

The Passionate Mind of  
Maxine Greene:  
'I Am . . . Not Yet'

*Edited by*

William F. Pinar



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*Notes on Contributors*

**Kathleen O’Gorman** is Associate Professor of Religious Studies and Religious Education at the Loyola University Institute for Ministry where she has taught for the past sixteen years. She earned the EdD degree from Teachers College Columbia University in Religion and Education in 1986. There she met and studied with Maxine Greene. Her current research interests and commitments concern the integration of the arts, humanities, and sciences in a comprehensive vision of curriculum and a practice of education that is grounded in narratives of the emergent universe and our planetary home within it.

**Anne E. Pautz** is Visiting Assistant Professor of Education at Oklahoma State University where she teaches graduate courses in curriculum and coordinates preparation for NCATE accreditation. Her interests include gender construction and representation as well as autobiographical curriculum theory, especially as it reformulates pre-service teacher education.

**William F. Pinar** teaches curriculum theory at Louisiana State University, where he serves as the St. Bernard Parish Alumni Endowed Professor. He has also served as the Frank Talbott Professor at the University of Virginia and the A. Lindsay O’Connor Professor of American Institutions at Colgate University (both visiting appointments); he taught at the University of Rochester 1972–85. He is the author of *Autobiography, Politics, and Sexuality* (Peter Lang, 1994), the senior author of *Understanding Curriculum* (Peter Lang, 1995), and the editor of *Curriculum: Toward New Identities* (Garland, 1998) and *Queer Theory in Education* (Lawrence Erlbaum, 1998).

**Paula M. Salvio** is Associate Professor of Education at the University of New Hampshire. Through interdisciplinary studies in feminist theory, performative poetry, and literary criticism, Salvio’s research aspires to conceptualize performance as a form of social inquiry in and out of school settings. She is currently writing a book on the teaching life of the Pulitzer Prize winning poet Anne Sexton.

**Patrick Slattery** is Associate Professor of Education at Texas A & M University where he teaches curriculum theory. He is the author of *Curriculum Development in the Post-modern Era* (Garland, 1995), co-author of *Understanding Curriculum* (Peter Lang, 1995), and co-author of *Contextualizing Teaching* (Longman, 1998). He has published articles on curriculum theory, philosophy of education, and teacher education in *JCT*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *Childhood Education*, *Religion and Education*, and *Curriculum Inquiry*. His research interests include the relation of education to the philosophy of time, aesthetics in the curriculum, postmodern theory, and critical cultural studies.

**Susan W. Stinson** is Professor of Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she serves as Department Head and teaches undergraduate courses in teacher preparation and graduate courses in interpretative research and curriculum. Her theoretical research concerns issues of gender, the body, and art education; her field research has focused on how young people make meaning of their experience of dance. Her scholarly work has been published in a number of journals, including *Dance Research Journal*; *Design for Arts in Education*; *Drama/Dance*; *Educational Theory*; *Impulse: The International Journal of Dance Science, Medicine, and Education*; *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* as well as *JCT*; *Women in Performance*; and the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*.

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## 5 *Releasing the Imagination and the 1990s*

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*Patrick Slattery and David M. Dees*

You can't depend on your judgment when your imagination is out of focus. (Mark Twain, 1935, p. 344)

When old and familiar things are made new in experience, there is imagination. When the new is created, the far and strange become the most natural inevitable things in the world. There is always some measure of adventure in the meeting of the mind and universe, and this adventure is, in its measure, imagination. (John Dewey, 1934, p. 267)

[Imagination] brings the severed parts together. (Virginia Woolf, 1976, p. 72)

What I am describing here is a mode of utopian thinking: thinking that refuses mere compliance, that looks down roads not yet taken to the shapes of more fulfilling social order, to more vibrant ways of being in the world. This kind of reshaping imagination may be released through many sorts of dialogue . . . When such dialogue is activated in classrooms, even the young are stirred to reach out on their own initiatives. Apathy and indifference are likely to give way as images of what might arise. (Maxine Greene, 1995a, p. 5)

