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EXPLORING OUR PERCEPTUAL LIMITATION¹

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PERSONAL PERCEPTUAL CHECKUP

In my classroom, I see a black child. I hear her soft voice: “Mwalimu unaniona? Mwalimu unajua mimi nani? Mwalimu nakupenda.”² I see her mother wearing her kitenge and kitambaa gliding gracefully toward me. I do not know where to start – their oddity is palpable. This child and her family could very well be from Mars. And I continue to wonder: If I were to reprimand her, would she cry? If I were to praise her, would she smile? Does she have any friends? Does she even need them? Is she afraid of the same things that I fear? What if not? Can I still care about this child whom I do not even understand? This child’s expression of humanity is so hard to comprehend that she becomes invisible, hidden behind her oddity as if behind a mask. But then I think maybe I

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do not have to understand or even see her. I can just teach her... And it is from me, an educator who chose to “just teach,” that this child may also learn not to see. Perceptual limitation is contagious. To this child and her teachers I devote this work on perceptual limitation. This work is prompted by a growing belief that perceptual limitation may negatively affect our peaceful relationships with people. Peaceful relationships are the ones that celebrate human dignity and life and, since I hold human dignity to be one of the most valuable human³ possessions, I also believe that a condition that jeopardizes human dignity (both one’s own and that of another) ought to be treated or addressed in other ways which will be revealed in subsequent sections of this paper.

Today I write from a perspective of a recovering shortsighted⁴ woman. There are many reasons for my emerging ability to see more clearly. I owe the beginning of this recovery process to Elaine Scarry⁵ and her call for an ounce of honesty still preserved in my consciousness. My honesty was called upon to admit my shortsightedness, which in many ways undermined the human dignity of the people whom I overlooked. How was this awakening possible? Who offered a much needed cure? What was this cure? Is it available to all? Is there only one such cure? I will attempt to illuminate the answers to the above questions as I discuss our “difficulty of imagining other people,” its consequences, and the kinds of dispositions that could lead to accepting the available cure(s). In addition, I will also share ways in which I address perceptual limitations in a classroom where I meet with odd and incomprehensible immigrants and those who teach them.

It is arguably every person's basic need to be confirmed by others in his or her uniqueness and to confirm them in return⁶. Today we hear and participate in, what seems to be, omnipresent discourse on diversity; we vigorously discuss its central theme of respect that should be accorded to each unique individual. But are we all sufficiently awake to actively participate in this discourse and incarnate its themes in our teaching and learning? As I began familiarizing myself with this discourse, I was in awe of its message and the effect of this message on my spirit and, as a result, inspired to recognize and respect diversity. Diversity was novel, fun, and passionate – my world became enchantingly kaleidoscopic. When I found out that diversity means all the cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, sexuality, and ability expressions that are somewhat similar but also vastly different from mine, I was somewhat worried. Soon enough I discovered the meaning of difference that made me uncomfortable. It was much easier to accept the oddity of those students and colleagues who were still sufficiently like me. Macedo and Bartolomé confirm this sentiment by stating that:

The practice of learning from and valuing student language and life experiences often occurs in classrooms where students speak a language and possess cultural capital that more closely matches that of the mainstream⁷.

But then how could I talk to the others who were too hard to comprehend? But most importantly, why would I want to talk to them?

Our Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many a scholar in a variety of fields (especially, peace education, philosophy/political theory⁸, bilingual education, multicultural education, special education, women studies, queer studies, to name a few)

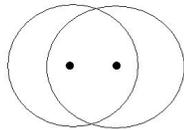
evoke the notion of human dignity as the underlying reason for offering respect to a different other. Unfortunately, the notion of human dignity seemed too abstract for me to do anything about honoring it. But, perhaps, this response was to be expected from someone who held her human dignity in question for too long. Allow me a brief autobiographical flashback which is employed here to offer explanation for my ambivalence toward the notion of human dignity.

