

Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University

Volume 2

Article 3

January 2010

Education: Agent and Architect of Democracy

Elizabeth Coleman
Bennington College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ts>

Recommended Citation

Coleman, Elizabeth (2010) "Education: Agent and Architect of Democracy," *Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University*. Vol. 2 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ts/vol2/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository.

ELIZABETH COLEMAN

Bennington College

At the center of any serious exploration of the possibilities and limits of civic engagement is the relationship that exists between democracy and education. That relationship at this moment in time is virtually non-existent. Until and unless the relationship between democracy and education is restored and radically reinvigorated, the plight of civic engagement, of education, and of democracy is grim.

From the beginning of this great American experiment in self-governance, the power of education was universally understood by its founders to be critical in determining its fate. Their faith in education was hard earned and well deserved; its triumph in America was first and foremost embodied in the lives and work of the founders themselves. The education provided by the Colonial colleges—which taught a rich mix of the classics, theology, law, and increasingly science—proved its remarkable power to shape events. The depth, penetration, and luminous quality of Jefferson’s understanding of governance were undoubtedly influenced by his education at William and Mary. The astounding level of political intelligence that informs the constitutional debates and the Federalist Papers is even more impressive evidence of the relationship between a broadly based and richly developed capacity for the give and take of ideas and the quality of our public life.

Such a community of minds would have been unthinkable absent the shared intellectual experience provided to the great majority of them by the Colonial colleges. And all of the Founders, college educated or not, understood that reading—more accurately devouring—complex, demanding books in history, politics, philosophy, rhetoric, and law was the source of insight, understanding, and judgment that were the ingredients of that intelligence (Smith, 1993; Walsh, 1935; Butts, 1953; Westbrook, 1996).

An appreciation of the importance of education in shaping public life is also evident in their words. In his 1796 Farewell Address, George Washington stated: “In proportion as the structure of government gives force to public opinion it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened.” James Madison, in his Second Annual Message, 1810, noted: “A well-instructed people alone can be permanently a free people.” And in a letter to Charles Yancey in 1816, Thomas Jefferson claimed: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.”

This is not to suggest that providing broad access to quality education was an easy task. The first public high school didn't open until 1821. It was not until the end of the 19th century that public secondary schools outnumbered private ones. But after two centuries of continuous effort it happened. Institutionalizing a quality educational system available to every child regardless of material circumstances is a staggering achievement, particularly in light of the ever-expanding scale of this country and the entrenched resistance to any centralized authority. Moreover the leaders of that extraordinary effort did not shy away from what the content of such an education needed to be if it was to do justice to the obligations that attend the democratic ideals from which it sprung.

Horace Mann in the mid-19th century was the first to successfully define and advocate a secondary school curriculum that was common, rigorous, and intended to be widely available. But its reach was limited to the state of Massachusetts; the condition of pre-collegiate education elsewhere remained haphazard both in content and scope (Mann, 1855; Cremin, 1957). This situation would change dramatically in the next two decades led by a national commission on education known as the Committee of Ten. They issued a report in 1893 in support of a publically funded education providing universal access to an uncompromising level of excellence. There were some differences with respect to the sources of excellence but total agreement on fundamental organizing principles: that every child would benefit by receiving a liberal education of the highest quality; that differentiation of curriculum would dilute the power of that education; that the value of such an education needed to stand alone and should not be dependent on providing access to college.

That triumph was to prove stunningly short-lived. As widespread access to high school became a reality during the opening decades of the 20th century, a very different note is sounded. In 1918, the National Education Association issued a second report entitled *Cardinal Principles of Education*. While citizenship was mentioned repeatedly, unlike the 1893 report it was only vaguely defined, one of a list of things to be addressed, rather than something that permeates and governs the whole. In striking contrast to the vagueness surrounding citizenship, the definition of the main task of high school could not have been clearer: "to help in the wise choice of a vocation." That in turn meant the emphasis should be on what is "individually useful" in place of a "bookish curricula." The danger of the bookish was that it would lead "tens of thousands of boys and girls away from the pursuits for which they are adapted" (Ravitch, 2000, p. 123-126; Battistoni, 1985, p. 81-82).

Perhaps it is not surprising that a tempering of ideals about educational possibilities would occur at the time of a massive expansion in access, although of course that is the moment when such ideals matter

most. But the anti-intellectualism and the use of education—that which was supposed to broaden horizons, extend possibilities—to consign armies of "boys and girls" to "pursuits for which they are adapted" is stark and startling. The anti-intellectualism of the report in addition fueled a theme that will haunt American education: a presumed opposition between intellectual accomplishment and the practical concerns of life.

