

Harry Potter and the Oppression of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse U.S. Students

CLAUDIA PERALTA NASH and CELIA DEN HARTOG KING

The authors draw from *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003) to reflect on how the often unspoken insinuations as to who possesses cultural capital, and whose knowledge is valued in our schools, play an important role in what opportunities are provided. As educators, they use the fictional Hogwarts School of Magic to compare and confront the issues rooted in oppression that affect the lives of U.S. students, and reflect on how injustices affect children's educational experiences.

Introduction

In the fifth book of the Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (2003), author J.K. Rowling portrays the hero as a 15-year-old boy who struggles not only with the hormonal changes of adolescence, but also with increasing feelings of not fitting in with his classmates at Hogwarts School of Magic. The previous year, Harry had won the TriWizard Tournament, which included a tragic encounter with the Dark Lord Voldemort and the death of a fellow student. Now Harry must deal with the rumors and gossip around this event that have invaded Hogwarts, putting him on the defensive. Add to this the entrance of Dolores Umbridge, the maleficent new High Inquisitor of Hogwarts, and the seeming aloofness of Dumbledore, former Headmaster and champion of Harry, and we find Harry in a dismal and insecure place indeed. He has a hard time concentrating on his studies, as nightmares plague him, and the influence of the Dark Lord over him becomes stronger.

All this might be more bearable if Harry felt satisfied with his education from all of his teachers. Umbridge, however, has a very narrow view of what constitutes a quality education and constantly makes the rounds of classes to observe and critique teachers at work. Her ideas about education include more theory than practice, and conflict with the real needs of children. *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2003) allows us to find parallels with U.S. education today, which essentially misses the mark for many children, especially those who are culturally or linguistically different from the mainstream.

We are living in an educational time when tremendous pressure is placed on educators and school personnel to “school” rather than “educate” students (Bahruth, 2007). We have bought into the notion that education happens only in school buildings, and only according to the plan set out by teachers and administrators (Illich, 1971). Students are no longer motivated to question, to engage in discussions, to ask what is fair or unfair or what should be included in the curriculum. Rather, educators are asked to turn schools into factories where students (the products) will be able to meet the economic demands of the globalization era. Nowadays, education has been centralized. The Federal program approves state plans, and evaluates which schools meet the set “standards.” Similarly, in *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2003), the educational plan is laid out for students, with mandates handed down from the Ministry of Magic, and under it, High Inquisitor Dolores Umbridge. The students have little to say about the education they want. They must trust that what has been decreed from the top is for their good. But is it? Are there comparisons we can draw between the educational experience for students of color and linguistically different students, and that of students at Hogwarts School of Magic?

How is Education Failing Diverse Students?

By 1998, 87% of White American adults had completed twelve or more years of school, and so had 76% of African Americans and 56% of Hispanics (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2000). The educational achievement for people of color was increasing in the United States. However, this trend is reversing because of new policies regarding graduation exams and the continuing decline in resources for urban schools. For example, the dropout rate for 16-24-year-old Black males has increased from 11.9% in 1990 to 15.5 % in 1998 (NCES, 2000). Meanwhile, the dropout rate for the same age group of Hispanics remained above 30% (President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic American Education, 1996). What is the reason for the continuing inequities in education that disadvantage cultures other than Whites? Could it be that these students are not viewed as having any capital worth preserving and building upon? Are they simply living down to the expectations that many teachers have for them?

At Hogwarts School of Magic, the welcoming message given in the introductory speech by Professor Umbridge at the beginning of another academic year resonates with the idea that the intellect and privilege of “these” students need to be preserved, and passed down from generation to generation:

The Ministry of Magic has always considered the education of young Witches and Wizards to be of vital importance. The rare gifts with which you were born may come to nothing if not nurtured and honed by careful instruction. The ancient skills unique to the Wizarding community must be passed down through the generations lest we lose them forever. (Rowling 2003, p. 212)

This statement begs the questions: Education for what? Education for whom? Education that privileges whom? Moreover, the “welcoming speech” given to students continues to embody the message of a democracy based on the meritocratic system-- anyone can succeed on the basis of merit, hard work and adherence to the rules of school (Noguera, 2003). The underlying assumption that the educational system in America is equal, and operates objectively, hides the fact that this system continues to privilege and serve the dominant culture of society while causing disadvantage for people of color. Barriers for an equal educational opportunity for underrepresented students are many, and continue to have an impact on the performance of students. Minority and low-income students are more likely to find themselves attending schools with inadequate resources that include substandard facilities and underprepared teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kozol, 1991, 2005; Rumberger & Gándara, 2004).

