



Why we choose to be stupid : the responsibility of andragogy and a search for answers in paradox, Canon, multiculturalism and the philosophy of postmodern critical education theory
by Gregory Norton Garcia

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Adult, Community, and Higher Education
Montana State University
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Abstract:

In this study ideas and concepts that can be used to describe the phenomenon of stupidity and explore the possibility that we choose to be stupid, were developed from the social and political philosophy of Western Civilization. The research methods applied were based on the phenomenological school of qualitative inquiry using a narrative style.

Findings suggest we choose to be stupid and stupidity can be generally described in the following ways: Conceptually, it is a paradox or antilogy that can be behaviorally chronicled in a number of ways.

Culturally, stupidity is a philosophically implied concept that has consistently been instrumental in shaping our ideas of intelligence.

Andragogically, stupidity is voluntary behavior that may be conscious and/or unconscious, but is manifestly anti-moral if not immoral and so it is counterproductive.

Individually and personally, stupidity is a seemingly anatomic behavioral response to serendipitous personal and cultural predicaments.

Stupidity can result from confused thinking. It can result from a misinterpretation of reality and it can also be generated by the human incapacity to live a moral existence. While stupidity may not be curable, by developing more precise awareness, we can compensate for stupidity by more fully realizing consequences.

It is suggested the ideas generated in this study are rich in possibility as subjects for more research and theory development of stupidity. Recommendations were made in support of developing more precise definitions of stupidity. The development of schemata and categories of stupidity can be also be generated by further research.

Educationally, the idea of this study supports and encourages changes in learning and teaching process, procedure and theory that represent the universe non-holistically. As an application in andragogy, it is recommended this study be applied as the basis for the generation of methodology that encourages awareness development as an educational process.

**WHY WE CHOOSE TO BE STUPID:
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ANDRAGOGY
AND A
SEARCH FOR ANSWERS IN
PARADOX, CANON, MULTICULTURALISM
AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF
POSTMODERN CRITICAL EDUCATION THEORY**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY-BOZEMAN
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APPROVAL

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This thesis has been read by each member of the thesis committee and has been found to be satisfactory regarding content, English usage, format, citations, bibliographic style, and consistency, and is ready for submission to the College of Graduate Studies.

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This thesis is dedicated to Marcia Ann Hawbaker Garcia,
my best friend, my partner, my heroine, and my bride.

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ABSTRACT

In this study ideas and concepts that can be used to describe the phenomenon of stupidity and explore the possibility that we choose to be stupid, were developed from the social and political philosophy of Western Civilization. The research methods applied were based on the phenomenological school of qualitative inquiry using a narrative style.

Findings suggest we choose to be stupid and stupidity can be generally described in the following ways:

Conceptually, it is a paradox or antilogy that can be behaviorally chronicled in a number of ways.

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Andragogically, stupidity is voluntary behavior that may be conscious and/or unconscious, but is manifestly anti-moral if not immoral and so it is counterproductive.

Individually and personally, stupidity is a seemingly anatomic behavioral response to serendipitous personal and cultural predicaments.

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It is suggested the ideas generated in this study are rich in possibility as subjects for more research and theory development of stupidity. Recommendations were made in support of developing more precise definitions of stupidity. The development of schemata and categories of stupidity can be also be generated by further research.

Educationally, the idea of this study supports and encourages changes in learning and teaching process, procedure and theory that represent the universe non-holistically. As an application in andragogy, it is recommended this study be applied as the basis for the generation of methodology that encourages awareness development as an educational process.

CHAPTER 1

WHY WE CHOOSE TO BE STUPID

The Reality of Stupidity

“The resistance of the popular occurs on a terrain altogether different from that of culture in the strict sense of the word...and it takes the most unexpected forms, to the point of remaining more or less invisible to the cultivated eye.”
(Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words*, 1990).

Definitions of Stupidity

Traditionally, lexicographic concepts synonymous with what is stupid include that which is dull, dense, crass, and dumb (Webster's Dictionary of Synonyms, 1942). Generally, these “agree in meaning conspicuously lacking in intelligence or power to absorb ideas or impressions, or exhibiting such a lack” (p. 798).

However, upon closer examination, even when viewed in the more traditional as opposed to contemporary context, a variety of possibilities arise that go beyond the limitation imposed by positivist assumptions of an explicit circumscription of congenitally defined limitations.

In these instances, in order to give definition to concepts that are prescribed by idiomatic expression, dictionary editors refer to the authority of literary canon represented by culturally artistic legitimacy recognized, arguably, through relative historical consensus.

Thus, by way of example, "although it seldom is applied to the insane or the imbecile, it often also suggests senselessness, as, 'stupid with age'" (Shakespeare); "stupid with Drink; he could not stand stupid people, especially those who are made stupid by education" (Wilde) (p.798). "What force, what fury Drove us into saying the stupid; intolerant, denunciatory things we said...?" (L.P. Smith). (p. 798).