Debates continue to rage, but the die is cast. Once access to education becomes widespread, the tendency to dilute, to make adjustments, accelerates. In Helen and Robert Lynd's *Middletown*, published in 1929, the president of the Muncie Indiana school board sums it up: "For a long time all boys were trained to be President. Then for a while we trained them all to be professional men. Now we are training boys to get jobs" (p. 194).

The same diminishing of values occurred in the liberal arts establishment, the citadel of our most visionary education. Despite the rhetoric of self-congratulation and the widely held assumption that liberal education persists as a serious alternative to what are viewed as more pragmatically oriented educational options, liberal arts education in truth no longer exists. We have professionalized what passes for liberal arts to the point where they simply do not begin to provide the intellectual breadth of application and the ethical depth that is their signature.

Over the past century the expert has dethroned the educated generalist to become the sole model of intellectual accomplishment. While expertise has had its undoubted successes, the price of its unrivalled dominance is enormous. The progression of today's student is to jettison every interest except one and within that one to continually narrow the focus. Subject matters of study are broken up into smaller and smaller pieces, with growing emphasis on the technical and the obscure. The perspective progressively narrows to confront an increasingly fragmented world, generating a model of intellectual accomplishment that amounts not to learning more and more about less and less—already a dubious accomplishment—but more precisely to learning less and less about less and less. This, despite the evidence all around us of the interconnectedness of things.

Lest you think this is an overstatement, here are the beginnings of the ABCs of Anthropology:

- Applied Anthropology
- Archaeological Anthropology
- Anthropology of Religion
- Biological or Physical Anthropology
- Cultural Anthropology
- Developmental Anthropology
- Dental Anthropology
- Economic Anthropology
- Educational Anthropology
- Ethnography

Ethnohistory
 Ethnology
 Ethnomusicology
 Forensic Anthropology
 Linguistic Anthropology
 Medical Anthropology
 Paleocanthropology
 Paleopathology
 Political Anthropology
 Social Anthropology
 Urban Anthropology

In addition to working in ever narrowing contexts, as one ascends the educational ladder, values other than technical competence are viewed with increasing suspicion. The very idea of the educated generalist disappears—the development of our fundamental human capacities to reason, to imagine, to communicate, to understand, to act about things that are of shared human concern. Questions such as “What kind of a world are we making? What kind of a world should we be making? What kind of a world can we be making?” move off the table as beyond our ken. Criteria that would make it possible to distinguish between the relative values of the subjects we teach are religiously avoided. Every subject is equal; nothing is more important than anything else. Keeping up with one’s field—furthering the discipline—becomes an end in itself without reference to anything outside of the discipline. The “so what” question is emphatically off limits.

In so doing, we, the guardians of secular democracy, in effect cede any connection between education and values to fundamentalists, who have no compunctions about using education to further their values—the absolutes of a theocracy. Meanwhile the values and voices of democracy—the very opposite of such certainties—are silent. Either we have lost touch with those values or, no better, believe they need not or can not be taught, with devastating consequences for our political landscape. Yeats’s nightmare vision comes alive: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity.”

This mix—oversimplification of civic engagement, idealization of the expert, fragmentation of knowledge, emphasis on technical mastery, neutrality as a condition of academic integrity—is deadly when it comes to pursuing the vital connections between the public good and education, between intellectual integrity and human freedom, between thought and action. Breadth has become equivalent to the shallow and depth to the recondite. Neither liberal education nor citizenship can survive under these conditions. In such a world, education is a good deal more likely to engender a learned helplessness than a sense of empowerment when the impulse is to change the world.

Connections between democratic life and education, once thought to be inseparable, have all but disappeared. This shrinking of the canvas is most fully captured in President Clinton’s State of the Union message of 1994, which uncannily echoed the words of our Muncie school board president in 1925 except spoken now in the accents of triumph rather than despair: “We measure every school by one high standard: Are children learning what they need to know to compete and win in the global economy.” That’s it? That’s the whole story? One might reasonably consider economic well-being to be one of the desirable outcomes of a successful education, but that is a very different matter from its becoming the *sole* objective of such an education—the standard by which everything is to be measured.