In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003), Dumbledore, as headmaster of Hogwarts, has a relatively inclusive attitude towards hiring teachers, supporting even those who are not purebloods. The important thing is that they know their subject and can relate well with students. An attempt is made to hire the best teachers for the job, no matter what their culture. Hagrid, the half-giant; Lupin, the werewolf; and Firenze, the Centaur are cases that show Dumbledore’s willingness to include diversity in his faculty. But Umbridge, Dumbledore’s replacement, has an agenda that includes purifying the faculty of Hogwarts, loading her words when referring to “dangerous half-breeds” (p. 302). Her campaign to rid the earth of part-humans, including rounding up and tagging of Merpeople, is reminiscent of Hitler’s attempts to purify the human race by first tagging (with yellow stars) and later exterminating all but

the Aryan “Master Race” (Hitler, 1943). Umbridge’s concern is less that teachers are experts in their field than that they are purebloods. Thus a homogeneous teaching staff may be seen to reflect the “best” element in society, that of the pureblood magical community.

Given that our nation’s teaching force is predominantly White, female and middle-class, and their values, perceptions and decisions likely derived from lived experiences very different from the diverse student population (Whang & Peralta Nash, 2005), we must ask ourselves: Why is it that legislation seems designed to assure that “new teachers will not be equipped to understand the majority of their students linguistically, culturally or academically” (Katz & Kohl, 2002, p. 7)? At a time when the need for greater diversity in the teaching population is critical, Praxis exams at the university level put culturally and linguistically different students at a disadvantage and weed them out of the potential pool of teachers. Is there an Umbridge somewhere attempting to “purify” the teacher population’s way of thinking? As in *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2003), those teachers who fit in best with the magical community mainstream—the purebloods—are the ones Umbridge wants on staff. She sees no value in diversity, whether it is teachers or students. She shows a disingenuous attitude conducted in the name of children’s best interest. As well known peace educator Betty Reardon points out, multicultural education is an essential element of education for peace (cited in Harris & Morrison, Reagan, 2003, p. 67). Multicultural education invites students and teachers to put their learning into action, to expose the contradictions between democratic ideals and actual manifestations of inequality in more inclusive and expansive ways reflecting on what is learned.

“Different” Children at Risk

As defined by Gregory, Rogien, Snow-Gerono, Cahill-Rawley and Yates (2005), Harry Potter is “virtually a definition of an at risk child” (p. 45), who not only experiences the loss of his parents and overcomes incredible hardship, but also faces the constant reminder that he is the “different” one. This is evident when one of his peers, Seamus, shares the reason that his mother didn’t want him to return to school. She believes that Harry is a liar, not trustworthy and a bad influence on others. Moreover, during Snape’s Potions class, Harry is ridiculed in front of everyone for not being able to produce the right potion because he has not followed the instructions correctly. Snape attacks him in front of the class with: “Can you read?” “Read the third line of the instruction for me, Potter.” “Did you do everything on the third line, Potter?” (Rowling, 2003, pp. 233-234); and even though Harry quietly admits that he has not, Snape utters “I know you did, Potter, which means that this mess is utterly worthless” (p. 234). The exchange between Snape (the teacher) and Harry (the student) positions Harry as “stupid” in front of the whole class. Even though he is honest by realizing that he had missed an ingredient, the teacher insists on ridiculing him by stating “Those of you who have managed to read the instructions” (p. 234). The interaction between Snape and Harry resembles the interactions that many students of color, or those who have special academic needs, may have with teachers in schools. The interaction blames the student, focusing on behavior rather than on lack of comprehension of the lesson (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Eckstrom & Villegas, 1991) or lack of reflection from the teacher. All of these incidents begin to weigh on Harry’s self esteem, and he wonders and worries

about the justifications he offers for his reactions, often doubting his virtues and abilities which are appreciated only by his two closest mates, Ron and Hermione.

