VI

Cultivating Imagination: Literature and the Arts

> We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy. . . . But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed.
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> —Rabindranath Tagore, "My School," 1916

> It will be observed that I am looking at the highly sophisticated adult's enjoyment of living or of beauty or of abstract human contrivance, and at the same time at the creative gesture of a baby who reaches out for the mother's mouth and feels her teeth, and at the same time looks into her eyes, seeing her creatively. For me, playing leads on naturally to cultural experience and indeed forms its foundation.
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> —Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, 1971

Citizens cannot relate well to the complex world around them by factual knowledge and logic alone. The third ability of the citizen, closely related to the first two, is what we can call the narrative imagination.[1] This means the ability to think what it might be

like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. The cultivation of sympathy has been a key part of the best modern ideas of democratic education, in both Western and non-Western nations. Much of this cultivation must take place in the family, but schools, and even colleges and universities, also play an important role. If they are to play it well, they must give a central role in the curriculum to the humanities and the arts, cultivating a participatory type of education that activates and refines the capacity to see the world through another person's eyes.

Children, I have said, are born with a rudimentary capacity for sympathy and concern. Their earliest experiences, however, are typically dominated by a powerful narcissism, as anxiety about nourishment and comfort are still unlinked to any secure grasp of the reality of others. Learning to see another human being not as a thing but as a full person is not an automatic event but an achievement that requires overcoming many obstacles, the first of which is the sheer inability to distinguish between self and other. Fairly early in the typical experience of a human infant, this distinction gradually becomes evident, as babies sort out by coordination of tactile and visual sensations the fact that some of the things they see are parts of their own bodies and others are not. But a child may grasp that its parents are not parts of itself, without at all grasping that they have an inner world of thought and feeling, and without granting that this inner world makes demands on the child's own conduct. It is easy for narcissism to take charge at this point, casting others as mere instruments of the child's own wishes and feelings.

The capacity for genuine concern for others has several preconditions. One, as Rousseau emphasized, is a degree of practical competence: a child who knows how to do things for herself does not need to make others her slaves, and growing physical maturity usually frees children from total narcissistic dependence on others. A second precondition, which I have emphasized in talking about disgust and shame, is a recognition that total control is neither possible nor good, that the world is a place in which we all have weaknesses and need to find ways to support one another. This recognition involves the ability to see the world as a place in which one is not alone—a place in which other people have their own lives and needs, and entitlements to pursue those needs. But my second precondition constitutes a complex achievement. How would one ever come to see the world this way, from having seen it as a place where other shapes move around ministering to one's own demands?

Part of the answer to this question is no doubt given in our innate equipment. The natural interplay of smiles between baby and parent shows a readiness to recognize humanity in another, and babies quickly take delight in those recognitions. Another part of the answer, however, is given by play, which supplies a crucial third precondition of concern: the ability to imagine what the experience of another might be like.

One of the most influential and attractive accounts of imaginative play is that of Donald Winnicott (1896–1971), the British pediatrician and psychoanalyst. Winnicott began practicing psychoanalysis after many years of treating a wide range of children in his pediatric practice, which he continued throughout his life. His views are thus informed by a wider range of clinical experiences

than are those of most psychoanalytic thinkers, a fact that he often emphasized, saying that he was not interested in curing symptoms, but in dealing with whole people, living and loving. Whatever their origin, his views about play in children's development have had a large and widespread cultural influence that does not depend on any prior sympathy with psychoanalytic ideas. (For example, it seems likely, as Winnicott himself believed, that Linus's security blanket in Charles Schultz's *Peanuts* cartoons is a representation of Winnicott's idea of the "transitional object.")

As a doctor who observed many healthy children, Winnicott had confidence in the unfolding of the developmental process, which would produce ethical concern—and the basis for a healthy democracy—as an outgrowth of early struggles, if things went well enough. He felt that development usually goes well, and that parents usually do a good job. Parents are preoccupied with their infants early on, and attend to their needs well, enabling the child's self to develop gradually and eventually express itself. (Winnicott typically used the word "mother," but he always emphasized that "mother" was a functional category, and that the role could be played by parents of either or both sexes. He also emphasized the maternal nature of his own role as analyst.)