### **Introduction**

In *Releasing the Imagination*, Maxine Greene evokes a passion for education, the arts, and social change as she shares her journey 'to look through the others' eyes more than I would have and to imagine being something more than I have come to be' (1995a, p. 86). Maxine Greene is a prophetic voice challenging educators and students — indeed all persons — to connect the arts with lived experience for the purpose of opening 'spaces where persons speaking together and being together can discover what it signifies to incarnate and act upon values far too often taken for granted' (1995a, p. 68). Greene envisions classrooms and communities that value multiple perspectives, democratic pluralism, life narratives, and ongoing social change. This is best accomplished, she believes, through literary, artistic, and phenomenological experiences that release the imagination. She challenges the anxiety of a modern world that has reduced learning and living to fragmented and quantifiable components devoid of the aesthetic and narrative. Greene (1995a) summarizes:

I have written *Releasing the Imagination* to remedy that anxiety. It grants a usefulness to the disinterest of seeing things small at the same time that it opens to and validates the passion for seeing things close up and large. For this passion is the doorway for imagination; here is the possibility of looking at things as if they could

be otherwise. This possibility, for me, is what restructuring might signify. Looking at things large is what might move us on to reform. (p. 16)

The possibility of creating a passion for looking at things anew and opening a doorway for imagination, education, and social reform is Maxine Greene's constant theme in the 1990s.

Maxine Greene's philosophical positions never stray far from her passion for narrative and lived experience which has been evident in her works from *Teacher as Stranger* to *The Dialectic of Freedom*. However, we believe that something unique has emerged in *Releasing the Imagination*. This text, as we read it, is Maxine Greene's artistic representation of her journey to create a new social and educational vision. In effect, *Releasing the Imagination* is an autobiographical narrative written in three parts: creating possibilities, illuminations and epiphanies, and community in the making. These chapters parallel the three movements in the symphony of Maxine Greene's life and career: transformations through literary encounters, the search for pedagogical possibilities, and creating a community with a passion for multiple voices and multiple realities. These movements coalesce in a harmonious process with the repetitive phrase of imagination through the arts. It is here that transformations, possibilities, and community emerge for Greene and others willing to engage in the process of releasing the imagination.

### Transformations through Literary Encounters

The downbeat of the first movement in Maxine Greene's oeuvre is the aesthetic experience that can occur through encounters with the arts and literature. She writes: 'If we regard curriculum as an undertaking involving continuous interpretation and a conscious search for meanings, we come to see many connections between the grasping of a text or artwork and the gaining of multiple perspectives by means of the disciplines' (1995a, p. 96). Drawing upon Sartre, Dewey, and Iser, Greene posits that encounters with the arts are a transactional mode of being in which the individual's lived experience and the text become united in a process of understanding that leads to transformation. Literature and the arts are not merely decorative additions or supplemental ornaments; literature and the arts '... bring to curriculum inquiry visions of perspectives and untapped possibilities' (Greene, 1995a, p. 90). Literature and the arts elicit modes of being and are misunderstood when they are reified or objectified.

Positivist critics may ask why there are so many literary references in *Releasing the Imagination*, concerned that literature is a distraction from the rigorous logic of philosophical analysis or sociological surveys. For ourselves and for Maxine Greene this criticism is rooted in modernist notions of positivist science as 'instrumental rationality' (Greene, 1995a, p. 113) that seek certitude and tangible evidence and only uncover 'inert ideas' (Whitehead, 1929). However, it is in the ineffable, the experiential, indeed the imaginative, that philosophical understanding and social transformations occur. For Greene, literature has allowed her to lend her life to others. She writes (1995a), 'I was, through my reading, allowing them [literary figures] to emerge in my consciousness and, by so doing, to transform it, as social scientific accounts or even psychological ones would never do' (p. 94). By lending herself to others through literature, Greene has been able to pursue her quest of seeing 'from the other side of the looking glass' (p. 94), creating spaces for personal transformations. Greene's description of her pursuit of personal transformations is reminiscent of Dewey's insight into encounters with works of art. Dewey (1934) contends that knowledge is transformed and made more intelligible through the

aesthetic experience. He writes, '[t]angible scenes of life are made more intelligible in aesthetic experience: not, however as reflection and science render things more intelligible by reduction to conceptual form, but by presenting their meanings as the matter of a clarified, coherent, and intensified or "impassioned" experience' (p. 290).