Similarly, public school students who are culturally/ethnically different from the mainstream, or who do not speak English, may be singled out for their perceived “lack.” Culturally different children may feel out of step with a curriculum that has no resemblance to their own background or experiences. Linguistically different children are likely to be sent to remedial classes where they learn English so they can “measure up” to the English-speaking norm. Unfortunately, speaking a language other than English, as it relates to students in the “regular” classroom, has been seen as a problem to be fixed, and not as an asset (Baker, 2001). English learners are referred for special education at several times the rate of the English-speaking population (Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

Certain minority groups have little incentive to do well in school because they perceive that their effort does not pay off in economic and job rewards like it does for mainstream students (Ogbu, 1992). Persistent negative stereotypes and bad press are difficult to overcome, and cause some groups to have to work harder to “prove” themselves, even when education level, grades, and experience are the same.

The poor, too, have extra hurdles to overcome. Low socioeconomic status is usually seen as a cultural deficit (Sleeter & Grant, 1999). When we view low-income children as deficient, we decide that they “do poorly in school because their ‘cultural backgrounds’ ill prepare them to succeed, and the source of the problem lies therefore in the home, an environment deficient in the language and practices necessary to support school success” (Tozer, 2000, p. 157).

In *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003), the Weasley family represents the poor element in society. They are a large family that lives in a ramshackle house, struggling to get by most of the time. Ron Weasley, Harry's best friend, comes to school with hand-me-down robes, and has to try to find the best bargains possible on textbooks, cauldron, wand, Quidditch broom, and other supplies. Instead of having an owl as a pet, he must content himself with having a rat. Although his best friends never make fun of him, Ron seems self-deprecating and unsure of himself through most of the book, and members of other Hogwarts Houses sometimes joke at his expense. Much of his lack of confidence can likely be related to a self-perceived dearth of cultural capital related to insufficient finances and low social status. Fortunately for Ron and others like him, though, Dumbledore, the headmaster at Hogwarts (at the beginning of the book) seems to value diversity.

Diversity at Hogwarts

Dumbledore's inclusive attitude toward everyone is seen in his treatment of all students as valuable, no matter what their lineage. There is little negative talk to or about students whose lineage includes Muggles (non-magical humans). The students, however, often examine and categorize themselves and other students according to their parentage. They also hold tightly to the Houses into which they are sorted at the beginning of their tenure at Hogwarts. Most interactions within Houses are friendly enough, but between Houses there is often great rivalry, with the strongest tension between Gryffindor, Harry's House, and Slytherin, the House of the purebloods. Other than a constant barrage of negative talk against Harry from Slytherin's Draco Malfoy, Houses seem to socialize mostly with their own. In fact, when Dumbledore's Army is planning their secret

meetings, they must devise a way to communicate with people from other Houses in a way that will not arouse undue attention, “because it would look suspicious if people from different Houses were seen crossing the Great Hall to talk to each other too often” (Rowling, 2003, p. 398).

Little ethnic diversity is obvious within *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003). A few students may be surmised to be other than White, but references to them follow persistent stereotypes. Angelina, “a tall black girl with long-braided hair,” (p. 224) is also captain of the Gryffindor Quidditch team, reflecting the stereotype of tall, Black athletes. The other incidence of ethnic diversity is Cho Chang, whose name gives her away as Asian, possibly Chinese, although this is never stated.

In spite of little obvious ethnic diversity, *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2003) does contain a number of subgroups not specifically related to ethnicity. The Wizarding community—especially that of purebloods—is the norm, much as Whiteness is perceived to be the norm in United States society (Tatum, 1994). All else is relegated to the category of Other (Giroux, 1997). Even the choice of courses offered in the curriculum seems to be focused on knowledge that would be most important for the advancement of the Wizarding community, reinforcing the dominant group’s knowledge, as in most U.S. schools. The outlier course is Muggle Studies, the study of non-magical humans. This course seems to mirror current attempts to address issues of diversity within many institutions of higher learning, which now mandate required diversity classes for their students. Although some of these classes may involve deep learning, including examination of long-held biases and beliefs, there may be a tendency by some to treat diversity issues on the surface, just to fulfill the mandate (Sleeter & Grant, 1999).