At first the infant cannot grasp the parent as a definite object, and thus cannot have full-fledged emotions. Its world is symbiotic and basically narcissistic. Gradually, however, infants develop the capacity to be alone—aided by their "transitional objects," the name Winnicott gave to the blankets and stuffed animals that enable children to comfort themselves when the parent is absent. Eventually the child usually develops the ability to "play alone in the presence of its mother," a key sign of growing confidence in the developing self. At this point, the child begins to be able to

relate to the parent as a whole person rather than as an extension of its own needs.

Play, Winnicott believed, is crucial to this entire phase of development. Having been raised in a repressive ultra-religious household in which imaginative play was strongly discouraged, and having experienced serious relational difficulties in adult life as a result, he came to believe that play was a key to healthy personality growth.[2] Play is a type of activity that takes place in the space between people—what Winnicott calls a "potential space." Here people (children first, adults later) experiment with the idea of otherness in ways that are less threatening than the direct encounter with another may often be.[3] They thus get invaluable practice in empathy and reciprocity. Play begins in magical fantasies in which the child controls what happens—as with the self-comforting games that a young child may play with its "transitional object." But as confidence and trust develop in interpersonal play with the parents or with other children, control is relaxed and the child is able to experiment with vulnerability and surprise in ways that could be distressing outside the play setting, but are delightful in play. Think, for example, of the tireless delight with which small children play at the disappearance and reappearance of a parent, or a cherished object.

As play develops, the child develops a capacity for wonder. Simple nursery rhymes already urge children to put themselves in the place of a small animal, another child, even an inanimate object. "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are," is a paradigm of wonder, since it involves looking at a shape and endowing that shape with an inner world. That is what children ultimately must be able to do with other people. Nursery rhymes and stories are thus a crucial preparation for concern in life.[4] The

presence of the other, which can be very threatening, becomes, in play, a delightful source of curiosity, and this curiosity contributes toward the development of healthy attitudes in friendship, love, and, later, political life.

Winnicott understood that the "potential space" between people does not close up just because they become adults. Life is full of occasions for wonder and play, and he emphasized that sexual relations, and intimacy generally, are areas in which the capacity for play is crucial. People can close up, forgetting the inner world of others, or they can retain and further develop the capacity to endow the forms of others, in imagination, with inner life. Everyone who knew Winnicott was struck by his unusual capacity to connect with others through play and empathy. With patients, particularly child patients, he had a tireless ability to enter the world of the child's games and cherished objects, their stuffed animals, their fantasies about a sibling's birth. But play, for him, did not cease where the "adult world" began. His adult patients, too, praised his capacity for taking the position of the other. Sixty-year-old analyst Harry Guntrip described this gift in a journal of his analysis with Winnicott: "I could let my tension go and develop and relax because you were present in my inner world." Play was also a feature of Winnicott's non-therapeutic relationships. He and his wife were famous for their elaborate jokes and pranks; his papers contain silly drawings and poems they wrote to each other during boring meetings.[5]

Winnicott often emphasized that play has an important role in shaping democratic citizenship. Democratic equality brings vulnerability. As one of his patients perceptively remarked, "The alarming thing about equality is that we are then both children and the question is, where is father? We know where we are if one

of us is the father."[6] Play teaches people to be capable of living with others without control; it connects the experiences of vulnerability and surprise to curiosity and wonder, rather than to crippling anxiety.

How do adults sustain and develop their capacity for play after they have left behind the world of children's games? Winnicott argued that a key role is played by the arts. He held that a primary function of art in all human cultures is to preserve and enhance the cultivation of the "play space," and he saw the role of the arts in human life as, above all, that of nourishing and extending the capacity for empathy. In the sophisticated response to a complex work of art, he saw a continuation of the baby's delight in games and role-playing.

The earlier progressive educators, whose views we described in chapter 4, though unacquainted with Winnicott's writings, understood from their own reflection and experience his basic insight that play is crucial to the development of a healthy personality. They found fault with traditional schools for not comprehending the educational value of play, and they insisted that play be incorporated into the structure of education, both early and late. Froebel focused on the need of very young children to explore their environment through manipulating objects and using their imaginations to endow simple shapes (the sphere, the cube) with stories and personalities. Pestalozzi's fictional heroine Gertrude saw that passive rote learning deadened the personality, whereas practical activities, carried on in a playful spirit, enriched the personality.

