PART I

On Being a Teacher

1. Letter to a Young Teacher
   Joseph Featherstone
2. Selection From *Accident, Awareness, and Actualization*
   Nel Noddings
3. Respect, Liking, Trust, and Fairness
   Kathleen Cushman

B. Othanel Smith (1968) has written that in many regards teaching is the same from one culture to another—that is, "a natural social phenomenon" (Smith, 1968, p. 4). It involves an agent who interacts with students within a specific setting. Typically, he or she has little control over the size of the class that is taught, the social and cultural background of students, or their physical characteristics. What a teacher can do is deal with the students on a personal level, shape assignments and the way questions are asked, and shape the content of what is taught. Teaching is more art than science, an imprecise process of trial and error and successive approximation. Bill Ayers (1995), an author included in this book (see Chapter 7), well known political activist from the 1960s, and an experienced teacher at both the university and K–12 level describes teaching this way:

> A life in teaching is a stitched-together affair, a crazy quilt of odd pieces and scrounged materials, equal parts invention and imposition. To make a life in teaching is largely to find your own way, to follow this or that thread, to work until your

> fingers ache, your mind feels as if it will unravel, and your eyes give out, and to make mistakes and then rework large pieces. It is sometimes tedious and demanding, confusing and uncertain, and yet it is as often creative and dazzling: Surprising splashes of color can suddenly appear at its center; unexpected patterns can emerge and lend the whole affair a sense of grace and purpose and possibility. (p. 1)

For most people, when teaching goes well, there are few more satisfying experiences. When it goes badly, it can be a nightmare.

The sociologist Dan Lortie (1989), in his book *Schoolteacher,* identifies five attractions to teaching that set it apart from other professionals. These include the following:

1. the *service theme,* serving other people and making a difference in their lives
2. the *interpersonal theme,* working with individuals and making a difference in their lives
3. the *continuation theme,* continuing positive experiences people have had in their earlier lives and education (a coach being involved in teaching people about sports, someone who liked literature, teaching English, etc.)
4. the *time compatibility theme,* having a job that is compatible with people's needs or desires (having summer breaks to allow one to travel, having a schedule that allows one the time to have a profession and also raise children); and
5. the *market benefit theme,* making an income on which to live (pp. 27–31).

Teachers entering the profession must address a number of personal and professional issues that go beyond Lortie's five main attractors. These include their moral and ethical stance. Historically, teachers have been held to a higher standard than other members of the society. The reasons for this are clear: They are public figures who deal with minors. As a result, indiscretions that are permissible in the more general public are not acceptable for teachers.

In the selections in Chapter 1, we begin by looking at the advice given by Joseph Featherstone, a master teacher educator, to a young beginning teacher. In the second reading, Kathleen Cushman (2004) interviews students about what it is that they feel teachers should do in their classrooms and how they should represent themselves and interact with their students. In other words, Cushman is dealing with how teachers should lead their daily lives in the classroom.

The final chapter concludes with a reading by the educational philosopher Nel Noddings (1997), who describes in detail how she constructed her life as an elementary and secondary school teacher, mother, and, eventually, university educator. Her reflections address the accidental developments in her life and career. She describes at length, for example, how disappointments often, in the

end, served to her advantage (i.e., only being able to get an elementary position when she originally wanted to teach high school).

Further Readings: In addition to the "Letter to a Young Teacher" written by Joseph Featherstone included with this selection, an excellent similar work is Jonathan Kozol's *Letters to a Young Teacher* (Crown Publishers, 2007). Also of interest is Sonia Nieto's *Why We Teach* (Teachers College Press, 2005).

Linking to Popular Culture: There are numerous movies that describe the lives of teachers and their day-to-day work. In the movie *Dead Poets Society* (1989), a charismatic teacher at an elite New England boarding school challenges the conservative values of the school and its curriculum. The movie won an Academy Award for best screenplay and raises a number of interesting issues concerning how teachers can and should shape their students. This issue was also raised in the 1969 movie based on a Muriel Spark's novel of the same title, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. It explores the story of a private school teacher vicariously living through the personal experiences of her students. Moral and ethical issues are also raised in the 2002 movie *The Emperor's Club,* in which an idealistic prep school teacher attempts to redeem an incorrigible student. For historical photographs of teachers in the United States, go to the Prints and Photographs Catalogue at the Library of Congress (http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html) and type "American Teachers" into the photographic search engine.