I grew up in the former Soviet Union where people were trained⁹ to see the world through the lenses of similarity. A Russian author, Yevgenii Grishkovets, demonstrates how easily an eye trained to recognize and project similarity can predict people with their inner and outer landscapes to a minute detail:

Sometimes traveling along the main street of such a city you catch a glimpse of someone's window on the second floor and see that it's a kitchen. And the shades are a certain color... and the wallpaper... and the orange lampshade made out of plastic, and a back of some guy will whisk by the window wearing a tank-top... probably blue. And all becomes clear... what people talk about there, what's in their refrigerator, what's on the table... and what kind of dishes they have in the cupboard, and what kind of sofa, and what sort of carpet and a metal etching they have on the wall...¹⁰

Attuned to expecting and seeing similarity, my fellow-countrymen superimposed their expectations of what it would mean to be a normal human being on those who were different and odd. We shied away from difference, branding it dangerous, perhaps, because it made us wonder about our own normality. In this environment, I was rarely

confirmed in my uniqueness but more often overlooked as a being of whom there is only one and, as a result, I overlooked others in service of similarity. This mistake came from misconstruing the idea of equality to emphasize sameness. This misconception resulted in the following pattern of perception of others:



In this crude diagram of human relationship, the dark centers stand for that part of our identity, which each one of us holds sacred¹¹: the unrepeatability combination/synergy of values and voices. When one person superimposes his or her core onto another's, in an attempt to project similarity, the circles should actually overlap completely, because a person's unique core informs his or her periphery (the ways people see him or her perform in real life). Thus in this overly generous, or perhaps not generous at all, pattern of perception, one person overshadows another, each person's human dignity severely endangered or even sacrificed. Unfortunately, many of us are quite skilled at this kind of projection of our own thoughts, emotions, and attributes onto others. How often had I myself walked into my classroom having looked through the roster and found a few Russian names and having assumed to know these people, what moved them, what left them cold, and how they would interpret me and their classmates? And how often had I been unpleasantly surprised at the fact that these students failed my expectations, openly or subtly rejecting my projection. I am glad that some of them did not allow me to cause them harm: the harm would have been caused if they allowed me to define them,

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completely. Thanks to their colorful and loud difference, I continued to explore the notion of human dignity without completely depriving them or myself of it. The problem was I was overly sensitive to the emphasis on similarity that the notion of human dignity of all seemed to imply. As a result after I moved to the United States I worked more effectively to be recognized as different. As I set out to explore the role of difference in constructing our common human dignity, I found that the notion of difference, too, may lead to a dead end if it is not addressed thoughtfully.

Today, when I ask my teacher candidates about the ways they engage in multicultural education in their classrooms, I inevitably hear a list of activities all geared toward exoticizing differences¹². Many of us may enjoy being considered exotic, in one way or the other. Being perceived in this way accentuates a person's uniqueness, but if this is the only perception a student receives from her teachers and peers, it is time to become seriously concerned. Elaine Scarry¹³ discusses in abundant detail the fact that it is generally difficult for human beings to stand clearly in the eyes of others, no matter how similar the observer and the one being observed are. The problem of perception is only exacerbated by differences. It is often difficult to imagine that a person vastly different from me can experience joy and sadness in the ways similar to how I experience these emotions. In extreme cases it may become difficult to imagine that this person even belongs to the human race. As a consequence, it is much easier for me to hurt this person without recognizing the extent of the effect of my words and acts, but often even without recognizing that harm was caused at all. Scarry accounts for this experience in the following way:

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The difficulty of imagining others is shown by the fact that one can be in the presence of another person who is in pain and not know that the person is in pain.

The ease of remaining ignorant of another person's pain even permits one to inflict it and amplify it in the body of the other person while remaining immune oneself.¹⁴

The pain from not being recognized as unique is familiar to me: for many years it has been inflicted and amplified in my heart and my body. This pain was inflicted by the same people who, too, were overlooked, whose human dignity, too, was under question. As a result of this personal understanding, I begin to realize that human dignity can only be respected by those who were themselves confirmed as humans with dignity. This realization underlies the imperative nature of my need to deal seriously with my perceptual limitation, a condition which did not necessarily go away by virtue of this profound realization. Today I understand that the notion of human dignity, which seemed too abstract to heed, is necessarily dialogic in nature, comprising both recognition of similarity and difference. On the one hand, our *universal human experiences, needs, and aspirations* define and legitimate human dignity – universality should not be overlooked, yet my experience of human dignity should not stop there. On the other hand, *cultural differences, and our individual uniqueness* are the sources of our individual identities and they, too, define and legitimate the notion of human dignity¹⁵. Recognizing the dialogue between the two orientations is what I try to hear and see when I listen to and look at a different other, who no longer stands in front of me as flat as a cardboard cutout.