We believe that one of the fundamental purposes of *Releasing the Imagination* is to inspire educators to begin the quest of encountering literature and the arts from the phenomenological perspective, that is, to engage the arts in ways that the lives of teachers and students will be transformed through the autobiographical narrative. For those who have already begun this journey, Greene provides a narrative of her life through literature as an example of the way that the arts have created spaces for transformation. Greene (1995a) explains:

In this time of interest in narrative and storytelling as a way of knowing . . . my hope is that the story disclosed here will move readers to tap their own stories, their experiences in finding projects by which to create identities. It is important to me, for example, to summon up the ways in which I was demeaned in my early days of college teaching by being told I was too 'literary' to do philosophy. That seemed to mean that I was thought ill equipped to do the sort of detached and rigorous analysis of language games and arguments that for a long time dominated the academic world. I could not objectify nor separate my subjectivity from what I was perceiving. I could not separate my feeling, imagining, wondering consciousness from the cognitive work assigned for me to do. Nor could I bracket out my biography and my experiences of embeddedness in an untidy, intersubjective world. (p. 113)

Here Greene articulates her passion for supporting educators in the process of incorporating literature and the arts along with personal narrative into the process of transforming lives, and thus creating meaningful learning spaces for pedagogical possibilities.

### Pedagogical Possibilities

If the downbeat that began the musical movement in Maxine Greene's work is the aesthetic experience, then the instrumentation that allows for the creation of the symphony is the pedagogical process. Greene (1995a) explains that 'we all believe that our efforts to understand the young and recover our own landscapes must be linked to notions of pedagogical praxis and that the pedagogies we devise ought to provoke a heightened sense of agency in those we teach, empower them to pursue their freedom and, perhaps, transform to some degree their lived worlds' (p. 48). Greene believes that this transformation can occur through pedagogical practices grounded in the arts because the arts serve to open vistas of possibility and experience that draw from and move beyond a student's lived world. Additionally, she reminds us that teaching is a transactional event that occurs between teachers and students, thus allowing for the opening of new vistas for both. Greene (1995a) writes:

If we teachers are to develop a humane and liberating pedagogy, we must feel ourselves to be engaged in a dialectical relation. We are more likely to uncover or be able to interpret what we are experiencing if we can at times recapture some of our own lost spontaneity and some awareness of our own backgrounds, either through communication with children, psychotherapy, or engagement with works of art. (p. 52)



Thus, pedagogical encounters with works of art not only allow our students to give their 'lives' to others like Greene, but also to understand and appreciate multiple perspectives and creative interpretations. These pedagogical encounters serve as a means of allowing teachers to step into lived worlds of students, perhaps allowing educators to find and create new spaces for personal, pedagogical, and social transformations.

Through the arts, aesthetic consciousness is awakened, allowing our students to see multiple perspectives and educators to hear the multiple voices of their students. This aesthetic consciousness also increases our imaginative possibilities which can serve to engender school reform. However, current school reform efforts remain rooted in reductionism and modernist philosophy. For example, in many ways, school reform is entrenched in the 'old quantitative models' (Greene, 1995a, p. 18) and 'the quest for certainty' (Dewey, 1929). In response, many citizens yearn for the predictable and assurances that their children have mastered the basics. Greene (1995a) challenges these assumptions, and asserts that we must also use imagination in the ways we think about school reform and school restructuring:

To tap into imagination is to become able to break with what is supposedly fixed and finished, objectively and independently real. It is to see beyond what the imaginer has called normal or 'common-sensible' and to carve out new orders in experience. Doing so, a person may become freed to glimpse what might be, to form notions of what should be and what is not yet. And the same person may, at the same time, remain in touch with what presumably *is*. (p. 19)

Exploring imaginative possibilities not only transforms classroom practice but also opens up vistas to new ways to envision the schooling process, evaluate the learning environment, and create educational experiences.

### **A Community with Passion for Multiple Voices and Multiple Realities**

The third phrase in the symphonic movement of Maxine Greene's oeuvre as reflected in *Releasing the Imagination* is the creation of a community inspired by a passion for multiplicity and social change. This is the rhythm that underscores her life performance. This is the *raison d'être* for turning to the arts and literature to release the imagination. Greene contends that in order to imagine a democratic community accessible to students we must 'summon up the vision of the "conjoint experience," shared meanings, common interests and endeavors described by John Dewey' (1995a, p. 33). Interconnectedness and communion are the characteristics of such a community for Greene: 'A continuing search for intellectual freedom and freedom of articulation . . . give vibrancy and energy to the *possible* community' (1995a, pp. 33-4). Perhaps it is the belief that such a community is not only *possible* but also essential for growth and survival that inspires Maxine Greene to write with such passion and commitment. There is an urgency in her commitment to a democratic community that integrates multiplicity into the fabric of its existence. Greene contends that in recent years invisibility has been refused by many people, '[o]ld silences have been shattered; long repressed voices are making themselves heard . . . We are challenged as never before to confront plurality and multiplicity' (1995a, p. 155).

As Greene so eloquently notes, this is an assiduous challenge for educators. Struggling to understand how our students are processing and 'living' the information we share with them, as educators we can become frustrated and disenchanting with our students' perspectives. Greene (1995a) writes:

Listening to them [students], we frequently find ourselves dealing as never before with our own prejudgments and preferences, with the forms and images we have treasured through most of our lives. What we have learned to treat as valuable, what we take for granted may be challenged in unexpected ways. We find ourselves stopped in our tracks — to wonder, to protest sometimes, to lash out in anger or contempt, to retreat now and then to think about our own thinking. (p. 188)

However, by tapping into the imagination through aesthetic consciousness, educators can find a space for allowing the multiple perspectives in our students' voices to emerge and grow within a social dialogue.

As noted above, for Greene, awakening her awareness to the voices of 'others' occurred in many respects through her engagements with literature. For her, literature taps '... all sorts of circuits in reader consciousness ...' (1995a, p. 186). From this awakened state both teachers and students can see, hear, and connect with the lives of others which in turn helps to re-position and re-create their own sense of self. As Greene notes, this state of awakened awareness allows us to '... participate in some dimensions that we could not know if imagination were not aroused' (1995a, p. 186). Thus, through the aesthetic consciousness aroused through artistic encounters, teachers and students can develop a space for the 'other' to enter into their own lived world. However, Greene warns that releasing this imagination does not instantaneously provide the answer for understanding silenced voices and multiple perspectives. Releasing the imagination creates an environment in which more interesting questions can emerge which in turn will '... lead us on more and more far-reaching quests' (1995a, p. 187).

Maxine Greene calls for a community of teachers and students who are questioning and searching for possibilities of social justice and equality:

I say these things about the possibility of shared commitments not because I believe we can override pluralism or rediscover a 'general orientation' or some renewed faith in a 'universal reason'. I say them in the belief that a re-viewing ought to involve us in the continuing constitution and renewal of a common world, if we can keep in mind the idea that such a world may come into being in the course of a continuing dialogue, which we ourselves can provoke and nurture in the midst of change. (1995a, p. 196)

This challenge will not come easy; it requires visionaries and individuals that are not afraid to break from their personal 'given,' everyday perspectives. This form of consciousness requires individuals to challenge one's own sense of being and awareness. Greene (1995a) states '[t]he principles and the contexts have to be *chosen* by living human beings against their own life-worlds and in the light of their lives with others, by persons able to call, to say, to sing, and — using their imaginations, tapping their courage — to transform' (p. 198). Releasing the imagination is not an easy quest — yet it is vital to imagining a world in which social transformation and individual possibilities can flourish. In musical terms this represents Maxine Greene's *de capo al fine* — her belief that the imaginative quest for multiple voices and multiple realities never ends. We will continue to be inspired by the music.

### Maxine Greene in the 1990s

It is clear to us that the three movements in Maxine Greene's *Releasing the Imagination* also can be heard in her other works published in the 1990s. This is particularly evident

in 'Notes on the search for coherence' (Greene, 1995b), published in the ASCD Yearbook entitled *Toward a Coherent Curriculum* (Beane, 1995) where she challenges educators to ask the kinds of questions that have to do with meaning and with 'different ways of seeing and describing the landscapes people inhabit' (p. 139). Coherence in the curriculum emerges when questions about human experience are foregrounded. When devising curriculum, Greene insists, we must 'consciously create conditions that stir learners to reach out from their own vantage points to spaces where they can attain some reciprocity' (p. 139). Greene often refers to Walker Percy's (1979) character Binx Bolling in *The Moviegoer* as an example of what can happen when we are not consciously creating such learning conditions. Percy writes, 'Not to be on to something is to be in despair.' Likewise, not to be on the search for possibilities in education establishes a curriculum that is lifeless, meaningless, and incoherent. 'It is understandable that . . . boredom and a sense of futility are among the worst enemies of education. At a time of diminishing opportunity in so many lives, at a time when upward mobility cannot be guaranteed, feelings of futility are widespread' (Greene, 1995b, p. 141).