References

Ayers, W. (1995). *To teach: The journey of a teacher*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Featherstone, J. (1995). Letter to a young teacher. In W. Ayers (Ed.), *To become a teacher.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975.

Smith, B. O. (1968). Toward a theory of teaching. In A. A. Bellack (Ed.), *Theory and research in teaching* (p. 23). New York: Teachers College, Bureau of Publications.

1

Letter to a Young Teacher

Joseph Featherstone

Joseph Featherstone is a professor at Michigan State University. He is a well known teacher educator, essayist, and former school principal. In his "Letter to a Young Teacher" (1995), Featherstone remembers his grandmother, the principal of a small elementary school in rural Pennsylvania, and her commitment to a social and political agenda. Featherstone argues that in a "confused political time" such as the one we live in, being a teacher requires, more than ever, the need for a political understanding and commitment.

Featherstone recognizes that schools have historically reflected the systematic inequality at work in the larger American society. He also maintains that schools have the potential—much as his grandmother believed—to be places where all people can be nurtured, grow, and develop. According to Featherstone, schools also need to be places where people can learn the joy of learning and creating. Students need to be able to experience a "movement of the spirit," not just the acquisition of pragmatic knowledge that leads to a job.

"What is to be taught?" in the curriculum is among the perennial questions Featherstone raises. The selection of course content is deeply political. Who and what get left out of what we teach? What gets left in? In the end, teaching and instruction are deeply cultural and political.

NOTE: Reprinted by permission of the Publisher. From William Ayers (Ed.), To Become a Teacher: Making a Difference in Children's Lives, New York: Teachers College Press. Copyright © 1995 by Teachers College, Columbia University. All rights reserved.

Featherstone distrusts business models of efficiency in education while at the same time espousing a democratic notion of a schooling in which high and elite culture is available to all students. Like John Dewey, Featherstone recognizes that schools are "embryonic democracies." What children learn in school about being part of a democratic system is carried with them into their adult lives.

Reading Featherstone's "Letter to a Young Teacher" raises the following questions:

1. To what extent should teachers be acting to change the world in terms of society and politics?
2. Should the type of education we provide our children in a democracy be different from what is found in other societies? If yes, why?
3. Is education in the United States truly equal?
4. How has the recent emphasis on standards in our schools diminished the ability of the schools to be places where children learn "grace, poetry and laughter"? Is this something teachers and schools need to be concerned about?
5. Who should determine what is taught in our schools?
6. Should models drawn from business and commerce dominate the discussion of how our schools should function?
7. How do you think schools should function to encourage the growth and development of democratic values and communities?

Dear Josie,

You asked me for some advice about starting out as a teacher, and what popped into my head first is an image of my grandmother. I never met her, but she remains a strong presence. She was the principal of a small, mostly immigrant elementary school in the Pennsylvania coal country. Like so many teachers then and now, the stories of her teaching got buried with her. She was one of many urban Irish Catholics who took part in the progressive educational and political movements of her day. I know that she was ambitious for kids' learning. The immigrant coal miners' children, whose families were often out of work, were to read high-class literature and poetry—she had a weakness for the English poet Browning. She also checked to see that kids brushed their teeth. She was a force in local and state politics, fighting for labor rights, pioneering in women's rights, and leading the movement to end child labor. She was the first woman elected to the state Democratic committee in Pennsylvania. I think she saw a direct link between politics and her practice in education: Both had as their aim the general progress of ordinary people. She was on the people's side, creating an expansive democratic

vision of education based on the idea of a country that would work for everybody, not just for the rich.

This seems to me a perspective—a tradition, really—worth reminding ourselves about in a confused political time. Fewer teachers now put matters in terms of politics, although it seems to me that teaching in the United States today more than ever involves a political commitment. I would argue that, like my grandmother, you should think of yourself as a recruit on the people's side, working to build a democracy that doesn't yet exist but is part of the American promise. My grandmother would surely point out that there is important work to be done both in and out of classrooms, and that sometimes school matters get framed by wider social issues. I can hear her, for example, insisting that the biggest educational problem today is the growing despair of joblessness. And I'm sure that my grandmother would say that teachers today have a vital stake in a national health care system, for she always saw the connection between kids' learning and good health. Brushing your teeth and Browning were connected. Her image reminds me that society and its schools are both battlegrounds, on which different sides fight for rival visions of America and its possibilities. The real basics in education, she would argue, flow from the kind of country you want the kids to make when they grow up. She was voting for a real, rather than a paper, democracy. And she thought that teachers had a role to play in helping the people become more powerful.

New teachers often don't realize that there are sides to take, and that they are called upon to choose. The old idea that education is above politics is a useful half-truth—it helps keep the schools from being politicized. But it conceals the essentially political character of choices we make for kids. Do we see the children we teach today as low-paid workers for the global economy, or as the reserve army of the unemployed? If so, why be ambitious for their hearts and minds? Alternatively, we can frame fundamental aims: that we are creating a first-rate education for everybody's kids, so that as grownups they can make a democracy happen. My grandmother and many in her generation would say that schools should offer what students need to take part in a democratic society and its culture—a complex package for everybody's children that would equip them for full participation in work, culture, and liberty.

This is clearly an ambitious goal, rarely achieved in world history, let alone in America. Schools alone can never accomplish it. Still, our sense of the purpose of education matters, and for a long while too many of our schools have not believed in educating the people. The old Greeks said that some were born gold and others brass, and they designed education accordingly. A slave or a woman would not get a free man's education.

Over the centuries around the planet, a lot of the human race has agreed, establishing separate educations for rulers and ruled. Hewers of wood and drawers of water would not read Jane Austen in advanced placement English classes. In a democracy, however, the people are supposed to rule. They are, the old phrase has it, the equal of kings. So the people need an education commensurate with their potential political, economic, and cultural power. To give the children of ordinary people the kind of education once reserved for the children of the elites—to do this for the first time in history—is the dream of the builders of U.S. education like Horace Mann and my grandmother and thousands of others who triumphed and struggled and died in obscurity.

You are a newcomer to an historic struggle. Some of this you may have learned already, just by keeping your eyes open. You probably know that the United States has always been a deeply flawed democracy and that education has always mirrored the systematic inequality of society. There was no golden age when the United States did right by everybody's kids. This society still has vastly different expectations for well-off and poor kids. The gap seems to be growing, not shrinking. We are two educational nations. The schools for poor kids that you may visit and teach in will often look like schools in a desperately poor nation, not the world's most powerful country. Textbooks are old, the roof leaks, and there is a shortage of paper. People of color and women and immigrants had to fight their way into the educational feast and are still kept at the margins in many schools. But you also need to know that in each generation, strong teachers like my grandmother have worked with parents and communities to make democracy happen. Her ghost is silently cheering you on.

My grandmother was not alone in thinking that schools have a special responsibility for the progress of the people's culture. In taking a large, ambitious, ample—democratic—view of education's aims, she was opposing minimalist views that reduce children to tiny gears in the nation's great economic machine. She was opposing the oldest human superstition of all, the belief in fundamental inequality. She was also laying rude hands on the second oldest superstition, the belief that because there is never enough to go around, existing unfairness must be endured. My grandparents' generation had a healthy respect for policies that generate jobs for the people, but they never made the mistake of thinking that all of life is embraced by the equations of economists or the maxims of bankers and investors. The economy should serve human life and its needs, not the other way around. There is, the old progressives argued, no real wealth but life. Making a living ought to be a means to a wider end: making a life. And in fact, students educated to fit narrow economic grooves—management's view of what will

suffice for today's workforce—will never be equipped to take part in debates and movements to change society and build a democratic economy in which everybody has a fair share and basic security.