Learning only about superficial aspects of cultures effectively maintains culture within a neat little box, while relieving the student and teacher of a responsibility to examine the accompanying issue of racism within society.

Muggles are regarded with both contempt and interest in Harry Potter (Rowling, 2003), much as parallel cultures may be regarded by the mainstream White culture in the United States. A career that involves working with Muggles is viewed as relatively unimportant. “You don’t seem to need many qualifications to liaise with Muggles . . . All they want is an O.W.L. in Muggle Studies . . . ‘Much more important is your enthusiasm, patience, and a good sense of fun!’” (Rowling, p. 656-657). For those who do pursue a career with Muggles, such as Arthur Weasley, an almost voyeuristic attitude seems to prevail. “As ever when he found himself in close proximity to Muggles going about their daily business, Mr. Weasley was hard put to contain his enthusiasm” (Rowling, 2003, p. 124). Mr. Weasley is enthralled with Muggles’ automatic ticket machines, in spite of the fact Harry points out that they are out of order. “Yes, but even so. . .” said Mr. Weasley, beaming fondly at them” (p. 124). This may be likened to fascination with certain aspects of parallel cultures, but lack of more intimate involvement with them—again, keeping cultures within boundaries. For the most part, there seems to be a fairly strong wall between the Wizarding and Muggle communities.

Elves are another largely invisible group. At Hogwarts, they seem to do most of their work in hidden away places such as the kitchen. They usually work at times when they are unlikely to have personal contact with Wizards and Witches, such as at night. They feel their invisibility and unimportance to their masters. Most people treat Elves with contempt or take them for granted. Only Hermione seems to have a soft spot for

them. Knowing that the only way they can gain their freedom is by being given an article of clothing for their own, Hermione furiously knits hats and socks, which she leaves lying around for them to find, in hopes of setting them free. Her attitude, although meant to be kind, is not perceived as such by Dobby, one of the house Elves. He takes all the hats, scarves and socks himself, stating that the Elves do “not care for clothes” (Rowling, 2003, p. 385).

Is Hermione trying to project her feelings on the Elves? Hermione’s attitude may be compared with teachers who are only able to see deficiency in the lives of their culturally different students, and not the assets of language and background knowledge they bring with them. Such teachers may focus on remedial activities to make children feel better about themselves, but never give them the “codes of power” (Delpit, 1995, p. 40) to make better lives for themselves. They also make statements like “I don’t see color, I only see children” (Delpit, p. 177), which are meant to reassure us of their good intentions toward students. The effect, though, is rendering children of color invisible, resulting in homogenization of curriculum and strategies and missing out on priceless opportunities to expand the knowledge base of students and teacher alike.

Giants in Harry Potter (Rowling, 2003) are literally in a class by themselves. They have alienated other societies with their violent ways, so that the few who remain live far away from the rest of the Wizarding community where they will not disturb them. Hagrid expresses the attitude of Wizards towards them in his statement, “It’s jus’ that mos’ Wizards aren’ bothered where they are, s’ long as it’s a good long way away” (Rowling, p. 425). The fact that Giants also do not speak English strengthens their comparison to English learners in our schools today. Teachers faced with children who speak other

languages may feel frustration because they have not been given the tools to accommodate and teach them, or they may believe that it is not their responsibility to work with them. English learners are often separated from their English-speaking classmates for pullout English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, robbing them of the conversational opportunities with native English-speaking peers that are critical for language acquisition (Krashen, 1983), and often excluding them from learning experiences that are related to grade level. Teachers, however, may feel satisfied that they have done their duty by providing English language instruction, albeit “a long way away” from their own classrooms, so to speak.