How do educators overcome pervasive malaise and futility to create a coherent curriculum? In the 1995 ASCD Yearbook, Maxine Greene argues that encounters with the arts and narrative can release the imagination and engender transformation — to see from another perspective — and transcendence — to go beyond an embedded existence — that will awaken possibilities for individuals as well as the socio-political, environmental, and global milieu. Greene (1995b) concludes:

The coherence is to be found in the rhythm and vitality of the process itself, the willingness to turn outward, to enter into dialogues, to continue to create provisional relationships, to reach beyond. What is significant as well — deeply significant in what strikes so many as a chaotic world — is the weaving of wider and wider webs of relationship, what may become a common world . . . That may be where coherence is fulfilled — in the making of a common world. (p. 144)

Maxine Greene makes an impassioned plea for coherence, imagination, relationships, a common world, and landscapes of possibilities in the 1995 ASCD Yearbook, echoing the themes of her other works throughout the 1990s, especially *Releasing the Imagination*.

Addressing the issue of the angst in the 1990s and highlighting her theme of creating a community with a passion for multiple voices and multiple realities, Greene's (1991) article entitled 'The literacy debate and the public school: Going beyond the functional' posits that many of today's educators ' . . . are responding to society's conceived survival needs, ordinarily defined first in economic terms' (p. 130). She continues noting that '[b]ecause of this, such discussions [regarding literacy] become purely functional' (p. 130). As a result of this perceived societal need for functional reading ability, Greene (1991) describes the dilemma of today's practicing educators in the following manner:

Teachers tend to set aside their original visions of worlds that would be opened by various kinds of literacy — by imagination, for example, by the capacity to truly see, to attend to the particulars at hand. Somehow convinced that their professional self-definitions (as well as their own trade jargon) place decided social value upon functional literacy, they scarcely ever ask themselves about the difference literacy makes in various lives. (p. 130)

By learning and drawing from the post-modernists' questionings of reality, romantic movements in poetry, existentialism, phenomenology, and pragmatist perspectives, Greene

(1991) proposes that as a society we can move beyond the search for solutions based in '[m]easurements and prescriptions to accord with the deficit models on which we depend' (p. 133). This move away from modernist's reductionism can help us to include the 'other' in our conceptions of the public space as well as in our conceptions of 'self'. With Toni Morrison (1989) Greene moves us to see that 'the trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self . . . We are not in fact "other"' (pp. 16, 9). Greene (1991) writes:

To include any of these 'other' views compels us (often against our will) to defamiliarize our accustomed worlds, to render strange what we have learned through our particular shared culture to read and see and say. Once we do allow for other consciousnesses with equal rights, including those of our students, we open ourselves to the *heteroglossia* or multiple voices of the social world . . . More than that, we may come to realize the language we speak does not belong to us alone but is social, as we ourselves are social, and that, whoever we are, we come in contact with the world through a great diversity of official and unofficial languages. (p. 164)

Greene contends that this awareness of the 'other' will allow for more honest and meaningful dialogue in our classrooms. Additionally, '[w]e might think of the many ways human beings have imposed narrative form on their experiences in an effort to create order and make sense' (1991, p. 164). Greene argues to reposition the dialogue regarding literacy away from reductionism's objectives of creating order, into an imaginative space in which new possibilities for social justice and equality can emerge.

Rather than creating, like E.D. Hirsch, Jr. (1987), a 'grand narrative' list to describe the culturally literate, Greene (1991) believes that the classroom dialogue can serve as a garden allowing imaginative possibilities and cultural awareness to bloom:

What is important is for educators, in their own diversity, to think about creating the conditions under which the dialogue, the vital interplay being envisaged on so many sides, can occur. It is under conditions like these that a common language, a shared cultural literacy, may be achieved. (p. 167)

For Greene, these classroom interactions will serve to open aesthetic sensibilities and possibilities for our students. She continues:

When I think of the literacy debate in relation to young people, I think of making opportunities possible for them to make the songs they sing; to tell, improve, and retell their stories; to gain a sense that they — talking together, writing together — are the authors of their world. (p. 167)

Thus, the literacy debate for Maxine Greene is more than just a reductionist 'list approach' to student knowledge. For her, the literacy debate should focus more on opening the imagination of teachers and students to help co-create a world that appreciates individual voice and is on a quest for social justice. For Greene, this is a space in which ' . . . we cannot plan or chart in advance, but which is where we have not been' (1991, p. 168).