Defined as conditions as well as concepts or things, traditional editors of dictionaries provided gradients: "A person or thing that is stupid reveals a deadness or deadening of the mental powers; a person or thing that is dull manifest a lack of mental quickness, or heavy, labored mental processes" (p. 798). However, these are apparently not irreversible conditions since, "thus constitutionally dull pupils progress slowly until they are awakened by good teaching" (p.798).

More current representations of stupidity concepts are found in the 1982 edition of the American Heritage Dictionary (p.1209) where stupid is defined as:

Slow to apprehend; dumb. Showing a lack of intelligence. Dazed or stunned. Pointless; worthless; a stupid job. A stupid person. Synonyms; stupid, dumb, slow, dull, obtuse, dense and crass. These adjectives mean lacking in mental acuity. Slow and the informal dumb can imply chronic sluggishness of perception or understanding; stupid and dull occasionally suggest a merely temporary state. Stupid and dumb can also refer to individual actions that are extremely foolish. Obtuse implies insensitivity or unreceptiveness to instruction.

An Intellectual Concept of Stupidity

Does stupidity have value as an intellectual concept? Probably not if stupidity is defined as a diminished physiological or cognitive capacity that involuntarily results in an individual possessing comparatively less capability to act wisely, to think intelligently, to conceptualize intellectually or to acquire and refine effective skills.

In this instance, stupidity exists as a relative ineptness in a measurable, content oriented, positivist, or known, view of the natural world in which a normative standard can be arrived at and from which relative gradients of non-normalcy can be fixed.

However, there are other definitions of stupidity that can be found in formal linguistic lexicography, in both written and spoken idiomatic expression, as well as in experience. These suggest the potential for a representation or a formalized schematic of stupidity that is not only sufficient to allow for the development of theory, but also perhaps interesting enough to urge that development, especially as such theory development relates to learning and education in the evolving multicultural postmodern world.

The Idea of Voluntary Stupidity

In the architecture of this scheme there exists voluntary and selective processes through which we choose, albeit sometimes consciously and sometimes perhaps unconsciously, to act unwisely, to think unintelligently, to conceptualize falsely, and to impede our capacity to consider, to accept, to learn, or to develop new skills, knowledge, or awareness.

Significantly, in all of these representative definitions of stupidity, the antonym of stupidity is intelligence. Thus, the examination of intelligence also lends itself to the

exploration of stupidity by identifying those things inferred or implied as the opposite of, or otherwise opposed to, intelligence.

Multiple Ideas of Stupidity

In these broader, more dynamic, versatile, and utilitarian definitions of stupidity, we can begin to imagine a view of nature and its realities quite different from that suggested by more limited and superficial structural concepts of stupidity that are framed in the idea of an involuntary diminished capacity that is congenitally constituted and permanently fixed.

Now, we are faced with multiple ideas of both stupidity and intelligence that in one sense can be considered absolute, fully defined, and evident, opposite representations. But in another sense, they are understood differently and less definitively. In these representations stupidity, and intelligence too, are seen to convey ideas that are more vague and interdependent, if not related. This perspective infuses these definitions with natural human dynamism as represented by irony and paradox. At the same time, the more explicitly formal definitions infuse ironical circumstances and paradoxical representations with meanings sufficient to allow functional or practical understanding.

For example, common expressions such as *an educated idiot*, or the description of someone as *so smart she (or he) has no common sense*, or even the ironic expression *that was smart*, used to show how stupid an act was, make it difficult to maintain stupidity and intelligence as independent from one another. In these instances, it appears neither are absolutely opposed to each other, nor absolutely complementary to one another, but probably very subjectively related in a number of ways that are clearly constituted in cultural thought and behavior.

A Fundamental Philosophy of Stupidity

Using this subjective relativity with the view of stupidity and intelligence as relative and relational values, we can join with Soren Kierkegaard, in supposing "that subjectivity is the truth, and that subjectivity is an existing subjectivity" (Soloman, 1981, p. 246). Living in Kierkegaard's subjectivity is to live in and with the possibility if not probability that we live in a state of greater doubt, belief, faith and wonder, than in certainty and with true knowledge. This is a fundamental point because it positions stupidity as misinterpretation in the attempt to find the certain and true.

This is, of course, central to the canon of the possible human condition that philosophers have wondered about through the centuries, and begging the question of this uncertain reality led Descartes to conclude:

I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks... What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing who doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels. (Soloman, 1981, p. 105)

I interpret this as a capacity to be confused.

Epistemological Implications

It is here in this relationship then, between thinking and reality, where stupidity plays an important epistemological role. For example, is stupidity simply the confusion that results when Descartes' thinking becomes too clouded and he works through rational thought to reconcile doubt, understanding, affirmation, denial, willfulness, refusal, imagination and feeling?

Or, is stupidity the misinterpretation of reality that is unavoidable in Kierkegaard's subjectivity? Or, is stupidity something else entirely, such as the predominance of one of Descartes' components of thinking over those others and occasioned because of some other predominance in the nature of the human being? Does it, for example, result from the interplay of Maslow's needs? Or, does it result from the conflict inherent in the multiplicity of Freud's egos? Or, is it some or all of these?