Such educators realized early on that the most important contribution of the arts to life after school was that of strengthening the personality's emotional and imaginative resources, giving

children abilities to understand both self and others that they would otherwise lack. We do not automatically see another human being as spacious and deep, having thoughts, spiritual longings, and emotions. It is all too easy to see another person as just a body—which we might then think we can use for our ends, bad or good. It is an achievement to see a soul in that body, and this achievement is supported by poetry and the arts, which ask us to wonder about the inner world of that shape we see—and, too, to wonder about ourselves and our own depths.

Technical and factual education can easily lack this cultivation. Philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), as a precocious child, received a superb education in languages, history, and the sciences, but this education did not cultivate his emotional or imaginative resources. As a young adult, he suffered a crippling depression. He credited his eventual recovery to the influence of Wordsworth's poetry, which educated his emotions and made it possible for him to look for emotion in others. In later life, Mill developed an account of what he called the "religion of humanity" based on the cultivation of sympathy he had found through his experience of poetry.

At around the same time, in America, Bronson Alcott, whose Socratic pedagogy in the Temple School we studied in chapter 4, gave the same idea of poetic education a curricular shape. Drawing on Wordsworth, and using his poems often in the classroom, he held that poetry cultivates a child's inner space, nourishing both imaginative and emotional capacities. In Louisa Alcott's *Little Men*, the imaginative games played at Plumtree School are just as important as the intellectual lessons, and are interwoven with them. Both lessons and games, in turn, are enlivened with a spirit of loving reciprocity, as the school, run like a large family, remark-

ably anticipates Winnicott's idea that sophisticated artistic play is a continuation of the play between parents and child.

The most elaborate development of the arts as a linchpin of early education, however, awaited the twentieth century and the theoretically sophisticated school experiments of Tagore in India and Dewey in the United States. Dewey wrote a good deal about the arts as key ingredients in a democratic society, and it is clear even today that the cultivation of imagination through music and theater plays a key role in the Laboratory School. Dewey insisted that what is of importance for children is not "fine art," meaning some contemplative exercise in which children learn to "appreciate" works of art as things cut off from the real world. Nor should children be taught to believe that imagination is pertinent only in the domain of the unreal or imaginary. Instead, they need to see an imaginative dimension in all their interactions, and to see works of art as just one domain in which imagination is cultivated. "[T]he difference between play and what is regarded as serious employment should be not a difference between the presence and absence of imagination, but a difference in the materials with which imagination is occupied." In a successful school, children will come to see that imagination is required to deal with anything that lies "beyond the scope of direct physical response."[7] And this would include pretty much everything that matters: a conversation with a friend, a study of economic transactions, a scientific experiment.

Let me focus here, however, on Tagore's use of the arts, since his school was the school of an artist, and one that gave music, theater, poetry, painting, and dance all a central role from the very start of a child's enrollment. In chapter 4 we studied Tagore's commitment to Socratic questioning. But Socratic inquiry can

appear cold and unemotional, and the relentless pursuit of logical argument can risk stunting other parts of the personality, a danger that Tagore foresaw and determined to avoid. For him, the primary role played by the arts was the cultivation of sympathy, and he noted that this role for education—perhaps one of its most important roles—had been "systematically ignored" and "severely repressed" by standard models of education. The arts, in his view, promote both inner self-cultivation and responsiveness to others. The two typically develop in tandem, since one can hardly cherish in another what one has not explored in oneself.

As we have mentioned, Tagore used role-playing throughout the school day, as intellectual positions were explored by asking children to take up unfamiliar postures of thought. This role-playing, we can now add, was no mere logical game. It was a way of cultivating sympathy hand in hand with the cultivation of the logical faculties. He also used role-playing to explore the difficult area of religious difference, as students were urged to celebrate the rituals and ceremonies of religions not their own, understanding the unfamiliar through imaginative participation. Above all, though, Tagore used elaborate theatrical productions, mingling drama, music, and dance, to get children to explore different roles with the full participation of their bodies, taking up unfamiliar stances and gestures. Dance was a key part of the school for both boys and girls, since Tagore understood that exploration of the unfamiliar requires the willingness to put aside bodily stiffness and shame in order to inhabit a role.