Another theme of Maxine Greene in the 1990s is that of a quest for pedagogical possibilities. This theme, highlighted in *Releasing the Imagination*, is placed in the foreground in 'Metaphors and multiples: Representation, the arts, and history' published in *Phi Delta Kappan* in 1997. In this piece, Maxine Greene charts her own pedagogical

journey with her students by describing how she incorporates 'a range of literary works, paintings, and other art forms, as well as the more standard list of works in American history, educational and curriculum history . . .' into her classroom encounters (1997, p. 388). She details the results of these interactions when she states that '[i]n the process of our inquiries, we have found our perspectives opening, as imagination is released and one-dimensional explanations give way to a notion of multiple realities' (1997, p. 388).

Greene (1997) contends that 'this mode of teaching and curriculum-making does not lead to final answers' (p. 388), and she describes her intentions in this teaching style as having an aim for imaginative possibilities for future teachers and students:

My aim is not to achieve certainty or to recapture some golden age of unassailable 'truth'. My aim is to awaken teachers-to-be to the ongoing quest for meaning in our history. If they can become the kinds of teachers who can enlist their students in that quest, then their involvement with the problem of representation will have been worthwhile. (p. 388)

Trying to move beyond rationalistic reductionism, Greene believes and models in her own classroom practice an educational philosophy that strives to release the imagination.

In this piece, Greene charts for the reader several personal reactions through using various pieces of literature in her classroom space. One in particular is Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'The May-Pole of Merry Mount' which is a 'tale of two colonies in old New England, the emblem of one being a maypole and of the other, a whipping post' (1997, p. 390). For her, this piece 'made me begin to understand the ways in which the *form* of representation feeds the life of meaning' (1997, p. 390). Greene contends that reading and experiencing Hawthorne's historical account translated into a metaphoric representation

. . . requires the act of imagination, a deliberate bracketing out for a time of the ordinary and the taken-for-granted. Readers who lend their own lives to what happens, who shape the stuff of their experience in accord with the story's symbolic development, who recognize it as a 'denotative and expressive symbol' that reaches beyond itself may find perspectives opening and dimensions of experience disclosing themselves in wholly unpredictable ways. (1997, p. 391)

Greene believes that this metaphoric approach to history allows the students to find new and different perspectives toward their own place in the historical flow of our puritanical society. She continues:

I discovered, as any teacher might, that a concentration on metaphor (in this case, with the maypole and the whipping post as examples) made far more difference to the students' search for meaning than an emphasis on divergent conceptions of reality, enlightening though they clearly are. A metaphor enables us to understand one thing better by likening it to what it is not. . . . A metaphor not only involves a reorientation of consciousness, it also enables us to cross divides, to make connections between ourselves and others, and to look through the other eyes. (p. 391)

Here Maxine Greene is modeling how she translates into the classroom her own passion for creating a space for seeing the world from the 'other's' eyes. This connecting of cultural divides that occurs through literary and artistic representations is a tangible means by which we can reposition society's conception of equality and justice.

Tapping into the imaginative possibilities of artistic representations is a main focus of Maxine Greene's search for pedagogical possibilities. She writes:

In making central to our teaching the arts and the symbol system that present them, we may render conscious the process of making meaning, a process that has much to do with the shaping of identity, the development of a sense of agency, and a commitment to a certain mode of *praxis*. (1997, p. 394)

In this article Greene provides the reader with several tangible examples of how utilizing symbolic representations in the arts can open a conscious space for re-positioning identity and consequently for re-positioning the societal dialogue regarding issues of social equality and justice. For her, this can only happen through tapping into the imaginative possibilities that lie within ourselves. Additionally, for her, it is the educator's responsibility to help open the imaginative spaces of our students. As modeled in this article, her call to educators is achievable and quite exciting, relying very much upon the release of imagination. Clearly defined in her conclusion to this article is the insistence that imagination holds the key to this form of consciousness. She closes this article by saying that '... it is the imagination that empowers human beings to create and to engage consciously with works of art. As they do, the realms of meaning can only deepen and expand' (1997, p. 394). This is Maxine Greene's constructivist (Greene, 1996) and inclusive (Greene, 1993) vision that permeates her work in the 1990s.