Separation of cultures seems to be a common theme in Rowling’s (2003) tale. Muggles and Wizards, although they live in the same world, inhabit their own spaces within that world, with few interactions between the two. House Elves live within the Wizarding world, but are for the most part used and unappreciated, or outright ignored. Giants, considered dangerous, live in their own “ghettos,” apart from the responsibility and view of the rest of the world. Some subgroups appear to be content with their separation because they wish to maintain their perceived position of superiority. Others, like the Giants and Elves, have been misunderstood, mistreated and maligned for so long that they don’t seem to have the will or power to change their situation. A few, such as Firenze the centaur, have crossed the boundary into the mainstream Wizarding community, but at a price. Firenze, who accepts an interim position as instructor at Hogwarts, is rejected and scorned by his fellow centaurs for having “entered into servitude to humans” (Rowling, 2003, p. 698). This may be compared with students from parallel cultures who find themselves rejected by their own communities when they

“follow the rules” and take on the behaviors and attitudes that will bring them academic success in a system of education perceived as belonging to the enemy (Ogbu, 1992).

They end up in a place similar to the one in which Firenze finds himself— approved by the leadership of Hogwarts, but continuing to be marginalized and never really fitting in because of his appearance. At the same time, he has been rejected by his own, leaving him a dweller between cultures.

We never hear about education for the diverse subgroups found in Harry Potter (Rowling, 2003). It appears that only Wizards and Witches are worthy of being given the important skills and knowledge of past generations, and they are aware of their high position. Hermione pinpoints the attitude: “It all stems from this horrible thing Wizards have of thinking they’re superior to other creatures” (p. 171).

Curriculum and Instruction

Before the Ministry of Magic, the magic folk’s administration, took over Hogwarts, Harry and his friends were never scolded by the headmaster for their starving curiosity. Questioning authority and pursuing knowledge were seen as positive, and promoted as important qualities to develop. Dumbledore encouraged students to grapple with the truth, to question, to engage in critical conversation. This “problem posing approach” is embraced by Freire’s pedagogy of oppression (Wallerstein, 1993).

However, all of these practices are eroded when Umbridge is appointed the new Headmaster of Hogwarts. Her goal is to “standardize” learning by controlling what is taught, and how it is taught. During Umbridge’s first class, the students challenge the narrowness of the curriculum that allows for no practice of what they are learning. Umbridge insists that as long as they study the theory hard enough, they will be able to

perform the spells during “carefully controlled examination conditions” (Rowling, 2003, p. 244). After all, “This is school, Mr. Potter, not the real world” (p. 244). Broader learning, with multiple perspectives represented and many learning styles addressed, would be more typical of a multicultural education (Banks, 1994), but this is not to be found in Umbridge’s class. She seems bent on implementing the narrowest of curricula based on only what has been “ministry approved.” This can be compared to Michael Apple’s (1993) proposition that schools tend to promote an “official” body of knowledge. One must ask the question: Who decides what knowledge is deemed to be worth learning in schools? At Hogwarts, it is the Ministry of Magic that decides. Neither individual initiative nor outside viewpoints are welcomed. Even the magazine, *The Quibbler*, is eventually banned from student reading because its expressed views conflict with Umbridge’s agenda.

What is really happening at Hogwarts mirrors what has taken place in some schools since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was born as the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965). Although it was hoped that NCLB would eliminate the achievement gap for subgroups such as students with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse learners, and the poor, what has resulted in some places is that high minority, high poverty schools have been the first ones to be targeted as in need of improvement. In many places, creative teaching is taking a back seat to revived technicist methods in order to achieve “un-meetable” test scores and satisfy the powerful accountability system (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Gains made by any of the students in the subgroup during the academic year will not be reflected in the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) report measured by “a yearly yard stick” that only

rewards if all subgroups meet the set target. Wood (2004) calls it the “diversity penalty” (p. 46) since the more diverse the school is, the more likely to be designated as “failing.”