Women were his particular concern, since he saw that women were typically brought up to be ashamed of their bodies and unable to move freely, particularly in the presence of men. A lifelong advocate of women's freedom and equality, he saw that simply tell-

ing girls to move more freely would be unlikely to overcome years of repression, but giving them precisely choreographed moves to perform, leaping from here to there, would be a more successful incentive to freedom. (Tagore's sister-in-law invented the blouse that is ubiquitously worn, today, with the sari, since he asked her to devise something that would allow women to move freely without fearing that their sari would expose their bodies in an inappropriate way.) At the same time, men too explored challenging roles in dance, under the aegis of Tagore, a great dancer as well as a famous choreographer, and known for his sinuous and androgynous movements. Explicit themes of gender equality were common in the dramas, as in *Land of Cards*, described in chapter 4, in which women take the lead in rejecting ossified traditions.

Amita Sen, the mother of Nobel Prize–winning Amartya Sen, was a pupil in the school from her earliest childhood days, since her father, a well-known expert on the history of the Hindu religion, went there to teach shortly after the school's founding. A small child playing in the garden near Tagore's window, she inspired his well-known poem "Chota mai," in which he describes how a little girl disturbed his work. Later, as a young bride, she inspired another well-known Tagore poem, about a young woman "stepping into the waters of life, unafraid." In between, she was a pupil in the school, and she proved to be one of its most talented dancers, so she took on leading roles in those dance dramas. Later, she wrote two books about the school; one, *Joy in All Work*, has been translated into English, and it describes Tagore's activity as dancer and choreographer.[8]

Amita Sen understood that the purpose of Tagore's dance dramas was not just the production of some fine artworks, but also the cultivation of emotion and imagination in his pupils. Her

detailed account of the role of theater and dance in the school shows how all the "regular" education in Santiniketan, the education hat enabled these students to perform well in standard examinations, was infused with passion, creativity, and delight because of the way in which education was combined with dance and song.

> His dance was a dance of emotion. The playful clouds in the sky, the shivering of the wind in the leaves, light glistening on the grass, moonlight flooding the earth, the blossoming and fading of flowers, the murmur of dry leaves—the pulsing of joy in a man's heart, or the pangs of sorrow, are all expressed in this expressive dance's movements and expressions.[9]

We should bear in mind that we hear the voice of an older woman recalling her childhood experience. How extraordinary that the emotions and the poetry of the child live on so vigorously in the woman, and what a tribute this is to the capacity of this sort of education for a kind of enlivening of the personality that continues on in one's life when all learned facts are forgotten. Of course, as her book makes clear, this could not be done by simply leaving children on their own to play around; instruction in the arts requires discipline and ambition, if it is to stretch and extend the capacities for both empathy and expression.

Instruction in literature and the arts can cultivate sympathy in many ways, through engagement with many different works of literature, music, fine art, and dance. Tagore was ahead of the West in his focus on music and dance, which we in the United States cultivate only intermittently. But thought needs to be given to what the student's particular blind spots are likely to be, and texts should be chosen in consequence. For all societies at all times have their particular blind spots, groups within their culture and also groups abroad that are especially likely to be dealt with igno-

rantly and obtusely. Works of art (whether literary or musical or theatrical) can be chosen to promote criticism of this obtuseness, and a more adequate vision of the unseen. Ralph Ellison, in a later essay about his great novel *Invisible Man*, wrote that a novel such as his could be "a raft of perception, hope, and entertainment" on which American culture could "negotiate the snags and whirlpools" that stand between us and our democratic ideal.[10] His novel, of course, takes the "inner eyes" of the white reader as its theme and its target. The hero is invisible to white society, but he tells us that this invisibility is an imaginative and educational failing on the part of white people, not a biological accident on his. Through the imagination, Ellison suggests, we are able to develop our ability to see the full humanness of the people with whom our encounters in daily life are especially likely to be superficial at best, at worst infected by demeaning stereotypes. And stereotypes usually abound when our world has constructed sharp separations between groups, and suspicions that make any encounter difficult.