In a sense the history of the tradition of intellectual thought in Western civilization represents major patterns in searches of discovery in the confusion that is to be a thing that thinks living in an existing subjectivity. Three fundamental configurations in these patterns include the search for meaning through morality (philosophy), survival through knowing and improving (experience), and the expansion or refinement of capacities through learning (education). It is evident, then, there are significant epistemological issues that relate to the concept of stupidity as inaccuracy, impeded development, or the undermining of progressive refinement of these three processes.

The Philosophical Function of Stupidity

The historic imperative that prescribes each of these three categories of being that flow from thought, frame human consciousness, and shape human behavior are found in their eternal and all-encompassing properties: They are both inevitable and inescapable.

That is to say, all human beings search for meaning through morality. Whether they themselves or others might consider them moral, immoral, or amoral from a philosophical, psychological or theological perspective is irrelevant; to be human is to search for meaning through morality whether one understands this or is aware of it or not.

Universality is the cornerstone of theory, and the immoral and amoral can only exist, therefore, as omnipresent notions that spring from the moral. The fountainhead that the moral represents here can be summarized in the reflection of experience as a lesson of functionally effective human behavior. In written form this was given us by the Greeks at the Genesis of Western thought and abridged by Solomon in the maxim, we ought to desire everything that is really good for us. (This is the definition of the moral and morality that I will use throughout this study).

To ignore or deny the importance of this human characteristic, that is, as a being in search of meaning through morality, is philosophically stupid.

Likewise, all human beings are involved in living as praxis, as in the going about and making an experience of life as well as in experiencing the living of life. This involves a constant knowing process, as well as a process of knowing. Whether one sees and understands this as formalized behavior is, again, irrelevant. The point is, it is unavoidable. However, again, I think there is clear validity to the theoretical postulate that to deny or to ignore this characteristic of what it is to be human is stupid, and therefore dangerous.

Finally, all human beings are involved in expanding and refining their capacities, that is, in educating themselves. This too is inevitable and unavoidable as it is in large measure what may be otherwise known as part of, if not the heart of, the evolutionary process. However, in the modern formalized processes of education, there are immeasurable capacities to manipulate people for immoral reasons. Denying, ignoring, or participating in this immorality is, I submit, stupid.

These then are the distinctions that delineate the human being; its existential definition as an organism, and the universe it is part of, which is to say the universe that it thinks it is part of, which is after all, the only universe it can know. Stupidity, it appears, may be a significant part of what it is to be human.

Excerpts From The First Interview

Twila, is a mother of two teen aged girls. She's 50 years old and lives in Wyoming where she currently teaches Title I - Reading, to children in grades 1-5. She has been teaching elementary school for 30 years throughout the west and mid-west.

Watching the growth of little children and watching them learn and then develop reading skills is a great joy to Twila. She enjoys watching how shocked parents are when they realize how much their children have learned in a year.

One of her most rewarding experiences was teaching migrant children. What impressed her most of all about these children was their extraordinary capacity to be thoroughly bilingual and "how easily they moved from one language to the other. They were also very eager to learn, and very protective about their brothers and sisters. They were very strong in being family."

Twila doesn't like the word stupidity and has a real problem working with it. It's a word that she doesn't tolerate in her classroom among children because they use it as an insult and it is both hurtful and harmful. It is a form of ignorance -- a way of putting people down-- and it's also behavior and ways of behaving. Bigotry as behavior is stupid and people have choices, and they make choices in these things.

In school, discipline problems are choices and when kids do things that are not good for them they are being stupid behaviorally. But, they are not stupid mentally, just not choosing to be intelligent. Their actions are reactions to things. They are inappropriate responses.

In some cases the causes are:

Rebellion against authority, home life problems, being angry inside; all of these cause responses that are stupid because they don't know how to channel their emotions into intelligent behavior. Impulse is not stopping to think... stupid. Still, stupid is a bad word.

Twila doesn't like the word.

They did, perhaps, once have a teacher who was so smart she was stupid because she was almost divorced from reality. She was extremely intelligent mentally but socially stupid or inept. Stupidity has a bad tradition as a word. Bright people can be stupid and stupid people can be intelligent. Common sense is most important. Intelligence or stupidity should be looked at as behavior rather than knowing things or having certain skills, though that's one kind of intelligence. But knowing what to do with knowledge and skills is even smarter.

Twila agrees she has, like all of us, done some pretty stupid things. Reminds her of:

Gump--Stupid is as stupid does. What is it? Lack of memory? Age? Presence? Confusion? Seems like we always say its the result of being at a stage of life, teen-age years, then young adulthood, then getting old, when actually we do stupid things all the time all our lives.

Twila was just recently stopped for speeding which really surprised her since she never speeds. She admits she didn't exercise good judgment and that was stupid. A form of stupidity.

Kids need to know 'how' not 'what'. Intelligence has everything to do with interpretation. Stupidity is not being oriented properly in the world. It is not always conscious. But we still choose. Sometimes we let ourselves fool ourselves.

Research into stupidity is good for education because we get set in our opinions about children and we need to see where they are at. By looking at levels of awareness and the awareness a child is centered in, we can deal with them better.