Testing

Snape, professor of Potions at Hogwarts, begins his first class by reminding students that at the end of June they will be taking the O.W.L. exam, and he expects everyone to pass. He tells them that only the best will continue studying with him, implying that only the “smart” will be awarded. Both Professor Flitwick and Professor McGonagall spend their first fifteen minutes lecturing about the importance of the O.W.L. exams. And just as Ron had mentioned earlier, Professor Flitwick reminds them that the results of the exams will influence the jobs for which they can apply, the advice they receive, and their future careers. Thus, it appears that the O.W.L. tests will regulate and control the course of the entire school year. How the material for these tests is to be covered is regarded differently by Professor McGonagall and the substitute, Professor Grubbly-Plank. McGonagall has years of experience, and students love her way of teaching as it engages students in discovering the answers while working collaboratively. She demonstrates passion as she builds the connections between the function of the exercise, and the emotion of learning. In many ways, McGonagall democratically empowers her students by providing opportunities to identify problems that interest them, and then leads students to seek the connection to larger issues. However, the new rules imposed by Umbridge—what is to be taught, and how—hinder the professional judgment of McGonagall; and she is eventually punished for not following orders.

On the other hand, Grubbly-Plank, the substitute teacher, seems interested in following the rules, given her response: “Oh, I will take them through the creatures that

most often come up in O.W.L.” (Rowling, 2003, p. 325). Even though it is unclear if her response is by choice or because she needs a job, she will comply and do as told.

Unfortunately, by responding to the demands imposed by Umbridge, the substitute is not allowing children to develop and learn within a democratic learning environment which, in the long run, results in their not being prepared to allow others to do so (Breault, 2003). Such a hierarchical educational system where power and correct answers are rewarded, is the approach used in schools today. We have confused “teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, [and] a diploma with competence” (Illich, 1971, p. 1). Unfortunately, this meritocratic ideology is used in the larger society by children who believe that having the most “right” answers deserves the greatest voice.

This approach punishes not only children, but also teachers. In our quest for certainty we have eliminated the freedom factor. The more we pursue certainty, the more suspicious we will be of teachers and educators who are responsive to their students. We are well on the road to eliminating the educational methods that have produced the best teachers, who in turn challenge the thinkers in the classrooms (Graves, 2002).

Opponents of standardized testing worry that the individual competence of a student is judged solely by the results of a test. Teachers across the country complain that the joy of teaching has been drained away, and that teaching simply means following scripted programs, “training” students on how to take tests, or having children read nonsense books in order to gain “fluency” without worrying about comprehension (Smith, 2006).

One consequence that is impacting children of minorities is the increasing practice of grade retention based on test results. These practices translate into reducing

the odds of the child graduating. Furthermore, once the child is held back twice, the chances of him or her never graduating are increased 90%. Meier (2002) points out that even before this test craze took over our nation, almost half of the Black youth in America were at least one year above the expected age when they reached 8th grade. A study conducted by Walt Haney on the education reform and statewide testing in Texas (cited in Sleeter, 2005) reveals that since about 1982 the rate at which Black and Latino students repeated 9th grade increased steadily to so great an extent that, in the late 1990s, 30% of them were retained. The rate of retention for minority students is almost twice that of White students (Kelly, 1999). “We continue to confuse test scores with quality schools, even though there is no evidence that high scores on these tests predict anything about a child’s success in life after school” (Wood, 2004, p. xii). A testing policy implemented in Chicago requiring students to pass tests at the 3rd, 6th and 8th grade led to the retention of more than 20,000 students. This proved detrimental not only because students didn’t achieve much better in the Iowa Test of Basic Skills reading scores, but it also increased the dropout rate in 8th grade (cited in Darling-Hammond, 2004).

It is evident that critics of the graduation test point out that it is not clear what will happen to students who do not pass it. The use of exit exams for graduation tends to reduce the graduation rate and increases the dropout rate for students of color, English learners, and students from communities of poverty.

Codes of Power

Administrators at Hogwarts School of Magic have power issues, similar to those of some administrators in education today who wish to maintain control over all aspects of

education in their domain.