The capacity to participate—in work, in politics, in the thought of the times—is really in the end a matter of cultural development. The key to the people's success will be the quality of their characters and their minds—the quality of their culture. It is this hardheaded grasp of the radical importance of culture that makes the progressives of my grandmother's generation worth listening to again today. Symbols and ideas and understanding have to become the property of the people if they are to ever gain any control over their lives and the lives of their children. Symbols and ideas and words and culture are no replacement for jobs or political power, but without them, people will easily lose their way. Many in my grandmother's generation admired Eugene Debs, who once said that he would not lead the people to the promised land, because if he could take them there, some other leader could convince them to leave.

Democratic teaching aims to make the people powerful in a host of ways, but perhaps most importantly in the realm of culture itself the web of meanings we weave with language and symbols out of our experience and the heritage of the past. In a democracy, people should be educated to be powerful, to tell their stories, to make their own voices heard, and to act together to defend and expand their rights. Culture might be said to be a shorthand word for all the ways that people and their imaginations and identities grow—how we construct the world and make ourselves at home in it, and then reinvent it fresh.

Schoolteachers of my grandmother's era had an almost mystical reverence for the word "growth." This is how you can tell that, for all their toughness (my aunt Mary had my grandmother in the fourth grade and said that she was really strict), they were romantics under the skin. In tough times, against heavy odds, with huge polyglot classes, they kept alive an idea of democratic education itself as a romance. This language doesn't fit our current skeptical mood and circumstance. It has an extravagant and sentimental sound—it's the language of possibility, democratic hope. The old progressives believed in a version of true romance. Some got these ideas from politics, some from religion, and some from poetry, believe it or not. My grandmother mixed her poetry and her politics into a potent brew. One of her favorite romantic poets, John Keats, put the argument for a romantic, democratic view of culture this way: now the human race looks like low bushes with here and there a big tree; spin from imaginative experience an "airy citadel" like the spider's web, "filling the air with beautiful circuiting," every human might become great, everybody would grow to the full

height, and humanity "instead of being a wide heath of furze and briars with here and there a remote pine or oak, would become a grand democracy of forest trees."[1]

A forest of oak trees: This democratic and romantic view of a people's culture—articulated in the nineteenth century by poets like Keats and Walt Whitman and practical dreamers like Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Margaret Haley, Jane Addams, W. E. B. Du Bois, Eugene Debs, and John Dewey—insists that the goal for which we struggle is a democratic culture in which everyone can grow to their full height and take part in the world of ideas, books, art, and music as well as work and politics. To hardheaded teachers like my grandmother, this was a version of true romance—true, because they knew that no kid grows on a diet of dry academic splinters and stunted expectations. If you teach kids just minimalist stuff—isolated skills, for example—they never get to practice and enact the real thing, culture itself. They get slices of the animal but not the whole live hog. They lose what Emily Dickinson called the thing with feathers—hope. In today's hard times, ruled by bastard pragmatism, it is important to insist that beauty is a human necessity, like water and food and love and work. The multiplication tables need memorizing. So do the French verbs. Not all learning is fun. But an idea of learning that leaves out grace and poetry and laughter will never take root in kids' hearts and souls. Education is in the end a movement of the spirit. This is the realism behind the old vision of education as true romance. Children require, finally, things that cannot be bought and sold, accomplishments that last a lifetime. They are asking for bread. Too many of our schools are giving them stones instead. From our point of view today, the school culture of my grandmother's generation may have been too genteel—a white schoolmarm culture that often ignored or disdained the experience of immigrants, women, and people of color. It was a monochromatic culture, tied into the many weaknesses of gentility. But what is impressive today about it is the depth of its democratic aspirations: the assumption that everyone can rise up on the wings of hope.