The Problem

“We can pool information about experiences, but never the experiences themselves.”
(Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, 1954)

Statement of the Problem

An adequately estimable intellectual concept of stupidity, wherein stupidity is a choice, does not appear to exist in the canon that is the philosophy of education.

Discussion of the Problem

The idea of stupidity that has its genesis in confused thinking, misinterpretation of reality, or an insufficiently moral human nature, reveals two more underlying axiom that provide an opportunity to reasonably conclude there is sufficient potential for an adequately estimable intellectual concept of stupidity, which does not appear to exist.

The first of these is the “basic assumption of all metaphysics, that the universe is intelligible” (Solomon, 1981, p. 91). If this is so then we can choose from two major ideal examples through which we can approach the construction of reality. We can, for instance, revel in Plato’s esoteric or ground ourselves in Aristotle’s common sense experience. Either way we are involved in contention with the alternative and the reality of that comparison is also the substance of the debate between intelligence and stupidity.

On the other hand, if the universe is unintelligent, or more precisely, non-intelligent, then we must look to paradigms such as Einstein’s declaration that it is only through faith that the problematic of the universe can be transcended. This view significantly enhances the

metaphysical debate through the expansions of thought enabled by materialism and immaterialism, processed by the distinctions of ontological examination. Again however, both intelligence and stupidity must still be viewed as functionally fundamental contentious standards.

The second underlying axiom that can be viewed as an integral component in the validity of stupidity as an intellectual concept are the parameters by which we determine fact, truth, or being. In other words, ontology itself. This involves the interplay between the two components of argument, logic, (or objective reasoning), and rhetoric, (or the invocation or petition to personal sentiment, empathy or bias).

It may be axiomatic to point out that the epistemological tradition that postulates truth can be arrived at through good argument is not necessarily true. Good argument is that in which logic and rhetoric function together. There is in good argument an absence of fallaciousness and a presence of valid deductive or inductive reasoning. All of these, however, do not inevitably express anything more than good argument.

Understandably, the implication of a world in which the human cannot know may be more than humankind, as an intellectually defined organism, can accept and the refusal to even imagine such a possibility has remained with us at least since Parmenides; "It must be that what can be spoken and thought is: for it is possible for it to be, and it is not possible for what is nothing to be" (Solomon, 1981, p.37).

Nevertheless, Parmenides only proved good argument may be nothing more than good argument, leaving human beings, with their supposed great nuclear capacity for thinking, no better off (and perhaps ultimately far less better off) than any other specie. After all, in this

possibility the human being is simply a product of either an unintelligent evolution, or perhaps an accidental one. In this sense, we can view ourselves as a malfunctioning specie gone awry that will eventually self-destruct through a dysfunctional counterproductive dependence on limited but immensely potent problematic survival capacities. These include imagination, language and the creation and usage of tools.

The Fundamental Assumption

The question now arises as to whether stupidity is also an inherent and irreconcilable wrong-headedness. That is, whether stupidity is the natural state of humankind. If so, then the enigma posed by the question about the validity of stupidity is far greater than the dilemma posed by Kant when he wrote, "It is the common fate of human reason to complete its speculative structures as speedily as may be, and only afterwards to inquire whether the foundations are reliable," (Solomon, 1981,p. 144) for now the idea of an unobtainable reliability arises. This scenario provides for the envelopment of all three of the potentials we have earlier described, which are stupidity as confused thinking, a misinterpretation of reality, and a critical limitation inherent in human nature itself.

If these are the realities of our existence, neither reason nor faith will suffice to ally intelligence with human existence since the thing that thinks, living in a subjective reality, can never reconcile what it perceives in its capacity to imagine with what it experiences in its immoral existence.

For the purposes of this inquiry, I will assume these are the fundamental realities of our existence. To summarize and restate the problem then, is to ask the following questions:

1. Is stupidity to be found in, and/or does it result from, confused thinking? This question arises from Descartes' declaration that he is a thing which thinks, and it therefore follows, to think is to be confused.

2. Is stupidity a misinterpretation of reality? This is the question that flows from Kierkegaard's conjecture that subjectivity is the truth.

3. Is stupidity an inevitable reality resulting from humankind's incapacity to live a moral existence? This is a slightly modified version of one of the most essential questions posed by the Greek philosophers.

4. If any of these questions can be answered affirmatively, are these conditions correctable, or, can they be compensated for by conscious choice sufficient to allow humankind the possibility of an intelligent existence? This question, and the answer to it, validate the importance of the problem.

Excerpts From The Second Interview

Terry, a mother of three living in South Texas, was born in Dallas, where she lived for 36 years. The middle child of three, and the only high school graduate among her siblings, Terry is a college graduate who holds a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting. She is 42 years old.

After high school, she married her high school beau and dropped out of college when she became pregnant. She subsequently divorced and later re-married. Her second husband was a truck driver, and Terry suffered physical and mental abuse in this relationship for 11

years. Single for six years with three children, she managed a hotel until she met her current husband.