All student organizations, Societies, Teams, Groups, and Clubs are henceforth disbanded. An Organization, Society, Team, Group, or club is hereby defined as a regular meeting of three or more students. (Rowling, 2003, p. 351)

The response of the Hogwarts administration under Professor Umbridge to ban any student activity, thus negating the opportunity to share knowledge, parallels the message given to culturally and linguistically diverse students by schools. These students are often asked to strip their culture and language at the school door (Peralta-Nash, 2003), because there is a strong belief that it would impede or interfere with learning the dominant language and culture. Harry and his friends do what many students do. They rebel against the testing protocols, and the intentionality of the teaching methods, even while they tell teachers what they want to hear, pick up on the official words they are supposed to use, and perhaps unwillingly participate in the preparation for testing. However, differently from the opportunities of children who attend urban, overcrowded schools, Harry and his peers are able to say: “I don’t like what you are doing to me” (Kozol, 2005, p. 126) and create their own ways of learning about what interests them (Defense Against the Dark Arts). In order to do so, though, they are forced to meet and learn in secret. These students are able to beat the oppressive situation in which their pursuit of self-affirmation, as responsible people, is hindered by Professor Umbridge (Freire, 1970).

Unfortunately, this is not the approach taken by most students who feel beaten up by the system in subtle ways. Instead of students making their own choices, the system makes a choice by tracking them into courses that differentiate the kind and amount of

content they will receive, or by labeling them as special need students. Eventually, these students learn to believe that the only way to rebel against the system of memorization and testing is by dropping out, thus fulfilling the hidden goal of the system of “squeezing” out (Bahruth, 1987) students who will bring down the test scores or the performance of the school.

Teachers can also be squeezed out of the educational system in various ways. At Hogwarts, Umbridge makes class visits with her clipboard, floating around the classrooms and interjecting her comments, preceded by an annoying “Hem, hem” at regular intervals. Both teachers and students are put on the defensive by this oppressive behavior, designed to intimidate the professors who do not meet her approval. Similarly, at some universities in the United States, so-called liberal professors are also being put on the defensive. On January 19, 2006, National Public Radio reported that the conservative alumni group, Bruin Alumni Association, headed by Andrew Jones was offering \$100 to students at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA) who were interested in monitoring professors branded as left-wing radicals. Students were asked to collect data by audio taping lectures and taking detailed notes to present as evidence of professors “indoctrinating” or brainwashing students. Faculty at UCLA were alarmed over what some were calling a campus witch-hunt. A professor in the Department of Women’s Studies told her students that she will be “watching her language” and anyone who wanted to audiotape needed to obtain her approval. This approach to silencing educators indicates that the ideas discussed represent a potential for change, for questioning, thus becoming potential sites of resistance pressing against the current trend of conformity.

The same oppression is revealed in *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (Rowling, 2003) when Ms. Umbridge bans all club meetings, realizing that such meetings are working against her efforts, and those of the institution, of training everyone to obey, to become well-behaved servants of the empire. Why is Umbridge so determined to suspend all social events? Is it because she fears that the knowledge held by Harry, if shared, would empower the students who are questioning school practices and the curriculum? Or is it because the knowledge that Harry has could arm the rest of the students to rebel against what is taking place?

In *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 2003), the oppression of students by not allowing them to question and experience what they want to know pushes them to go underground, creating their own learning experiences. In the real world of public education, students do not enjoy the same luxury as Harry and his friends. They do not live at the school, and may not have the resources to take learning into their own hands. The unfortunate result is often that oppression pushes them out of schools altogether. If we wish to see all students succeed, it is time to do a better job of meeting the needs of a diversity of students.

References

- Apple, M. (1993). The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense? *Teachers College Record*, 95(2), 222-241.
- Bahruth, R. (1987). Dialogue journals and the acquisition of spelling in a bilingual classroom, In *Dialogue*, ed. J. Peyton and J. Staton. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics. IV(1): 4.
- Bahruth, R. (2007). Schooling. In D. Gabbard (Ed.), *Knowledge and power in the global economy: The effects of school reform in a neoliberal/neoconservative age* (2nd edition, Chapter 28). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (3rd edition). Tonawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Banks, J.A. (1994). *Multiethnic education: Theory and practice* (3rd edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Breault, R.A. (2003). Dewey, Freire, and a pedagogy for the oppressor. *Multicultural Education*, 10 (3), 2-6.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). What happens to a dream deferred? The continuing quest for equal educational opportunity. In James A. Banks & C. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research of multicultural education* (3rd edition, pp. 607-630). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Delpit, L. (1995). *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom*. New York: New Press.
- Eckstrom, R. & Villegas, A.M. (1991). Ability grouping in middle grade mathematics: Process and consequences. *Research in Middle Level Education*, 15(1), 1-20.
- Frank, S. (2006). *Teaching without nonsense* (4th ed). NY: Teachers College Press.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. NY: Continuum.
- Giroux, H.A. (1997). *Pedagogy and the politics of hope: Theory, culture, and schooling*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Graves, D. H. (2002). *The freedom factor. Testing is not teaching. What should count in education*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Gregory, A.E., Rogien, L., Snow-Geron, J.L., Cahill-Rawley, M.A., & Yates, D. (2005). A factious analogous analysis of No Child Left Behind through the lens of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. *The Researcher*, 19(1), 42-52.