Perhaps, in order to offer respect to different others, in order to confirm them by seeing and hearing their authentic selves, I need to experience my own human dignity first and then learn to project the generosity with which I looked at my own humanity onto others, no matter how odd and nearly incomprehensible their human ways and their human attributes are. Elaine Scarry suggests just such an intervention into the established patterns of thinking:

When we seek equality through generous imaginings, we start with our own weight, then attempt to acquire knowledge about the weight and complexity of others. The alternative strategy is to achieve equality between self and other not by trying to make one's knowledge of others *as weighty as* one's own self-knowledge, but by making one ignorant about oneself, and therefore *as weightless as* all others¹⁶.

Today I know the gentleness of my hands, the heaviness of my feet firmly planted on the ground, the sometimes subdued, sometimes racing beat of my heart, I attend to a thought. I sit in a chair, I reflect, I account every aspiration, every disappointment, every loving wonder and every death wish – I sort them, sift them, and I marvel. I breathe in, I breathe out... And I become heavier with every physical, spiritual and mental stirring I attend to. What a thrill! No more dieting, I say to myself, the more weight I gain, the richer I grow, and the richer and the heavier I allow others to be. Thus, my newfound understanding of the notion of human dignity and the resulting weight that I gained in my own eyes serves to enliven the flat cardboard figures, which would then transform into weighty and three-dimensional human beings in my class and outside of it.

Feeling blessed by my recovery, I bring a beautiful poem by Pablo Neruda to my Saturday class in Foundations of Bilingual and Multicultural Education. Fifteen students are looking at me and I – at them, calculating who would be a good candidate to read the Spanish version of this poem. In my mind I single out Lourdes, an obviously Hispanic woman. I ask for volunteers; Dean, a white student of European descent, raises his hand, and so does Lourdes. I look pleadingly at Dean, “let her read it, I can’t imagine that you can do it, too,” I think to myself. And so Dean gives up his chance to show the class and his instructor that his Spanish is, in fact, near-native. Dean recedes to the background because of the poverty of my imagination. I fail the test of unconditional hospitality by attempting to maintain my neat picture of the world. Of unconditional hospitality I will say a few words as a way of refining the earlier lamentation on the poverty of my imagination.

Jacques Derrida, famous, for his treatment of the notion of hospitality qualifies unconditional hospitality as a “welcome without reserve and without calculation, an exposure without limit to whoever arrives.”¹⁷ As Dean’s incongruent-with-my-expectation multidimensionality arrived and knocked on my door, the door remained closed but not due to the poverty of imagination. I imagined him plenty: since he looked like me, I imagined him to be like me, an incompetent in the Spanish language. I imaged him forth, instead of letting him freely enter into my imagination. Perhaps, to practice unconditional hospitality I needed unconditional imagination. But Derrida comes to the rescue: practical hospitality, he suggests, transforms the unconditional nature of pure hospitality because one needs to protect her home from unlimited arrival of the other¹⁸.

And this statement points to the possibility that while often unconscious, perceptual limitation may also be consciously employed toward protecting one's home/identity and, may, therefore, be a choice. In the next section I will address perceptual limitation as a choice.

VARIETIES OF AFFLICTED INDIVIDUALS

Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti¹⁹ have written about various training activities to alleviate perceptual limitation. Many teachers will find their work quite illuminating and useful. Yet, it has been my experience that this training usually reaches only those who are already half way there, those who already have pre-requisite compassion which is a disposition that I build on when helping my teacher candidates overcome their perceptual disability. But there is also a person out there and even here, a person with 20/20 eyesight who voluntarily and stubbornly chooses to be shortsighted or even blind. Perceptual limitation, indeed, serves some individuals very well. The more powerful one is, the more invested he or she will be in maintaining this self-inflicted condition. Then, what could be done with the folks who wish to enjoy their perceptual limitation at the expense of many adults and children who desire recognition? If such is the case, then the ones who are not seen may want to step up. In fact, Paulo Freire²⁰ suggested a while ago that this may be the only way a major change could happen (it is unlikely to happen at the decision of the afflicted in power). Ian Baptiste²¹ extended Freire's message and openly suggested coercive restraint as a means of dealing with those who choose to frivolously embrace their perceptual limitation and whose choice renders them "beyond dialogue."