Now Terry is married to a loving and caring man. Currently, she has one child still in school, (high school). Disabled because of a stress-related disease and attending counseling, Terry is currently working on developing a happier life and gaining better health through an improved living of life. Terry says:

One form of stupidity is when we don't realize that everyone is not the way we see them or think of them or want them to be. Whether these views, the way we think things are, or should be, are good or bad isn't the point. Stupidity is just not seeing things as they really are...but.. instead kind of operating off our conception of what they are. Or, what we want them to be.

"This can make many people unhappy, and disappointed too, not just the person who has the inflexible view but those he or she views, and others affected by that person. Everybody is what they are," Terry says, and we have to "take them as they come. We can't go around expecting the world to be the way we want it to be, trying to make it that way, and then getting frustrated when we find we can't change it."

People have choices not to act or think stupidly but they also choose to believe they don't have a choice. When people choose to see things black or white, no curve in the road, no room for error, well, then they lock themselves in. That's stupid.

Terry feels she was stupid to stay with her second husband and suffer his abuse. She felt at the time that the most important thing for her to do was to save the marriage. She was afraid of the stigma of divorcing for a second time, and she wanted her children to have a father. Once the verbal, mental, and physical abuse took away her self-respect and self-worth,

Terry says she realized she was a victim. Until that realization came to her, she felt she was what her husband told her she was: unattractive and stupid.

Another aspect of stupidity is overloading the mind, Terry says.

That's why we have to take notes. Some people have to have a daily planner. They aren't stupid...they are just overloading their mind...okay, maybe we are all stupid more than we're smart...

One thing good about stupidity, Greg, the way you are looking at it, is people can't use it as a weapon when we understand it's kinda like a condition, and all of us are in it maybe, or probably maybe, most of the time.

We're also stupid about many of the ways we live. We live in a past or future that "doesn't exist." Now is the only time that exists but "we're not very smart about living in it."

Purpose of the Study

"Intelligence is all about improvising, creating a wide repertoire of behaviors, 'good moves' for various situations....The good moves repertoire is an end point very different from snapshots of passive contemplation."
(William H. Calvin, *How Brains Think*, 1996)

The purpose of this study is to suggest the potential exists for a complex representation, or formal scheme, of stupidity that is sufficient to allow the development of an educational theory of stupidity. The representation suggested in this study appears to be a positive project in that stupidity emerges as a behavior, or an interpreting, of a pervasive human trait that has no relationship to the idea of an exclusive individual human property of obtuseness as an individual deficiency.

Research Questions

“Although the intellectual fear of mass culture can be traced back to the coming of industrialization, the die was cast by early sociologists of popular culture like the Frankfurt School. Their work was set in the context of the expanding capitalist leisure industry, with the emphasis on the stupefying effects which the consumption of ‘popular culture’ (the culture industry) had on people’s ability to transform the world.”
(Andy Lovatt, Jonathan Purkis, 1995)

Can stupidity be described in these interrelated contexts?

1. Conceptually, as a paradox or antilogy that can be behaviorally chronicled in a number of ways including something that is extant as well as nonexistent, and absolute as well as inadequate.

2. Culturally, as an (unacknowledged) concept in philosophy that has consistently been instrumental in shaping Western ideas of intelligence.

3. Educationally, especially andragogically, as voluntary behavior that may be conscious and/or unconscious, but is manifestly anti-moral if not immoral and therefore counterproductive.

4. Individually, as a seemingly anatomic behavioral response to serendipitous personal and cultural predicaments that will inevitably result in the necessity to successively engage in increasingly potent and apparent stupid behavior.

Assumptions

“Perhaps moments of exegesis, of definitions in context would be replaced by the exposure to moments of dialogue and their use in the ethnographer’s revision of familiar concepts that define the analytic limits of his or her work, and of anthropological discourse more generally. Such a move would open the realm of discussion of ethnographies to organic intellectuals (to use Gramsci’s term) and

readerships amongst one's own subjects." (Lovatt and Purkis, *Shouting in the Street*, 1995)

Assumptions upon which this study has been based include a virtual lack of educational theory of stupidity. Therefore, this study is intended to suggest, rather than prove, there is a sufficient reason to explore the development of an educational theory of stupidity, i.e., it exists, it is a complex phenomenon, and it is vitally important to learning theory, especially for adults (Andragogy).

Additionally, because the assumption has been made stupidity is voluntary, it has been assumed there is a responsibility, inherent in adulthood, to strive not to be stupid. Also, because it appears interpretations of stupidity vary according to culture, and are culturally arrived at, assumptions have been made in selecting the targets that are the focus of this study (i.e., paradox, canon, multiculturalism, and the philosophy of postmodern critical education theory). A discussion of these assumptions follows.

Paradox, Canon, and Multiculturalism

Using a qualitative approach, this study searches for representations of stupidity both in and through the use of canon and multicultural paradigms. This approach assumes the effecting of a relevance with contemporary educational thought.

In a way, the subjective nature of the object of this inquiry, stupidity, is in itself a compelling question in a number of cultural, sociological, psychological and emotional viewpoints. It has been suggested by one informant for example, that stupidity is a taboo, one that is especially evident in the desultory, accusatory and insulting use of the word, especially when applied in family, school, and peer relationships.

