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Underrepresented: In the Margins of Education

Jennifer L. Erdely¹

This poem documents and serves as a call to action to confront our perceptions in spaces of learning. The format of the poem serves as a way to “give perspective” (Faulkner 2009, 92) to those who are marginalized while contemplating voice, ownership, and responsibility. This poem’s importance lies in its margins—in those blank spaces where we as teachers, scholars, and students can write how we decide to engage our own identities, pedagogies, and performances with what is on the page. Poems allow space for other voices to be expressed—the blank space on the page is the place of freedom for students, teachers, and/or performance practitioners to articulate the other dialogues simultaneously taking place. The poem’s brevity intends to facilitate multiple readings and interpretations.

¹ Jennifer L. Erdely (Ph.D., Louisiana State University) is an assistant professor at Prairie View A&M University where she teaches courses in ethnography, documentary, and performance. Her research interests are poetic transcription, activism, and tourism. She would like to thank her students for inspiring this poem and Stacy Holman Jones and Deborah Cunningham Breede for their support. She would also like to thank the editors and anonymous reviewers of the piece for their generous and helpful feedback. The author may be contacted at jenn.erdely@gmail.com.

Underrepresented: In the Margins of Education

“Indigent”²
“Indolent”
And you think
they’re
Oh, so ignorant
Don’t they have you fooled.
You fool.³
Smarter than you’ll ever know
Brighter than
The sun
Burning through
Your magnifying glass.
And you still can’t see
Me

Bibliography

Faulkner, Sandra L. *Poetry as Method: Reporting Research Through Verse*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Werry, Margaret and Róisín Gorman. “Shamefaced: Performing Pedagogy, Outing Affect.” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (July 2007): 213-230.

² “Underrepresented” critically reflects on the ways in which bodies are oppressed and suppressed in spaces designated for learning. By detailing the difficulties in overcoming what Freire (2013) would call the “order” that has been “internalized” (62), this piece calls out terms (incorrectly) used to label students who emerge from underrepresented groups.

³ Instead of the students being shamed, as Werry and Gorman (2007) discuss in “Shamefaced: Performing Pedagogy, Outing Affect,” the piece plays with the meaning of the word “fool.” The poem harkens to the meaning of the minstrel, and then discredits those who are shaming the student, under-estimating her/him in the process.