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To justify his call for coercive restraint Baptiste²² introduces useful vocabulary as he makes a distinction between “misguided foes” who often “injure others unintentionally” and “true enemies” whose “injurious acts are based on sufficient and principled conviction,” and these acts are intentional. True enemies are the individuals whom I term “beyond dialogue.” But then again by believing them beyond dialogue I fail to offer them a chance to surprise me, thus denying myself a chance to locate, even inadvertently, a point of entry into dialogue. Sometimes it may be useful to attend to William James’ words:

We have no right to speak of human crocodiles and boa-constrictors as of fixedly incurable beings. We know not the complexities of personality, the smoldering emotional fires, the other facets of the character polyhedron, the resources of the subliminal region²³.

He may be right, sometimes. Baptiste also points to possibilities of transformation reminding us that each individual may act on a continuum: depending on the situation one can be my ally, misguided foe or, at another time, a true enemy. While we should not deny the possibility of recovery, we should also attend to reality, and reality is such that the cure for perceptual limitation needs to be altered according to specific diagnosis and it may sometimes be ineffective despite our hopes and efforts. Let us review a few possible scenarios.

When dealing with misguided foes, we are actually working with people who wish to be cured, they simply may not yet be aware of their affliction or of the cure. Those who want to be cured can find this cure fairly easily (although, once the cure is

found, the process of self-healing is a long and challenging one). In previous section Elaine Scarry suggested one cure and I described my experiments with it.

In addition to Scarry's suggestion, Paulo Freire²⁴ spoke extensively on the value of conscientization as a powerful cure. Maxine Greene²⁵ advocated wide-awakeness. But, I repeat my question, what could be done with the persons who *wish* to enjoy their perceptual limitation at the expense of many adults and children who desire a peaceful present and a future?

Peace educators are faced with a number of challenging tasks. The first task is to figure out in what capacity they themselves are performing in any given situation (an ally, a misguided foe, a true enemy). The second task is to determine who they are currently working with. The third task is to catch themselves and their students during the moments when they change the roles, turning into allies, misguided foes, or true enemies. The fourth task is to attempt to seize that moment of breaching the role and enter into dialogue (this will work when a person *breeches toward dialogue*). The fifth and one of the most daunting tasks is to realize when it is time to use other strategies than those of enlightenment or conscientization²⁶.

It is important to admit that perceptual limitation, indeed, serves some individuals very well. As mentioned earlier, Paulo Freire called upon the oppressed to show themselves to the oppressor as a way of countering his or her stubborn addiction to perceptual limitation. Baptiste²⁷ sees the obvious limit of this call in its underlying assumption that the power of positive transformation is located exclusively within the victim and that the perpetrator wishes to be cured or even could be cured. This

understanding is precisely what Baptiste puts into question. He believes, as I do, that there may be times when it is quite impossible to minimize someone's perceptual limitation. He then offers a solution in the form of an occasional need for coercion. To this end he articulated a *pedagogy of coercive restraint* which "exercises force that matches the level of conflict."²⁸ Unfortunately a deeper exploration of coercive restraint would take me outside of the province of this paper. But I wanted to end my brief reflection on coercion with an ellipsis so that I may return to explore this intriguing topic further. The following are the questions I wish to address in my subsequent writings: What could be done to minimize the need for coercive restraint? and If coercion must be employed, what could be done to minimize the possibility of application of force while delivering a firm message of denunciation of the act/thought?

Appiah²⁹ reminds us that besides the two responses to the "true enemy" already discussed that of changing his/her mind and keeping him/her out of our way, we could also consider keeping out of his/her way. While not the most appealing for being quite passive, this course of action may often be reasonable.