In Ellison's America, the central challenge for the "inner eyes" was that of race, a stigmatized position almost impossible for the conventional white reader to inhabit. For Tagore, as we have seen, a particular cultural blind spot was the agency and intelligence of women, and he ingeniously devised ways to promote a fuller curiosity and respect between the sexes. Both writers claim that information about social stigma and inequality will not convey the full understanding a democratic citizen needs without a participatory experience of the stigmatized position, which theater and literature both enable. The reflections of Tagore and Ellison suggest that schools that omit the arts omit essential occasions for democratic understanding. An Indian acquaintance of mine expressed

frustration that as a child in Indian government schools he never got the chance to explore different social positions through theater, whereas his nieces and nephews in the United States learned about the civil rights movement in part by putting on a play about Rosa Parks in which the experience of sitting in the back of the bus conveyed information about stigma that could not have been fully conveyed without that participatory experience.

So we need to cultivate students' "inner eyes," and this means carefully crafted instruction in the arts and humanities—appropriate to the child's age and developmental level—that will bring students in contact with issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and cross-cultural experience and understanding. This artistic instruction can and should be linked to the citizen-of-the-world instruction, since works of art are frequently an invaluable way of beginning to understand the achievements and sufferings of a culture different from one's own.

In other words, the role of the arts in schools and colleges is twofold. They cultivate capacities for play and empathy in a general way, and they address particular cultural blind spots. The first role can be played by works remote from the student's own time and place, although not just any randomly selected work. The second requires a more pointed focus on areas of social unease. The two roles are in some ways continuous, since the general capacity, once developed, makes it far easier to address a stubborn blind spot.

Both, in order to be stably linked to democratic values, require a normative view about how human beings ought to relate to one another (as equals, as dignified, as having inner depth and worth), and both therefore require selectivity regarding the artworks used. The empathetic imagination can be capricious and uneven if not

linked to an idea of equal human dignity. It is all too easy to have refined sympathy for those close to us in geography, or class, or race, and to refuse it to people at a distance, or members of minority groups, treating them as mere things. Moreover, there are plenty of artworks that reinforce uneven sympathies. Children who are asked to cultivate their imaginations by reading racist literature, or pornographic objectification of women, would not be cultivating them in a way appropriate to democratic societies, and we cannot deny that antidemocratic movements have known how to use the arts, music, and rhetoric in ways that contribute further to demeaning and stigmatizing certain groups and people.[11] The imaginative component of democratic education requires careful selectivity. What we should notice, however, is that the way these defective forms of "literature" operate is by inhibiting imaginative access to the stigmatized position—by treating minorities, or women, as mere things with no experiences worth exploring. The imaginative activity of exploring another inner life, while not the whole of a healthy moral relationship to others, is at least one necessary ingredient of it. Moreover, it contains within itself an antidote to the self-protective fear that is so often connected to egocentric projects of control. When people take up the play attitude toward others, they are less likely—at least for the time being—to see them as looming threats to their safety whom they must keep in line.

The cultivation of imagination that I have described is closely linked to the Socratic capacity for criticism of dead or inadequate traditions, and provides essential support for this critical activity. One can hardly treat another person's intellectual position respectfully unless one at least tries to see what outlook on life and what

life experiences generated it. But what we have said about egoistic anxiety prepares us to see there is something further that the arts contribute to Socratic criticism. As Tagore often emphasized, the arts, by generating pleasure in connection with acts of subversion and cultural reflection, produce an enduring and even attractive dialogue with the prejudices of the past, rather than one fraught with fear and defensiveness. This is what Ellison meant by calling *Invisible Man* "a raft of perception, hope, and entertainment." Entertainment is crucial to the ability of the arts to offer perception and hope. It is not just the experience of the performer, then, that is so important for democracy, it is the way in which performance offers a venue for exploring difficult issues without crippling anxiety.

Similarly, Tagore's notorious dance performance, in which Amita Sen danced the role of the Green Fairy, was a milestone for women because it was artistically distinguished and extremely enjoyable. So was the even more daring drama in which Amita danced the role of the queen, and the text accompanying her movements was, "Come to my breast." The text ultimately had to be changed to "Come to my heart"—but, Amita told me, "Everyone knew what was really being said." That episode could have set back the cause of women, but it advanced it, because the erotic agency of the queen, beautifully danced by Amita, was delightful. In the end, the audience could not sustain habits of shock and anger, against the gentle assault of beautiful music and movement.