#### Autobiographical Interpretations (David M. Dees)

Maxine Greene's work has always inspired in my own life as an educator. As I reflect on her life outlined in *Releasing the Imagination*, I am reminded of the ways in which aesthetic consciousness has influenced and re-positioned my perspective on the world as I gave my self over to certain artistic representations. For Greene, many of these moments of personal transformation occurred through literary encounters. For me, these moments have occurred especially through theatrical experiences.

I remember the first time I saw a performance of Martin Sherman's (1979) play *Bent*. This account of the holocaust describes the journey of a gay man from Berlin to Dachau. In an effort to hide his sexual identity and not be forced to wear the pink triangle (the lowest of the low), Max has intercourse with a dead women to prove to the Nazi soldiers that he is not 'bent.' As he describes both the pain and anger of this and other forced atrocities, he defends himself to the audience and his new found lover by noting that with his yellow star he is better off within the walls of the Nazi concentration camps. As Act II began, I watched these actors, trapped in a concentration camp, move large stone bricks from one side of the stage to the other. As the characters moved these bricks, they talked of their love, their pain, their anger, continually moving brick by brick back and forth across the stage. Not only did I feel first hand a small part of the agony of a concentration camp, but this performance made me begin to reflect deeply upon the question that many of us have had regarding the holocaust: How could Western culture come to such a horrific place? My reflection, however, did not end at this historical question.

During this performance I also began to reflect upon the society in which I find myself. Granted, we are not even near the atrocities of the concentration camps that were created to punish those who are 'a bit bent' from the 'norm.' However, this performance reminded me of the 'punishment' that many of my gay friends are forced to endure.

These human beings are forced to hide their identity for fear of verbal persecution, losing their job, and violence. I began to ask the question: How different are we in today's society? Do we force children and young adults into relationships to 'prove' their sexual identity? I started to think about school dances, proms, parties, etc. Do we welcome gay couples to these events? I thought about the high rate of suicide and drug abuse among gay teens. I realized that although we do not have official identity badges to persecute my gay friends, we have other more subtle forms of oppression in our society. This performance affected me much more than just remembering and learning about the atrocities of the holocaust. It made me realize that my friends are also living a nightmare of hidden love and hidden identity within my own 'new' society. Through this performance, I was able to give my life over to them, allowing me to 'see' the world through their eyes in ways I had never imagined.

From this point, I began to imagine a society in which people could love and accept each other for who they are. I imagined a society of people who would encourage others to live a life of realized potential. This, in turn, began to affect my perspectives towards my own class. I was beginning to imagine new pedagogical possibilities as I taught future teachers. For example, when dealing with issues of race in American society, what could my students learn from the lessons of Troy in August Wilson's (1986) *Fences*? Could they 'see' an image of the broken dreams of the African-Americans that moved from the south to the north in hopes of a better tomorrow? Could they begin to understand the pain of being 'fenced' in because of race and history? To me and my students, this type of aesthetic encounter affected us much deeper than any statistical measure of oppression and racism that I could cite for them.

The same type of transformation occurred for me and my students as we read Maria Irene Fornes' (1986) *The Conduct of Life*. Trying to create an understanding of the female voice in our world, this play dramatizes the oppression of women in a male dominated, destructive and aggressive society. We 'witnessed' in this play how the masculine values of control and domination are used to devalue and oppress the female activities of nurturing, educating, and caring for others. In the end we see Leticia, the wife of the oppressor, forced into killing her husband, thus representing how oppressive masculine societal values can overtake individuals, forcing them to contribute to the destruction of each other. Again, class members gave themselves over to this work, realizing how we devalue and persecute women in our society. As a class, we began to explore how our society values aggression and ruthless competition at the cost of our souls and the common good. We discussed how women are portrayed in popular culture as things of beauty to be lusted after rather than listened to. Granted, the students could have learned the same things by reading post-modernists' and critical theorists' discussions of this subject. However, inspired by John Dewey and Maxine Greene, I have come to appreciate the transformation of knowledge that occurs through encounters that engage the aesthetic consciousness, creating new levels of meaning and understanding, that allow us to give ourselves over to the 'other.'