For the purposes of this study however, it is assumed there is an all encompassing, pervasive, or universal category of stupidity in a most general sense that may also include a multitude of specialized forms or categories of stupidity. My purpose here is to suggest the existence of the former rather than delineate the latter.

Postmodern Critical Education Theory

Indeed, because there are so many varied perspectives an inquiry into stupidity can encompass, it is important to distinguish this study will view a variety of elements of a whole as those elements relate to a single issue or point of reference. That issue is whether we chose to be stupid, especially when our behavior is involved with learning. Related issues do include the sociological, the psychological, and the emotional. But above all, this is a work of cultural critique from my view of the adult learning experience as an andragogy of common, chosen, or voluntary, behavior.

More specifically, I am interested in what intelligent behavior is in an evolving multicultural world. Related to this latter concern are the implications of chosen stupidity as a stupefying behavioral process from critical education perspectives and other views and ideas about stupidity that emanate from paradox, irony (humanness), and the change of paradigms, that are consistent with the historic imperative as canon.

Andragogical Responsibility

It is at this point where a greater definition of the inquiry into stupidity is being applied where it is also incumbent to refine and narrow the scope of the examination.

If we interpret and explore Kant's characterization of reason as a broad representation of education, and assume it is a valid reflection, then elementary and pre-school learning is a palpably critical juncture where a vital function is being performed.

Obviously, the reliability of the foundation in human reason that is constituted, constructed, and reproduced in early childhood development has a great deal to do with distinctions about concepts of self worth, capabilities, capacities, human effectiveness, stupidity, intelligence, and the quality of behavior in adulthood.

Unfortunately, children do not have the capacity to participate authoritatively in a dialogue about the validity of their perspectives of truth, reality concepts, the purposes of human existence and other existential issues, even if they may possess some very well defined but rudimentary perceptions. Thus, at the very point when cultural reproduction, including the initial conceptual outline of intelligence and stupidity is initially taking place, those who are the targets of that project have no voice.

This is probably very unfortunate because the precocity of originality that is so much of being in childhood offer interesting and compelling insights that we do not take seriously. It may also be very unfortunate because adult dialogue may be so representative of an acquired non-originality that it is difficult to achieve the potency of truly good thought at precisely that point when the most powerful impression of what truly good thought is, is being codified for people who have no voice by people who's voice has no originality.

While this dilemma is paradoxical, it also lends itself to the recognition of a mandate of responsibility on the part of those who are in adulthood. I term this responsibility of adulthood the responsibility of andragogy because it is in the sense of humankind as the

voluntarily learning specie that we are examining stupidity. Fyodor Dostoevsky, alluded to this mandate of adult responsibility this way:

In the first place... it is possible to love children, at close quarters, even if they are dirty, even if they have ugly faces, although to me a child's face is never really ugly. In the second place, I also will not speak of adults at the moment, because, besides being disgusting and undeserving of love, they have something to compensate them for their suffering: they have eaten their apple of knowledge, they know about good and evil and are like gods themselves. And they keep eating the apple. But little children haven't eaten. They're not yet guilty of anything. (Soloman, 1981, p. 251)

As I understand Dostoevsky, I cannot help but agree that it is indeed adults who shape the world. Also, they have a capacity to be conscious of not only their reactive role in the cause and effect concurrence of symptoms, but to recognize and deliberately act on their proactive potential to influence cause and effect with an awareness of their knowledge about good and evil.

The Assumption of Moral Bias

Because a cultural view of stupidity is so rooted in the anthropologic, this work will also refer to some of that which can be considered, at least in part, theology. I have made the assumption that it is not my intent to parochially pursue an ideal of religiosity. Nor, I assume, is it my intent to argue against religious discourse. However, I clearly recognize a major bias in my critique in that I assume the validity of ideas about what constitutes the intelligent, the educated, the wise, the efficient, the effective, and the functional, with what is moral. Moreover, I don't believe any of these can exist without a moral value. Finally, in defining moral, I point back to the Greek philosophers and those things that are really good for us.

Excerpts From The Third Interview

Born in 1979 in Wisconsin, Steven is a sophomore at a mid-sized University in Montana where he is majoring in Political Science and History. Steven is a student center advocate and is a member of honor societies.

“Stupidity is a way of categorizing other people. You rarely consider your own behavior stupid” (but he will grant to himself that he makes stupid actions or choices). Yet, for the most part, Steven feels stupidity is always applied to the realm of others.

“At the University, new students make remarks that seem stupid or are considered stupid by older students, but its really a matter of perspective whether they are stupid or not.” Steven says the most stupid thing he has done recently is “roll” the family pickup truck (twice) because he was driving too fast for conditions and that was “stupid on my part.” The consequences (he hasn’t “heard the end of it!”) are that he has lost his driving privileges, and he realizes he could have been killed, so he doesn’t think he will do that again. Steven says “stupidity is part of who we are and what we learn and we must have a balance, we must balance the smart side with the stupid side.”

Another way we use stupidity is to:

Justify our wars by viewing or propogandizing about other people. Yet, when we say stupid we recognize they are human. We also use it in politics, such as at school, when we apply it as a control mechanism.