We have touched on images of gender, and perhaps there is nothing more essential to the health of a democracy than having healthy images of what a real man is, and how a real man relates both to women and to other men. This issue was recognized as central from the very beginning of modern democratic culture,

in both Western and non-Western nations. In Europe, the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, writing in 1792, insisted that good citizens needed to learn that manliness does not require warlike aggressiveness against other nations. Alluding to what he understood to be the custom of Native Americans, he said that the men of Europe, similarly, should put on women's clothes when they deliberate about war and peace, and should in general cultivate a "reduced respect" for warlike exploits and a horror of a "false statecraft" that whips people up into eagerness for conquest. Instead, both men and women alike should cultivate "dispositions of peace"—in the service of which, he suggested, assuming a female role for a time might be very useful.[12]

Similar ideas were explored in India by both Tagore and Gandhi. Tagore's school, through its dance idiom and its emphasis on the arts, cultivated a male personality that was receptive, playful, and uninterested in dominating others. Tagore explicitly linked this goal to a repudiation of the sort of aggressive colonizing nationalism that he associated with European cultural values and norms of manliness. Gandhi, later, firmly linked his nonviolent approach to social change to a repudiation of the goal of domination in sexual relations. He deliberately cultivated a persona that was androgynous and maternal—not to show his followers that they must altogether abandon traditional gender distinctions, but to show them that one can be a real man without being aggressive, that a wide range of gender styles are all compatible with true manliness, so long as the accent is firmly on respect for human dignity in others and compassion for their needs.

In short, children need to learn that sympathetic receptivity is not unmanly, and that manliness does not mean not weeping, not

sharing the grief of the hungry or the battered. This learning cannot be promoted by a confrontational approach that says, "Drop your old images of manliness." It can only be promoted by a culture that is receptive in both curricular content and pedagogical style, in which, it is not too bold to say, the capacities for love and compassion infuse the entirety of the educational endeavor.

As with critical thinking, so too with the arts. We discover that they are essential for the goal of economic growth and the maintenance of a healthy business culture. Leading business educators have long understood that a developed capacity to imagine is a keystone of a healthy business culture.[13] Innovation requires minds that are flexible, open, and creative; literature and the arts cultivate these capacities. When they are lacking, a business culture quickly loses steam. Again and again, liberal arts graduates are hired in preference to students who have had a narrower preprofessional education, precisely because they are believed to have the flexibility and the creativity to succeed in a dynamic business environment. If our only concern were national economic growth, then we should still protect humanistic liberal arts education. Today, however, as we'll see in the next chapter, the arts are under assault in schools all over the world.

At this point, a case study will help us see how crucial the arts can be in supplying ingredients for democratic citizenship in an American culture divided by both ethnicity and class. Consider the case of the Chicago Children's Choir. Chicago, like most large American cities, contains huge economic inequalities, which translate into large differences in basic housing, employment opportunities, and educational quality. Children in African American and Latino neighborhoods, in particular, are usually not getting

anywhere near as good an education as children in suburban white neighborhoods, or in urban private schools. Such children may already have disadvantages in their homes—only one parent, or even no parents living with them, and no "role models" of career success, discipline, aspiration, or committed political engagement. Schools are not racially segregated by law, of course, but they are largely segregated de facto, so students are likely to have few friends from classes and races different from their own.

To make things worse, the arts, which can bring children together in nonhierarchical ways, have been severely cut back in the public schools, as part of cost-cutting measures. Into this void has stepped the Chicago Children's Choir, an organization currently supported by private philanthropy, which by now includes almost three thousand children, approximately 80 percent of whom are below the poverty line, in programs of choral singing with rigorous standards of excellence. The program has three tiers. First, there are programs in the schools; many of these take the place of programs run by the city that had been cut away. The in-school programs serve some twenty-five hundred children in more than sixty different choirs in fifty elementary schools, focusing on grades three through eight. The in-school program, as the official description of the program states, "validates the idea that music is as important as math and science to the development of the mind and the spirit."