Like Greene, these personal transformations have encouraged me to release my imagination with my students in an effort to imagine and create a better world. In this imaginative space, we can find new avenues for social justice and equality. We can find new spaces for appreciating individual identity in a complex and diverse society. Like a Monet painting or Samuel Beckett's (1976) *Footfalls*, we can imagine new perspectives towards the fundamental questions of reality itself. Maxine Greene has modeled for me in her life's work the power of autobiographical reflection and aesthetic consciousness. She has also inspired me to help co-create with my students a classroom space that encourages the releasing of the imagination in an effort to create pedagogical possibilities that

allow the 'other' to speak to us all. Imagine the possibilities. Imagine the promise of a better world.

### Autobiographical Interpretations (Patrick Slattery)

In the summer of 1995 I taught a graduate course in Columbus, Ohio, entitled 'Pupil Services Administration' to 30 educators seeking certification to become school administrators. I designed the course not only to address the technical skills related to student health services, special education, testing, counseling, athletics, and the like, but also to challenge administrators to broaden their vision of pupil services by investigating popular culture, aesthetics, and contemporary social issues as important dimensions for understanding students, especially marginalized youth in our communities. Several local and national events in the educational community in 1995 provided excellent opportunities to investigate the limitations of the traditional instrumental and functional approaches to pupil services administration in the schools: an alarming rise in the over-medication of active youngsters, particularly the use of the drug *Ritalin*, created a debate about the appropriateness of current trends in the diagnosis of ADD and ADHD. Legislation proposed by some politicians and religious leaders that would prohibit school counselors from discussing sexual orientation with students created a debate about the rights of students to have access, support, and information about important life issues as well as the freedom of counselors to address these issues. Reports of high school athletes who sustained permanent physical damage because coaches provided illegal performance-enhancing drugs and intimidated students to compete before serious injuries had healed sparked national debates about the role of competitive athletics in the schools. These and other media reports supported my belief that school administrators must examine pupil services from the perspective of the human person with sensitivity toward the impact that marginalization has on youth in the schools.

It was a difficult sell. Most of the educators in this class expected prescriptive information about the legal and technical requirements for administering tests, filing health forms, organizing extra-curricular schedules, and the like. While this information was provided, these educators revolted when asked to critically analyze the impact of current schooling practices and procedures on the lives of students. They were particularly indignant when asked to investigate the situation of marginalized youth and expand their vision of the role of the principal in supporting the needs of injured athletes, students struggling with sexual orientation, hyperactive youngsters, and others. In short, I asked these educators to imagine the lived world of students and find ways to free students to attend to their fears, anxieties, dreams, and aspirations. I struggled daily to find a way to help these future administrators to imagine an educational system where pupil services were more concerned about the lived world of students and less concerned about the technical aspects of administering programs. It was a frustrating experience.

At the end of the first week of class I received in the mail a copy of Maxine Greene's new book *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. It was a glorious sunny afternoon; I decided to forget the frustrations of my graduate course and immerse myself in this new book. I went to the oval on the Ohio State campus and sat under a shady buckeye tree in front of the library. Maxine Greene's book was a gift at the most opportune time. *Releasing the Imagination* affirmed my vision that I was so desperately trying to convey to my graduate students. Throughout the book I was reminded that the focus of our work as educators must move beyond the



technical dimensions of training and credentialing. We must counterbalance bureaucratic demands with an emphasis on the human person and the human spirit. It is the release of human imagination that will spark new visions for a just, caring, hopeful, and sustainable community. Maxine Greene's vision in the 1990s amounts to much more than an educational reform proposal; she is intent on developing a 'social imagination: the capacity to invent visions of what should be and what might be in our deficient society, on the streets we live, in our schools' (1995a, p. 5). Imagination is the key to unlocking doors that prevent the social imagination from emerging. 'It takes imagination to break with ordinary classification and come in touch with actual young people in their variously lived situations. It takes imagination on the part of young people to perceive openings through which they can move' (1995a, p. 14). In other words, it takes imagination to realize possibilities and make judgments and assessments about schools and society. After spending several hours on the OSU campus reading Maxine Greene's book and thinking about my graduate students' limited understanding of pupil services, I glanced skyward to ponder the connection between *Releasing the Imagination* and my own lived world experiences in the classroom. My eyes caught an anecdote by Mark Twain etched in stone above the entrance to the OSU library — 'Your judgment may be flawed if your imagination is not in focus.'

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