And, political behavior is stupid at times such as when, in WWII, the allies knew what was going on, the holocaust, and did nothing about it, morality has something to do with it....

Also, politicians put spins on things and distort views, and that’s stupid. But, it’s, you know, it’s yin and yan.... We have to have the stupid side to have the smart side.

Procedural Outline

Bibliographic Research

Anthropologic issues will be explored by researching a bibliography of Western philosophy and critical education theory using a hermeneutical approach in order to find quintessential patterns of nominal definitions. In as much as possible, this approach will seek to borrow from those epistemological discovery methods used by Plato (Dialogues), St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others. For the most part, this research will focus on the traditional cultural defining of ideas related to intelligence in order to determine, by inference, the traditional cultural defining of stupidity, so it can be determined if conclusions may be drawn relating to choosing to be stupid and learning.

Interviews

Selected informants will be initially contacted by either Email or telephone and provided a background of the project, why they have been selected and asked to participate, and what will be expected of them, including:

1. A written or taped informal, anthropological, biography.¹
2. A request to read a description of the issue and discuss it.

¹A bibliography is necessary to document the personal experience of informants, and to orient informants to a holistic self perception consistent with their function as informants. The purpose of informants reading the issue is to provide them with a broad scope idea of the range of content in the subject of stupidity, and especially in terms of the premise and question: "We humans sometimes choose to be stupid. We humans sometimes choose to be stupid when we should be, or could be, learning (i.e., learning can be considered formal or also learning in everyday life in the developing multicultural world). If true, why?" Finally, the purpose of the interview is to elicit new, unanticipated viewpoints. Thus, interviews will be thematic, using methodologies outlined by Pentti Routio (Arteology, 1997).

3. Participation in a taped interview.

The Internet

Phenomenological issues will be researched by use of the Internet. Using a variety of search engines in addition to the Electric Library, contemporary publications, home pages, books, articles, and electronic forums identified by a search for the key words 'stupid' and 'stupidity' will be surveyed in order to identify stupidity as words, philosophical concepts, attributes of objects, attributes of perceptions, as a message, and as discovery. This aspect of the research is also intended to reveal patterns of meaning so it can be determined if conclusions may be drawn relating to choosing to be stupid and learning.

CHAPTER 2

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS IN PARADOX

Introduction

“...But the capability for handwriting probably got the longest free ride off the throwing lateralization, until it got put to work a mere 5000 years ago. Whereupon the left brain and right hand created a written language which allowed an accumulation of generation-jumping knowledge, and all that. Throwing strikes again. And beside explaining minor things, such as how humans got started and what made book-learning culture possible, the throwing theory even reveals the true origins of baseball, establishes it as the most elegant of all sports, the fast ball as the most fundamental of inventions....”

(William Calvin, *The Throwing Madonna, Essays On The Brain*, 1983)

Implication of Paradox, Stupidity, Intelligence

In Western cultural literature, and especially in the literature of philosophy (and educational philosophy), a proposition that reappears so often it takes on the dimension of being a universal theme is the idea that the exercise of man's intellect has much to do with the state of man's soul. That is, to the degree the intellect is being exercised, the wholeness of the soul is being constructed. Also, to the degree the soul is defined, the purposes of the intellect are refined.

It is always difficult to reduce universal mantra to minutiae because even the most common perceptions are individually understood and therefore reconstructed. Nevertheless, it is in this very problematic dilemma that the power of paradox lends itself to the search for understanding.

A classic example of the power of paradox can be found in Allan Bloom's manuscript, The Closing Of The American Mind (1987). Opining on the theme of the relation of the intellect to the soul, Bloom wrote, "Men may live more truly and fully in reading Plato and Shakespeare... because then they are participating in essential being and are forgetting their accidental lives" (p. 380). As a philosopher and educator, Bloom's view of the exercise of intellect effecting the state of the soul encompasses a description of the human community as well. "The real community of man... is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers, that is, in principle, of all men to the extent they desire to know" (p. 381).

In applying (perhaps unknowingly) the idea of the power of paradox,

Bloom (1987) wrote:

But in fact, this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of the good. Their common concern for the good linked them; their disagreement about it proved they needed one another to understand it. They were absolutely one soul as they looked at the problem. (p. 381)

Ontological Imperatives

There are two fundamental characteristics that shape the idea that a causal relationship exists between the intellect and the soul, as well as between the soul and the intellect. The first characteristic is an abstraction of education as a quest that is circumscribed by the quintessential and ubiquitous.

