

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

January 30, 2009

Dear Mr. President:

I am writing on behalf of the future of our country. This future is heavily dependant on our educational institutions, which are in desperate need of a major overhaul if we as a country and you as the leader of our country seek to preserve the pillars of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to keep the American Dream alive. True, the world we live in today is very different and our country is very different than it was 232 years ago. Change is an inevitable and beautiful part of all life on earth. We hold the power, as agents of change, to continue to uphold the essence of American values as we interpret their meaning in relation to today.

The first essential truth that I would like to bring to your attention is that citizenship and education are inextricably linked (Torres 1998). What does it mean to be a citizen? Citizens are active participants in all aspects of our social, economic, and political systems. They are valued and their voices are heard as essential to defining these systems. The success of our economy, foreign policy, and identity as a country rest on our ability to nurture thoughtful, creative, empathetic, and empowered citizens. This may seem obvious, but it is actually much more complicated than one may think. Our country is a rich tapestry of interwoven cultures, beliefs and values, and we all identify as Americans. This beautiful multiculturalism is a central part of the holistic identity of our country. Our educational systems are theoretically meant to cultivate active, intelligent, contributing citizens from early childhood through higher education, job-skills training, and literacy. The hegemonic systems that archaically define our history of power however, have silenced many if not the majority of voices and are perpetuating the past into a future that can no longer support it. What results is an educational system that is crumbling at its foundation.

Education has never been separated from the concept of Power (Torres 1998). Education seeks to empower and disempower to perpetuate the “status quo” in a country where the “status quo” is becoming irrelevant. Our educational institutions attempt to support cognitive socialization and construction of cultural identities through moral and ethical dimensions (Torres 1998). Those who are empowered are those who can conform to the dominant hegemony and those in power are consciously and unconsciously silencing voices that do not or cannot conform.

Our postmodern society is marked by processes of fragmentation which has occurred in part as a result of a lack of direction and an absence of political inclusion. This is masked as political radicalism that challenges viewpoints without addressing the fragmented politics of special interest groups (Torres 1998). This, in turn, “undermines the constitution of communities of learning and political action, hindering the ability of progressive groups to challenge differential access to influence, power, and wealth resources of elites and dominant classes in most areas including education.” Therefore, “a radical democracy demands the incorporation of a political economy alongside the proposals for critical multiculturalism.” (1998:236)

Our government with your leadership needs to set an example and a precedent going forward that acknowledges and supports the fact that because education and citizenship are inextricably linked, the institution of education and our educational systems in our country are inherently political. This does not mean that the government must heavily regulate or attempt to control, restrict, or define education in America, but rather support the needs of each region and the army of tireless, passionate educators who dedicate their lives to serving the future of our country by effecting change in their community. They are sensitive practitioners of critical pedagogy and waging war against the systems with which they are forced to comply, but have first-hand ethnographic evidence to support the systems' ineffectiveness. By completely changing how the federal government supports education in our country we must keep in mind that "abandoning the quest for certainty does not require abandoning the search for knowledge." (1998:237)

Knowledge is inextricable from meaning and value, and as such, education is not a moral enterprise rather a set of procedures to guide ethical thinking and action in the form of compassion, empathy, justice and individual responsibility (Torres 1998). Educators' needs must be heard and supported if they are to be entrusted with the enormous task of cultivating citizens of the future. This requires a deep examination of how educators are indoctrinated, what methods and systems are effective, and how they can be continually supported and educated so that they can best meet the ever-changing needs of students to become effective 21st century citizens. "Civic virtues point to a sense of solidarity that unites individuals around common goals. These goals are, at the very least, how to survive and live together in our contemporary, diverse society." (1998:247) National identity then becomes a process of life-long learning rather than a static definition when educators are constantly reevaluating their teaching and re-learning alongside their students.

For frameworks of solidarity and common ground across cultures, ethnicities, classes and gender differences, the goals of cultural diversity are central. We need to develop flexible frameworks for solidarity in schools that take seriously the need for democratic reform. Cultural diversity is a major by-product of the growing process of economic, cultural, and political globalization with an intensity which has no parallel in the history of humankind. Globalization produces all sorts of implications for multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic configuration of local communities in the United States and elsewhere. In terms of the social covenant, not surprisingly, diversity is a key challenge for any institution ... in facing growing and social educational demands. (1998:247)

I am not writing with answers to the many challenges that plague and threaten the future of our educational systems, rather asserting a wake-up call. We the people of the United States put forth by the nature of our constitution and founding fathers have the power to elect a leader. We have chosen you to lead us into a brighter future and we are entrusting you with this enormous responsibility, however we are all a part of this unique and powerful country and we all must do our part to truly effect change. This means though, that everyone must be given agency and empowered to do so. You are in a position to support this process. There is a large body of research existing and may scholars, activists, practitioners, and citizens who carry the knowledge to support this change and provide it with the momentum to unfold in a direction that is the most supportive for our global society and international economy. You cannot make this change on your own, but you do have the power to empower those who can.

I fully realize that there are many urgent national issues that plague our future and although I do not believe that by changing our educational institutions we will find the magic bullet to all our problems, I do believe that many if not all of the issues our country faces are deeply intertwined. By addressing education, other issues will begin to unwind and we will have more empowered and educated people to help solve them. We are entrusting you with the leadership position we the people have elected you to. Please empower us to effect change.

Sincerely,



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Torres, C. A. (1998: 223-263) *Democracy, Education and Multiculturalism Dilemmas of Citizenship in a Global World*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc.