Philosophers* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1953), 45.
8. See Martin, *The Schoolhome*.
9. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (1776; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 362.
10. This section draws on both my De Garmo Lecture, "There's Too Much to Teach" and my John Dewey Lecture, sponsored by the John Dewey Society, "The Wealth of Cultures and the Poverty of Curriculum; or Education and Our Great Unmooring," paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York City, April 1996).
11. Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage, 1960), 16ff.
12. Lawrence Cremin, *The Genius of American Education* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 6-7.
13. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Harper and Row, 1970).
14. Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School* (New York: Knopf, 1968), chap. 2 and Marvin Lazerson and W. Norton Grubb, eds., "Introduction," in *American Education and Vocationalism* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1974).
15. Cremin, *The Genius of American Education*. and Cremin, *The Transformation of the School*.
16. Diane Ravich and Chester E Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know?* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), chap. 2.
17. Rousseau, *Emile*, 38.
18. Illich, *Deschooling Society*, 109.
19. R.S. Peters, "Education and the Educated Man," in *A Critique of Current Educational Aims*, ed. R.F. Dearden and R.S. Peters (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), 6-8. Actually, he said that it "indiscriminately" marked this out, 13.
20. *Ibid.*, 7.
21. *Ibid.*, 9.
22. *Ibid.*, 3.
23. *Ibid.*, 8.
24. Similar questions arise in connection with the concepts of cultural stock, cultural wealth, and cultural liabilities.
25. Martin, "What Should We Do," 155.
26. These are not necessarily the only crucial questions.
27. Henry A. Giroux, *Ideology Culture and the Process of Schooling* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 149.
28. The category of cultural capital includes much more than propositional knowledge. But, given its class basis, it cannot approach the inclusiveness of the concept of cultural stock outlined here. Pierre Bourdieu's writings recognize a much wider range of educational agents.
- 29 I owe this term to Alexander Goldowski.

30. Karl Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 293.
31. Arlene Croce, "The Ballachine Show," *The New Yorker*, 7 June, 1993, 99.
32. *Ibid.*, 100.
33. But in his view the new generation adds value to the wealth through cultural reevaluation.
34. It is perhaps worth noting that a hidden curriculum *can* transmit cultural assets as well as cultural liabilities.
35. Such sharing already occurs, but the parties to it are usually perceived as school's helpers rather than as educational agents in their own right.