The second tier consists of the neighborhood choirs, eight choirs in different regions of Chicago. These are after-school programs requiring auditions and some level of serious commitment, serving children from age eight to age sixteen. These children perform many times each year and tour to different parts of the country;

they learn a wide variety of music from different countries of the world and develop their musical skills.

Finally, the most advanced level, the Concert Choir, probably the top youth ensemble in the United States, has recorded numerous CDs, toured internationally, and performed with symphony orchestras and opera companies. This group performs works ranging from Bach motets to African American spirituals; the repertoire deliberately includes music from many different world cultures.

This choir system was inaugurated in 1956 by Christopher Moore, a Unitarian minister, who believed that he could change young people's lives by bringing them together through music—across differences of race, religion, and economic class. The system has grown from an initial twenty-four singers to its current size through the dedicated support of many Chicago-area donors; the city gives it free office space but makes no further financial contribution.

Such facts are easy to narrate. What is difficult to describe is the emotional impact of hearing these young people, who do not sing like the church choirs of my youth, motionless with music held in front of them. They memorize everything they sing, and sing everything expressively, at times using gesture and even dance movements to put a song across. Their faces express tremendous joy in the act of singing, and this emotion is a large part of what the program cultivates, in both performers and spectators.

I have observed rehearsals of the neighborhood Hyde Park choir, as well as public performances by the Concert Choir, and even in the highly inclusive activity of the former, one finds immense pride, musical aspiration, and personal commitment. Singers from the Concert Choir typically become mentors to the younger chil-

dren, giving them role models of discipline and aspiration, and also developing their own ethos of social responsibility.

When I recently interviewed Mollie Stone, conductor of the Hyde Park neighborhood choir and associate conductor of the Concert Choir, I asked her what, in her view, the choir contributes to life in Chicago. She gave me a moving and eloquent set of answers. First, she said, the choir gives children the opportunity for an intense experience side by side with children from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. The experience of singing with someone, she said, includes great vulnerability; you have to blend your breath and your body with someone else's, and you have to make the sounds from within your own body, as would not be the case even with an orchestra. So, in addition, the musical experience teaches children love of their own bodies, at an age when they are likely to hate their bodies and feel very uncomfortable; they develop a sense of ability, discipline, and responsibility.

Then, since the choirs sing music from many different cultures, they learn about other cultures, and they learn that these cultures are available to them; they transcend barriers that expectation and local culture have thrown in their way, showing that they can be world citizens. By learning to sing the music of another time or place, they also find ways of showing that they respect someone else, that they are willing to spend time learning about them and taking them seriously.

In all these ways, they learn about their role in the local community and the world, and Stone emphasized that this can lead to many forms of curiosity, as choir alumni go on to study political science, history, language, visual art.

Three stories illustrate what Stone is talking about. One day, she came into the rehearsal room of the Concert Choir and heard

a group of African American kids singing a complex passage of a Bach motet they had been rehearsing. "So," she said, "you're getting in some extra rehearsal today?" "No," they said. "We're just chilling. We're just jamming." The fact that these African American kids from ghetto schools felt that a natural way to "chill," to relax together, was to sing Bach, showed that they did not feel confined to "black culture"; they could claim any culture as their own and take membership in it. It was theirs as much as was the world of the African American spiritual.

Stone then remembered her own experience, when she was a young singer in a predominantly African American choir and the choir performed a Hebrew folksong. As the only Jew in the choir, she had a sudden sense of inclusion; she felt that the other kids respected her culture, took it seriously, wanted to study it and participate in it.

Finally, on a recent tour, the Hyde Park neighborhood choir went to Nashville, Tennessee, the home of country music, a place whose culture and values are somewhat alien to most northern, urban Americans—whom residents of Nashville would be likely to regard with suspicion in turn. Hearing a country music group performing outside the Grand Ole Opry, the kids recognized a country song that they had sung in choir, and they surrounded the band, joining in. A celebratory expression of inclusion and mutual respect was the result.

What the choir shows us about the role of the arts in promoting democratic inclusion and respect is not news. It is part of a long American tradition that includes the progressive educators I have mentioned (from Alcott through Dewey). Horace Mann argued that vocal music, in particular, tends to unite people of diverse backgrounds, and to reduce conflict.[14]

I have emphasized, here, the contribution the choir makes to its participants. Needless to say, this contribution is multiplied many times, through the effect on parents and families, on schools, and on audiences who hear the choir both in the United States and abroad.

