

JOY as a Metaphor of Convergence
By D. D. Liston (2001)
Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc.

A Book Review

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“What more interesting topic is there than the one who are we? And what might we be/become?” (p. 218).

These questions are addressed in Delores D. Liston’s book, *JOY As a Metaphor of Convergence* (2001). Her concern is a timely one, given our current crumbling social and educational foundations, coupled with the trend for many educators to think primarily in terms of test results and future earning power of students.

The author describes a world view that centers on joy, a world view that ignites her own awareness, vitality, possibilities, and expanding boundaries, and which guides her pathway as an educator. She claims that is natural to be joyful, healthy, and creative, and that joy in educational context restores the quest of learning. Joy is viewed as making us kinder and more compassionate, as well as inspiring us with the ardent wish to draw others into the same joy.

The author’s use of language highlights the pertinence, consequences, and seriousness in her call: “The way we experience our world is tied to the way we imagine it” (p. 186). And “the imaginings and creations generated through *joy* will lead to joyful lives for all human beings” (p. 22). Thus, she presents joy as a metaphor of convergence “to

change our collective and individual vision of what might be” (p. 218). Her choice of “metaphor” is spelled out in this way:

The metaphors we use to form the context of our interpretations have a profound influence on our experiences and behavior. For example, the factory metaphor is the predominant metaphor in use in education at the present moment... Therefore, I claim the only way to bring change is to modify or reconstruct the metaphors that shape the interpretations of our experience (p. 7).

The factory metaphor fails to acknowledge, for example, that a) learners construct their own knowledge and know more than tests might reveal, b) teachers day-to-day encounters with them take place in the political, cultural, moral, and spiritual landscapes of their learning, and c) ownership for school reform reaches beyond the school into society itself. Thus, for moving beyond the Cartesian dualism, paradox, and uncaring encounters with self and others, the author calls for educators to adapt a metaphor of joy as convergence to change. It invites teachers to take courage in encountering students in the process of making meaning of the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical dimensions of life while also exploring possibilities within the acknowledged landscapes in which their encounters actually take place. Joy as a metaphor of convergence also connects educational content with the lives of teachers and students as they co-create (through experience) both their curricula and their teaching-learning environments—imbuing the individual with unique responsibilities during the process. Although the author intentionally does not prescribe the “how to” possibilities, she suggests assembling around common interests, self-supporting groups, communities of caring and compassionate learners, and innovative learning centers. In such assembling, diversity and dialoguing for creating meaningful and exciting lives joyfully contribute toward the emergence of a better humanity. The author cautions, however, that the challenge is not easy, given such extraneous measures as accountability, and “for the moment, Joy remains outside the context of most school experience” (p. 216). Thus, she advises beginning with what is most feasible, while focusing on change in our thinking-being.

This book brings together numerous and diverse writings for demonstrating convergence, which can be seen in the three parts of the book: “*Joy: On the Way to Understanding*”; “*Joy: Metaphors from Computer Science, Neuroscience, and Quantum Physics*”; and “*Joy: In Context*”. In her call for educational change, the author adds her voice to those of important curriculum thinkers and practitioners such as John Dewey (1960) and Maria Montessori (1949) to Maxine Greene (1996), Paulo Friere (1995), and David Purpel (1988). This book will have special appeal for educators who are willing to focus on the deep questions regarding what it means to be human and how we might live and learn together.

References

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