As today, Americans in the past argued over whose version of culture to teach. The tug-of-war over today's (quite recent) canons of literature and history is an inevitable aspect of being what Whitman called a people of peoples. I believe—though my grandmother might disagree—that such tugging and pulling is a sign of cultural vitality, part of a process of democratic change that Whitman described as "lawless as snowflakes." The

---

[1]This passage was quoted, significantly, by that romantic John Dewey (1934, p. 347) in *Art as Experience,* his great argument for a democratic approach to art and culture.

arguments over whose version of culture to teach will properly go on until the republic closes shop. A democracy educates itself by arguing over what to teach the next generation. But as grown-up groups struggle for each generation's balance of pride and recognition and representation and inclusion, we need to keep in mind how important it is for kids to be allowed to make and do culture, to participate in enacting live meanings and symbols. Opening up the school curriculum to the world's rainbows of cultures is a necessary step toward becoming a people of peoples, a real democracy. But it will not be much of a gain to substitute a new multicultural and multiracial orthodoxy for an older cultural orthodoxy. Nobody's version of the canon will matter if kids don't start reading real books sometime. Unless kids get a chance to make cultural meaning, and not passively absorb it, nothing will come alive. Anybody's version of culture can be delivered secondhand and dead. The real challenge is to help kids make cultural meanings come alive here and now, to act as creators and critics of culture, armed with the skills and discipline to—as Emerson put it—form and power. And what holds for kids surely holds for teachers too.

A romantic and democratic vision of human possibility may in the end be a practical thing for teachers—as real as radium, and even more valuable. Teaching is, after all, more like taking part in a religion or a political movement than anything else—the whole thing rests on what the old theologians called the virtue of hope. Its loss kills more kids than guns and drugs. The technocratic lingo of the educational managers and the boredom of today's colleges of education do no service to a profession that in the end requires true romance, the stuff that lights up the soul. Who would rise up on a cold, dark morning and go out to teach if the only goal were to raise the SAT scores? A democratic vision helps you not only in rethinking your purposes, in choosing the curriculum, for example, but also in making it through those February days when the radiators are banging and teaching school feels like the dark night of the soul. It says on the Liberty Bell, across the crack, that the people without vision shall perish. This should be a warning to us in an educational era dominated by dull experts, squinty-eyed economists, and frightened politicians. You will never survive your years as a teacher by listening to what passes for vision now in the United States.

The novelist Charles Dickens dramatized the basics—the fundamental democratic issues—in his novel about depressed times in nineteenth-century England, *Hard Times*. (Passages sound a lot like the United States in the 1990s.) Dickens introduces a capitalist named Mr. Gradgrind. Mr. Gradgrind, not at all coincidentally, runs a school for workers' kids. Gradgrind calls the kids by number, not by name, and insists on a curriculum limited to "facts, facts, facts." "You are not to wonder," he says to the children. Mr. Gradgrind

stands for a minimalist and antiromantic political ideology that measures life by the profit margin and reduces humans to numbers. He is a utilitarian, like many of our current leaders in politics and education, for whom the bottom line is a religion. He believes only what can be measured and therefore misses out on human mystery and potential. To him, children are parts for the great economic machine. He sees a world composed of competing individual atoms. He fears the human imagination and the bonds of friendship.

Gradgrind wants kids and teachers to be passive recipients of the curriculum of "facts, facts, facts." They are not to wonder, because wondering makes trouble. Dickens argues that children's imagination is in fact a critical political issue, and that the imagination and the human heart require much more than calculations of profit and loss. He asks us to put true romance and human sympathy and the imagination back in our picture of education. Dickens is clear that Mr. Gradgrind's approach to education is a strategy of control: He wants passive labor, not active critical minds. Nothing could show more clearly the political implications of a minimalist, as opposed to an expansive and democratic, vision of culture.

Education is a battleground on which different visions of the future are struggling. Gradgrind offers a grim and colorless world of isolated, competing individuals in an environment whose skies are blackened and ruined by greed; he can never match the bright colors and laughter of communities of children.

Mr. Gradgrind is above all an enemy of the idea of culture for the people. He sees art and humor as absurd and dangerous frills. Children's imagination is a threat. He hates the circus, for example, which Dickens makes into a symbol of popular creativity. Mr. Gradgrind is not, alas, dead. He is everywhere today, in corporations, legislatures, governors' mansions, and central offices of school systems. I saw him on the evening news last night. He was wearing an expensive suit and was pointing to a wall chart. An hour later, he was flourishing a Bible. To fight today's versions of Mr. Gradgrind, teachers and the rest of us need to start imagining an expansive and democratic vision of education as true romance—not the romance of sentimentality and fakery and escape (the media have stuffed us all with too many such lies) but the true romance that knows that the heart is the toughest human muscle, the romance of respect for the people and what their children's minds are capable of.