In other words, essential human nature prevails and endures correspondingly, even in very changed environments, at least to the extent that we still face the same problems even

if in different form. We also share a universal need to understand these problems, perhaps especially because it is our hope, (if not an article of human faith), they are not insoluble.²

The second characteristic is an inspiration of education as a permanent dialogue addressing the quintessential and insoluble through a quality of thought and behavior that ensures, assures, and furthers community. One of the results of this educational praxis is the initiation of an ontological forum to compare and define qualifications of thought that meet a logical test to a degree of quality that furthers community. In this case, logic considerations include both archetypes of theoretical perfection as well as more limited models framed in the experienced reality of human behavior.³

Ontological Tradition (Canon)

In Western civilization the on-going forum deliberating quality of thought has been consistently engaged since the age of the Greek philosophers with every succeeding generation contributing its perspective theses. Invariably, each and every critique has fashioned a premise of the ideal form of thought that is representative of what it means to be intelligent, that is, to be educated, intellectual, wise, or otherwise the antithesis of stupidity. Stupidity, however, is always implied, it is never explicitly or definitively conceptualized as

² In The Structure of Freedom, (1978) Christian Bay supports the idea that "All human activity is related to values, explicitly or implicitly. No man in his right mind would seriously occupy himself with a problem unless its clarification or solution were of some value to him."

³ Again, I refer to Bay who in turn references Myrdal, An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, pp 1027 ff, in clarifying goal values as a matter of personal faith: "Two particular canons at least seem to have a wide acceptance. One is the canon of logical consistency. Most of us do not wish to be self contradictory, not even in our system of goal values, in so far as this can be avoided. Secondly is the canon of insight. We generally want to be as aware as possible of practical implications of our important values, so that we can know how to promote them and avoid counteracting them."

a cultural scheme to the extent that intelligence (and sometimes wisdom) has been developed as a theoretical proposition.

In the remainder of this introduction, I will attempt to reveal the quality of canon as what I believe is a tradition of wisdom seeking in reaction to ideas that have arisen and have been seen as implications of stupidity.

Axiological Stupidity

In terms of theory development, classic philosophical arguments include descriptive postulates about the composition of the individual, thought, behavior, the environment, time and space paradigms, and what is supposed to be known as truth (i.e., historical avenues of thought up to that point in time). For the most part, attempts to bring the power of paradox to bear, as we have identified it thus far as the Greek method of opposed but friendly argument coming from a shared value for the good, are contained in an envelope framed by rational thought comprised of shared values reflecting contemporary societal norms qualified by conventionality. In other words, most views, philosophically speaking, become axiomatic.

Invariably, this bounded thinking box severely limits the potential capacity of paradox to enable opposed thinkers to participate in essential being, and to become absolutely one soul, so as to understand the problem, as Bloom remarked. This incapacity, (an axiological component of stupidity, if you will) is effected because of confusion between argument that is in opposition with argument that is paradoxical.

By this I mean to submit that the perspective of man--both her view and her place--are paradoxical and this may not have as much to do with opposed perspectives as much as it has to do with the perspectives of opposition.

If our very existence is paradox, we must search out the paradoxical in every inquiry in order to more truly search for the good, for it will always, in this view, be found as part of some or many other things related to one another in strangely opposed, but complementary, ways. If in recognizing this we are acting intelligently, to reject the exploration of paradox then, would be to act stupidly.

Fundamental Paradox of Consciousness

In William Calvin's home page Internet column, *Science Surf*, he quotes from Derek Bickerton's (1990) book, Language and Species:

The paradox of consciousness – that the more consciousness one has, the more layers of processing divide one from the world – is, like so much else in nature, a trade off. Progressive distancing from the external world is simply the price that is paid for knowing anything about the world at all. The deeper and broader [our] consciousness of the world becomes, the more complex the layers of processing necessary to obtain that consciousness.⁴

It is necessary to understand the idea of Bickerton's paradox of consciousness in order to understand the role of paradox both as stupefying agency as well as revealing medium. In other words, paradox can function both to enlighten and to disguise because it is, I think, what arises when we progressively distance from the external world, as Bickerton puts it, and it is therefore a product of the deeper and broader consciousness of the world.

Dealing with paradox then, becomes synonymous with the more complex layers of processing necessary to obtain the greater consciousness of the world. Conversely, in this

⁴ William H. Calvin teaches neurobiology at the University of Washington and has published extensively on the subject of evolution.

project, the failure to recognize paradox is a failure to reach for greater consciousness, and accordingly defines--to a greater or lesser extent--stupidity.

The Positivist Denial of Paradox

The incapacity to understand or recognize the unique human perspective and the concomitant paradox as well as the power of paradox inevitably result in argument postulated by closed mind, or positivist, views that do little to advance anything except opposed argument itself. When the argument centers on topics related to intelligence as a societal product, boundaries customarily include class and power constructs with points of convergence on political, economic, and social mantra. As an observation, normally the inflexibility of the argument can be found in the degree to which the title of the work is positivist in its communicative nature.

However, I feel I need to point out my critique of the positivist viewpoint is being selectively applied here: It should be evident I view the phenomenon of stupidity in one sense at least, as a potential product of certainty in an uncertain existence. As such, positivism, representing the decided certainty, can be a major producer of stupidity.

Of course, the same may be said of uncertainty and the denial of a known reality, and this view, properly I think, would be the defense of positivism. However, it is not the subject of this thesis, but its antithesis, therefore it should be understood my critique of positivism is an intellectual exercise and not a political program.

Stupidity Issues and Positivist Critiques

To provide a contemporary example, I submit Donald Wood's (1996) Post-Intellectualism and the Decline of Democracy: The Failure of Reason and Responsibility in