- Haney, W. (2000). The myth of the Texas miracle in education. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(4). Retrieved January 6, 2006 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n41/>
- Harris, I. M., Morrison, M. L., & Reagan, T. (2003). *Peace Education*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Hitler, A. (1943). *Mein Kampf*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Illich, I. (1971). *Deschooling society*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Katz, S. & Kohl, H. (2002). Banishing bilingualism. *The Nation*, 275, 6-7.
- Kelly, K. (1999). Retention vs. social promotion: Schools search for alternatives. *Harvard Education Letter*, January/February 1999. Retrieved February 14, 2006, from <http://www.edletter.org/past/issues/1999-jf/retention.shtml>.
- Kozol, J. (1991). *Savage inequalities*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Kozol, J. (2005). *The Shame of the nation. The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. New York: Crown Publishers.
- Krashen, S.D. (1983). The Din in the Head, Input, and the Language Acquisition Device. *Foreign Language Annals*, 16 (1), 41-44.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). *The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Meier, D. (2002). *In schools we trust*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2000). *Digest of educational statistics, 1999*. Washington, DC: Department of Education.
- Noguera, P. (2003). *City schools and the American Dream. Reclaiming the promise of public education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Ogbu, J.U. (1992). Understanding cultural diversity and learning. *Educational Researcher*, 21(8), 5-14.
- Peralta-Nash, C. (2003). The impact of home visits in students' perception of teaching. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Fall 2003,111-125.
- President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic American Education. (1996). *Our nation on the fault line: Hispanic American education*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Rowling, J. K. (2003). *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. New York: Scholastic.
- Rosenbaum, M. D. & Londen, J. W. (2000). ACLU Legal Brief: Williams v. State of California. Retrieved February 6, 2006 from

<http://www.aclunc.org/students/williams-brief.htm>.

- Rumberger, R.W. & Gándara, P. (2004). Seeking equity in the education of California's English learners. *Teachers College Record*, 106, 2032-2056.
- Sleeter, C. E. (2005). *Un-standardizing curriculum. Multicultural teaching in the standards-based classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sleeter, C.E., & Grant, C.A. (1999). *Making choices for a multicultural education. Five approaches to race, class, and gender*. 3rd Edition. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tatum, B.D. (1994). Teaching white students about racism: The search for white allies and the restoration of hope. *Teachers College Record*, 95(4), 462-476.
- Tozer, S. (2000). Class. In D. Gabbard (Ed.), *Knowledge and power in the global economy: Politics and the rhetoric of school reform* (pp.149-159). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Wallerstein, N. (1993). The teaching approach of Paulo Freire. In J.W. Oller, Jr. (Ed.), *Methods that work: Ideas for literacy and language teachers* (pp. 190-204). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Whang, P. & Nash Peralta, C. (2005) Reclaiming compassion: Getting to the heart and soul of teacher education. *Journal of Peace Education*, 2, 1.
- Wood, G. (2004a). Introduction. In Deborah Meier and George Wood (Eds.). *How the No Child Left Behind Act is damaging our children and our schools. Many children left behind* (p. xii). Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Wood, G. (2004b). A view from the field: NCLB's effects on classrooms and schools. In Deborah Meier and George Wood (Eds.). *How the No Child Left Behind Act is damaging our children and our schools. Many children left behind* (p. 46). Boston, MA: Beacon.