To enact this true romance, we need to do many things. We need a democratic version of the humanities and the liberal arts from kindergarten through the university. At the university level, as in the schools, the older traditions of the "liberal arts" and the "humanities" and elite science and math are often preserves for privilege, crusted over with the practices and

superstitions of human inequality. But the people's children deserve the best, and such subjects and traditions need to be rescued for them, not abandoned. Culture needs to be democratized, not abandoned. The people have a right to claim their heritage and take possession of what generations of leisure have given the privileged.

Underlying the daily work in schools, then, is the task of creating a democratic culture, a task that may take generations. Of course, a genuine people's culture, when it emerges, will look very different from the oily "people's cultures" concocted by the commissars in totalitarian regimes. To begin such work, teachers need to be able to see "culture" in its several meanings: what used to be called the "high" culture, the traditional symbols of academic learning, the great books and works of art and music; newcomers to the canon; and also the local webs of meaning and tradition arising out of the lives of students and communities. Today we want to interrogate the old "high" culture and ask who it included and who it left out. But in the end, we also want our kids to get access, to break into the old vaults as well as savor new treasures.

Instead of thinking of culture as a separate realm of "high" experience, an elite commodity, we want to show our kids the common continuum of human experience that reaches from the great works of art of all times and cultures to children's talk and imagining right now, to help students move back and forth from their experience to the experiences embodied in poems, artworks, and textbooks. Unlike my grandmother's generation, we want the visions of culture offered in our schools to be true rainbow bridges that the children crisscross daily in both directions—the home and neighborhood cultures on one end, and the wider worlds of culture on the other.

My grandmother had a vision of a teacher going forth to bring culture to the people. What we might add to that today is the image of the people and their children giving something back in a true exchange of gifts. Today we might be in a better position to see that culture making in the schools has to be a two-way street. The idea of culture embraced by the school must also reach out to embrace the cultures of the students and their families. As a Native American friend of mine says, you will be the children's teacher when you learn how to accept their gifts.

Gradgrind sees school as a small factory in which elite managers make decisions for the passive hands. This is also his model for politics. Does this sound familiar? Dickens, by contrast, sees education as taking part in a democratic community—groups of people who share imaginative participation. As a teacher on the side of the people, you need to make yourself a careful student of the care and feeding of small, provisional human communities, for these are where people learn to make cultural meaning

together, to practice and create the people's culture. This is why John Dewey called schools "embryonic democracies" and why some of the old reformers called them "little commonwealths." Classroom communities require certain elements: learning to talk the talk, learning to listen respectfully, finding a voice, learning to make and criticize knowledge in a group, giving and taking, finding the blend of intellectual and emotional support that a good classroom group can provide, valuing the habits and skills of reading and writing that arise when speakers and writers and artists get responses from audiences and listeners and readers. The discipline that lasts comes from participation, and it is the discipline of freedom.

In practice, then, helping the people progress in cultural terms means the ongoing creation of provisional forms of community. In good schools, students are learning to make culture—the kind of broad, powerful, and purposeful meanings we associate with intellectual, artistic, scientific, and democratic communities—and to forge links between the kind of culture they are enacting in school and the cultures of their communities. In school subjects, they learn the discourse of many of the smaller worlds that make up the large world of culture, literacy, and the languages of math and science and the arts, as well as the logic of action required to go on making, remaking, and criticizing different kinds of community over a lifetime.

With her union background, my grandmother would warn you about Gradgrind's loneliness and the need for solidarity as an educational ideal. The Gradgrinds want you to stay isolated and to think of education and politics as mainly a matter of competition between individuals. Dickens and my grandmother tell you something different: that we are brothers and sisters, that we learn from one another, and that we will have to work out a common fate on a troubled and threatened planet. Not only that, but to the extent that we remain isolated, the Gradgrinds will prevail. Look at the way they have used the racial issue to divide the forces of democracy in the last 20 years.

Although individual students make the meanings, the business of taking part in culture always means participation in some kind of community, real or imagined. You are part of a music community, even when you play the guitar alone. Math skills and ideas have as their aim participation in the community of those who make, who "do," math. The old Greeks emphasized the communal side of math when they called it a performance art and—to our astonishment today—linked it with such communal arts as theater and dancing. They would be amazed to hear that we make kids study math solo, rather than reasoning together as a group.

I emphasize the community angle not to slight the individual—all education has to balance individual and social aims—but to stress the way that

the individuality we prize so deeply in our students emerges from what they learn through community encounters with others, their families, peers, and teachers. Mr. Gradgrind doesn't get this. He preaches rugged individualism but is at bottom an enemy of true individuality. But students who haven't learned to listen won't have much of a chance of finding their distinctive voices; nor will students who have never spoken in class about something that really matters to them or made some significant choices at some important points about their own learning.

My grandmother's generation was in love with the idea of growth. It's easy to see the importance of growth for students, but how about for you? When you start teaching, you do not know enough, but you are also not culturally developed enough to be a model for your students. This might be particularly true if you come from a family that never had much access to "high" culture. Even if you got a lot of "culture," is it really yours, or is it a ragbag of secondhand experiences and unexplained views? How do you help your kids build the rainbow bridges back and forth? How can you sell them on literacy if you yourself don't read much and don't enjoy books? What about your identity as a teacher? What about the struggle for democracy? You might like the picture of the teacher going out to meet the people, but what do you really have to offer? This is a harsh question, but you have a big responsibility if you are signing up as a teacher. How do you start the lifetime work of becoming a practical intellectual who can help the people progress culturally?

The question of your own cultural development may in the end be the big question about your future as a teacher. With some attention, I think that you can begin to see how democracy is the underlying issue in our society today, and how education reflects a wider, worldwide struggle. It may be more difficult to see the democratic cultural challenge: to see that a lively discussion of *Frog and Toad* in the second grade is one step toward a people's culture. A vision helps, but it needs to come alive daily in your teaching practice. How can you start to become a practical intellectual who is able to bring culture to the people's children and able to accept their gifts back? This will never be easy. But don't despair, you aren't dead yet. There are lots of ways to begin expanding your own possession of culture, ranging from exploring your roots to developing your own literacies and your acquaintance with ideas, traditions, and symbols in a host of realms. My grandmother, with her message of solidarity, would urge you not to go it alone, to join up with other teachers and reach out to people in your community. Your own ability to nourish a learning community in your classrooms will be helped immeasurably if you yourself inhabit—and help create—genuine learning communities outside of class. The things you want

for your students—the development of culture, interests, identities, and a voice—are all things that you need as a teacher. One or two genuine interests to share with kids are worth their weight in gold. Finding one or two ways to link your teaching to the wider struggle for democracy will show you the meaning of your work. Read Herbert Kohl's *Back to Basics* to begin to get a sense that history and democratic tradition are resources to draw on in the work of teaching. Learn something about your own history, because that can give you an important angle on where you stand in relation to culture making.

Culture is like—is another name for—growth and development and education itself. Like history, it has no end. Generations of thoughtful teachers have taken part in the long struggle. Now, just your luck, it's your turn. All the best.

* * *

P. S. I call you "Josie" because that's what W. E. B. Du Bois calls his student in his sketch of himself as a teacher in the rural South in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Josie has all the life and vitality of the people and craves a formal education, which she never gets, dying young. Du Bois was the young teacher going out to meet the people, and Josie was the people meeting the teacher. Both had something to offer in the exchange. The result for Du Bois was the complex educational goal in *The Souls of Black Folk:* to learn the ways and the powers of the wider culture represented by school learning and the classics, but to keep your soul and know your roots. Du Bois was the spiritual granddaddy of the civil rights generation—he died just as the 1963 March on Washington was taking place—but his vision of a democratic culture awaits our work. I know that the dreadful premature harvest of young Josies has not stopped, but I like to think that some are making their way into teaching, like you.