Today I find my own, less forceful ways of dealing with perceptual limitation: I help my teaching candidates develop dispositions and attributes that weaken their affliction and mine. I still walk an easy street, rarely finding true enemies among my teacher candidates, but even on that street there are educators who need to admit their affliction and deal with it with a sense of urgency and commitment. The recovering educators are likely to continue the ripple effect of the cure by encouraging their students to do similar work on their minds and spirits.

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MINIMIZING PERCEPTUAL LIMITATION

Having pointed in the direction of the cure, I am inspired to offer a few concrete examples. In this section, I would like to share some of the ways to address perceptual limitation that I currently use in preparing ESL and bilingual teachers.

In my Foundations of Bilingual Education class, one assignment became somewhat popular. As part of educating sensitivity and respect toward difference, my pre-service and in-service teachers and I engage in an exercise of perspective taking³⁰. They are asked to carefully read one of the suggested immigrant memoirs or fictional life stories³¹ and then compose an essay in the voice of a chosen character from the book. The essays appear under the general title “*The Difficulty of Imagining Other People.*”³² In the essay, the character discusses his or her life and educational goals and envisions who and how may be of help in accomplishing these goals. The essays may then be discussed in class. And as I respond to them, I choose to address the character instead of the actual graduate student who put the essay together. Many of my teaching candidates see the value in this assignment, some take it to unexpected heights:

...if I knew better, I would have wished for a world where my Daddy was not cast off like so much black dirt. A world that did not take away from him at such a tender age the only love he ever knew... I would have wished for him a world that allowed him to love and be tender, to provide and to succeed, a world that didn't take away his pride and masculinity, a world that did not shame and reject him... You see, if I could have wished for this world then things would have been different. My parents would have been different. Maybe they would have been

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happy, and most importantly, I think they could have loved me. And then what happened to me, right before I got my blue eyes, wouldn't have happened.

Because you see, what happened to me that day didn't just happen in a moment, in an instant of depraved insanity, it happened in a lifetime, two lifetimes, many, many lifetimes (Pecola, *The Bluest Eye*).

We can have all our judgments and wrong ideas and life can beat'em right on out of us. If we lucky. Good people is good people. You a good person, Celie. You just needed to git rid of your fear and live life. Well, the both of us got love and the both of us got experience. Ain't that somethin'? And most of all we here. We here! (Mr. _____, *The Color Purple*)³³

As the above excerpts make clear, some students, indeed, let the character pass through their hearts and they will never be the same. They may even remember how to see and hear others better. (Un)fortunately, those who take this assignment to unexpected heights are often quite ready to embrace the other's particularity. For those who are still struggling, other steps may be useful. Below is one such step.

While it is important to see and hear others properly, it is just as important to be seen and heard (those students who struggle to see and hear others may benefit from being seen and heard). The next exercise creates a space for my students' voices, which, in this case, are to be heard by their former/current oppressor. We call this piece "*Letter to my oppressor*." Teaching candidates are asked to compose a personal letter to their real-life oppressor who remains anonymous. The letter details various ways in which its

author was harmed, as well as ways in which he or she overcame or is attempting to overcome the aftermath of this oppression. This activity allows my teachers to stand up to the oppressor and throw off the cloak of invisibility in which they were clad until they heard themselves speak about the specific instances of oppression. As we read the letters out loud, tears come to our eyes. The catharsis that this assignment offers helps further develop our sensitivities to our own selves, parts of which were unheard until this moment. This is a crucial step toward opening our hearts to be sensitive to a different other.

In the course of a semester, along with the above assignments my students and I engage in routine exercises that, too, help minimize our perceptual limitation. Each session of my class begins with an open-ended “*How are you (doing today)?*” addressed to a specific student rather than to the whole class. I found that when I address this question to the whole class my eyes see a nameless and insignificant mass, thus overlooking unique individuals; and they, in turn, would respond with a formulaic “Fine” rather than providing the answer unique to their current situation. Derrida supports this attempt at particularizing classroom discourse:

Pure hospitality consists in welcoming whoever arrives before imposing conditions on him, before knowing and asking anything at all, be it a name or an identity ‘paper.’ But it supposes also that one address him, singularly, that he be called therefore, and that he be understood to have a proper name: ‘You, what’s your name?’ Hospitality consists in doing everything to address the other, to

accord him, even to ask him his name, while keeping this question from becoming a ‘condition,’ a police inquisition, a blacklist or a simple border control.³⁴

I usually begin with one student and then ask him or her to address the same question to someone else in class. This way we become genuinely acquainted and set the tone for a more collegial exchange. It is, however, important to emphasize that students are not discouraged from providing a formulaic answer: some may perceive our inquiry about their day as a form of “shoving”³⁵ into their private life. If or when they begin to get to know others vicariously, they may eventually open up.