Unfortunately, such enterprises are not favored by the U.S. educational establishment, local or national. The choir is therefore constantly in debt, and is able to continue to exist only through tireless volunteer donations of both time and money. Chicago is fortunate to have a number of privately funded initiatives through which major arts organizations create programs for the schools—in addition to a great deal of cost-free public art that is typically supported by public-private partnerships.

Since I have mentioned money, let's face up to this issue. The arts, it is said, are just too costly. We cannot afford them in a time of economic hardship. The arts, however, need not be expensive to promote. If people will only make room for them, they can be fostered relatively inexpensively—because children love to dance and sing, and to tell and read stories. If we think of art in the way that Dewey criticized—as highbrow "Fine Art," requiring expensive equipment and objects for its "appreciation"—we can easily be led to the conclusion that in a cost-conscious time there is not enough money for it. I have heard such arguments from educators in Chicago, and I do not buy them. I have been in rural areas of India, visiting literacy projects for women and girls that have no equipment at all—not even chairs and desks, no paper, no pens, perhaps only a slate passed from hand to hand—and there, the arts are flourishing, as young girls who are just beginning to read express themselves much more fully by putting on plays about their experiences, or singing songs of their struggles, or drawing

pictures of their goals and fears. Dedicated activist teachers know that the arts are the way to get kids to come eagerly to school, to want to learn to read and write, to want to think critically about their situation in life. So often, as a visitor, I have been asked if I will teach them a song of the American women's movement—and when I volunteer "We Shall Overcome," they already know it, in every regional language. Music and dance, drawing and theater, these are powerful avenues of joy and expression for all, and it does not take much money to foster them. Indeed they are the backbone of the curriculum in rural literacy programs because they supply both children and adults with motivation to come to school, positive ways of relating to one another, and joy in the educational endeavor.

Why can't we use the arts this way in the United States? Recently I visited a program for troubled young teens at Morton Alternative, a public high school in Cicero, a city just outside of Chicago. Teens who have been kicked out of another public high school must go to Morton Alternative—unless they drop out entirely (since some are over sixteen). The school has a total of only about forty students, so individual attention is feasible. Thanks to a remarkably astute and compassionate principal, who focused on each child's history as if that child were his own son or daughter, and thanks to an arrangement with a volunteer organization of psychotherapists and social workers, all children receive a lot of individual mentoring and regular group therapy in groups of four or five. I was deeply impressed by the changes that were taking place just because some adults are listening. The school was as close to the family environment of Alcott's Plumtree School as it was possible to be when children had to return home to

families that were often dysfunctional and even violent. What do you do with the arts, I asked. The principal and the head therapist seemed surprised. They had not thought of this as something helpful.

But why on earth not? These adolescents, most of them Mexican American, come from a culture with enormously rich music and dance traditions. Through these, and through theater, they could have found powerful ways to express their conflicts and aspirations. Group therapy is already a type of theater, but it does not involve the sort of disciplined achievement that putting on a play would. There was no economic reason why they were not doing this. They just had not thought about it.

Four weeks later, the head therapist sent me a poem that one of the girls in the therapy session I had observed had written as a result of his new determination to incorporate the arts into his efforts at Morton Alternative. A halting, yet extremely powerful account of her growing love for her baby, written by a teen mother who was having enormous struggles in that role, the poem did seem to me to mark a new stage in her progress toward pride and self-mastery, and the therapist supported that conclusion. It makes so much sense, and it did not cost an extra dime.

The education I recommend requires that teachers do things differently. Implementing it would require major changes in teacher training, at least in most districts in the United States and most nations of the world. It would also require most school principals (though not the principal at Morton Alternative) to change the ethos of their schools. In this sense, this education is costly. But the costs are, I believe, transition costs; there is nothing intrinsically more expensive about doing things this way. Once the

new ways are in place, they will perpetuate themselves. I would even argue that a type of education that gets both students and teachers more passionately involved in thinking and imagining reduces costs by reducing the anomie and time wasting that typically accompany a lack of personal investment.