As the semester progresses, we continue to acknowledge each others’ uniqueness in a variety of ways. One way to confirm the particularity of each individual is to *diversify the vocabulary of praise*. This exercise is usually connected to individual presentations. The audience is encouraged to write a specific compliment to the presenter. Some are still struggling with the traditional “Good job” and “Outstanding!”, yet others are able to come up with entire paragraphs. The more we practice, the better the compliments become. The compliments are usually turned in to me so that I could organize them for each presenter and type them up in order to share the good will of the audience. The impetus for this activity comes from my dissatisfaction with the existing rather scant and impersonal repertoire of praise which disregards rather than confirms the uniqueness of individuals and their acts.

Finding something new and unusual about each individual in class would not be possible without an openness to surprises which can only come when one acknowledges unfinishedness of each person and, therefore, the inevitability of change. Direct teaching

is only part of the instruction that we, educators, can offer; while not explicit, our dispositions are inscribed in our every word and act. My teaching candidates continue to tune into their openness toward the mystery and surprise of a different other as they are encouraged to punctuate their definitions of different others with *a metaphorical ellipsis or a question mark*. Thus “a jerk...,” “a sweetheart...,” “an ignoramus...” only last so long until we meet the labeled individual next time and witness a newness. Thus, both metaphoric punctuation marks symbolize continuation, and openness to surprises within another individual so defined. In generously utilizing an ellipsis and a question mark, we remain present to dialogue, and I see dialogue as a foundation of the cure for perceptual limitation.

TOWARD A CONCLUSION

One of the key ingredients of any conflict is inability or unwillingness to see another person’s perspective, or simply to see another person. It would then seem that peace work necessitates regular and frequent perceptual checkups. I hope that this reflection demonstrates that perceptual limitation is a curable condition, but the success of the cure depends on a person’s willingness to seek and undergo treatment. I wish to end by inviting the reader to seek newer ways to treat his or her perceptual limitation, for after all, it is also a recurrent condition. Every conscious effort at minimizing this condition, no matter how small, serves as a “testimony to one’s respect for the dignity of the other.”³⁶ And as Freire and Scarry remind us, this testimony can only be given responsibly from one’s unique position in the world.

NOTES

¹ The original term, “perceptual disability,” was borrowed from a thoughtful piece by Elaine Scarry. *The Difficulty of Imagining Other People*. In *For Love of Country?* edited by Martha Nussbaum (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002). The term “disability” was used loosely and, therefore, deemed infelicitous because it created disability where social factors may be instrumental in bringing about this condition. In addition, whereas many disabilities may not be curable, this piece strongly suggested a cure. Disability, however, is a complex continuum, which may accommodate the original use of the term. However, a more neutral term was selected in an attempt to encourage the readers’ attention to the content of this article. To form a personal understanding consult Deborah Kaplan’s article, “The Definition of Disability,”

<http://www.accessiblesociety.org/topics/demographics-identity/dkaplanpaper.htm>.

² The child says in Swahili: “Teacher, can you see me? Teacher, do you know who I am? Teacher, I like you.” And all of these words fall on my deaf ears, and both of us incur a significant loss. I lose a chance to respond to this child’s love, and she loses her trust in one adult whose confirmation she so urgently needs.

³ While not in possession of human dignity, non-human yet living species also need to be perceived clearly if we purport to respect life, although the development of this perception will not follow the same route as the development of a clear perception of humans.

⁴ Perceptual limitation is more appropriately used in its plural “perceptual limitations,” metaphorical shortsightedness is just one of the many ways in which our perception could be limited.

⁵ Elaine Scarry. *The Difficulty of Imagining Other People*

⁶ Martin Buber. *A Believing Humanism: My Testament, 1902-1965* translated by Maurice Friedman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967), also Betty Reardon. *Educating for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective* (Paris, France: UNESCO, 2001).

⁷ Macedo and Bartolomé. *Dancing with Bigotry: Beyond the Politics of Tolerance* (New York: St.Martin’s Press, 1999), 130.

⁸ See an intriguing overview of the development of the notion of human dignity in Martha C. Nussbaum’s recent work, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁹ For a long time I have been on the receiving end of “if you are not with us you are against us” message. According to Paulo Freire and many scholars of critical thought, the ideological fog of dichotomous thinking is socially encouraged and maintained and it clouds our perception thus limiting it. We are daily bombarded with ideologies exacerbating our perceptual limitation, and we re-create them because of our perceptual limitation. See a classical text on social construction of reality: Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966).

¹⁰ The original excerpt comes from the collection of plays by a Russian author Yevgenii Grishkovets, the English translation is mine. See Yevgenii Grishkovets, *Zima*. (Moscow: Vremya, 2005), 185.

¹¹ Okolie calls this “core identity”. Core identities are the ones that “stand out to the subject and to the other, and they are the ones that often spur action on the part of the subject.” See Andrew C. Okolie, “Identity: Now You Don’t See It; Now You Do,” *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 3, no.1 (2003), 4.

¹² For critique of exotizing and essentializing difference see Gary C. David and Kenneth K. Ayouby, “Studying the Exotic Other in the Classroom: The Portrayal of Arab Americans in Educational Source Materials,” *Multicultural Perspectives*, 7, no.4 (2005): 13-20 among many such sources, and for suggestions for alternative, more politically engaged ways to address multicultural issues see Macedo and Bartolomé’s *Dancing with Bigotry*.

¹³ Scarry, *The Difficulty of Imagining Other People*.

¹⁴ Ibid., 100

¹⁵ Reardon, *Educating for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*

¹⁶ Scarry. *The Difficulty of Imagining Other People*, 105.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, “The Principle of Hospitality,” *Parallax*, 11, no.1 (2005), 6.

¹⁸ *ibid*

¹⁹ Linda Lantieri and Janet Patti. *Waging Peace in Our Schools* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996).

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- ²⁰ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (30th anniversary ed.)* translated by Myra Bergman-Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2000).
- ²¹ Ian Baptiste, “Beyond Reason and Personal Integrity: Toward a Pedagogy of Coercive Restraint,” *The Canadian Journal for the Study of Adult Education*, 14 no.1 (2000): 27-50.
- ²² *ibid.*
- ²³ *ibid.*, 311
- ²⁴ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.
- ²⁵ Maxine Greene. *Landscapes of Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1978).
- ²⁶ Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*
- ²⁷ Baptiste, “Beyond Reason and Personal Integrity”
- ²⁸ *ibid.*
- ²⁹ Kwame Anthony Appiah. *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in the World of Strangers* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2006).
- ³⁰ Reardon, *Educating for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*
- ³¹ Edwidge Danticat. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Vintage, 1998); Toni Morrison. *The Bluest Eye* (New York: PLUME, Penguin Books, 1994); Richard Rodríguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodríguez* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1982); Amy Tan. *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1989); Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston & J.D. Houston. *Farewell to Manzanar* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995); Alice Walker. *The Color Purple* (New York: Pocket Books,

1982), among other sources. In addition, I wish to suggest an article that details some of the uses of multicultural literature toward gaining sensitivity. See Judith Y. Singer and Sally A. Smith, “The Potential of Multicultural Literature: Changing Understanding of Self and Other,” *Multicultural Perspectives*, 5, no.2 (2003): 17-23.

³² The name of this activity is borrowed from Scarry’s (2002) chapter with the identical title.

³³ Both excerpts are retyped from the originals with proper permission from their authors. I preserved the original grammar and syntax.

³⁴ Derrida, “The Principle of Hospitality,” 7.

³⁵ TheodoreSizer and Nancy Sizer, *The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1999)

³⁶ Paulo Freire. *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).