In the face of this dramatic diminishing of expectations, one is driven to ask: How could self-interest, defined solely in economic terms, replace the values of human dignity, autonomy, liberty, happiness? How could the aggregate of a narrow self-interest supplant the idea of a public life informed by the ideals of justice, equity, social responsibility, and a continual expansion of human possibilities? How is it possible that the most egregious examples of an undemocratic treatment of human potential—the consigning of armies of young people through adjustments in the curriculum to “the pursuits for which they are adapted”—is enacted in our educational institutions—the very arena once defined by its capacity to expand human potential and make good on the promise of democracy? How in short could education, once so drenched in values, become so empty handed and empty headed?

At the center is the failure throughout this history to grasp the intrinsic power and value of education, to do justice to its unique institutional responsibility and capacity to influence the quality of life of the community and of the individual. Despite a widespread enthusiasm for education, its value is persistently understood to come from an accommodation to or indoctrination in external interests of one kind or another whether they be political, economic, religious. It is quite astonishing actually how little thought we give to the nature and purposes of education. Notwithstanding the endless references to John Dewey (who conveniently seems readily usable in support of virtually anything), the intrinsic meaning of education is treated as exempt from the need for reflection. In contrast to every other major social institution in our society—law, health, business, media, religion—where we have clear ideas about their distinct purposes, education remains a blank slate on which virtually anything can be written.

That absence is perilous for education in any context; it is particularly so in a democracy, for the connection between freedom and education is unsustainable without grasping the implications of our *shared* capacity as human beings to think, to imagine, to empathize, and the role education

must play in developing those capacities. While reason, imagination, and empathy are part of the human condition and make possible the ideals of human community, it is education that enables us to see beyond the surface of things and to resist the huge distorting pressures of passion, desire, and the countless forms of manipulation that surround us in all aspects of our lives. Clarity of thought is, in truth, an enormous accomplishment as is an abiding respect for evidence, the views of others, and a tolerance for uncertainty. It is so much easier to abandon these, most particularly when our passions are engaged.

Moreover in the absence of carefully considered purposes, unexamined assumptions rapidly assume the character of self-evident truths. Two in particular have increasingly scarred the landscape of American education: the presumption that there is an incompatibility between intellectual excellence and breadth of access, undergirded by a presumption that there is an incompatibility between intellectual excellence and the world of practical affairs—thinking and doing. While the presumed disparity between access and excellence is a recurrent theme in American history, the severing of thought and action has assumed proportions in the last century that would earlier have been unthinkable.

Together these assumptions have become so deeply ingrained that those who maintain a commitment to, for example, the intellectual intensities and demands associated with a classical education are deemed *prima facie* elitists because it is presumed that they must be indifferent to access. Those who are ready to compromise or attack such uncompromising commitments are with equal certainty viewed as the true defenders of democracy. It matters not that such an “accommodating” view of education ends by closing doors, however much it may seem to start by opening them.

This strange inversion of democratic values has extended its reach throughout the educational system. When the numbers of students attending college dramatically expanded, we suddenly heard about the virtues of multiple options and the limits of the texts most deeply associated with a classical education. The remarkable role of those texts in the history of this country deterred no one in the wholesale rush to label such an education parochial, anti-democratic, and disconnected from the realities of life.

A particularly glaring example is the declining reputation of Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago in the 1930s and 40s, and his limited impact on American education despite the passion and eloquence of his voice. Hutchins believed that there are only two kinds of education—good and bad. The responsibility of educators was clear and unequivocal regardless of the demographics of their students. He also believed that the power of a good education was to exploit the capacity

of human reason to create a community of minds, while engaging our diversity of perspective and circumstances, when the focus is on issues of far-ranging human significance (Hutchins, 1936, 1947).

It mattered not what he said about the community to which we potentially belong by virtue of being human any more than it mattered that he believed as much as anyone in an idea of the dignity of every individual that informs both democracy and education at their best. The mere presence of Aristotle, Plato, Hume, and Kant in a curriculum intended for all students was sufficient to brand and dismiss his ideas about education as the very quintessence of the elite. This assault combined with the overwhelming tendencies to pigeonhole students, to disconnect breadth from depth and thought from action, made a shambles of what had been understood for millennia as an education worthy of free men and increasingly of free women, inclined towards and capable of self-governing.

As the purposes of education diminished, the idea of a robust citizenship also disintegrated. It is difficult to imagine, much less measure, the distance between our current notion of citizen as taxpayer and Lincoln's in the Gettysburg Address: “that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth,” and its resounding reaffirmation by Adlai Stevenson: “as citizens of this democracy you are the rulers and the ruled, the law givers and the law abiding, the beginning and the end” (qtd. in Sillars, 1956, p. 327). As Daniel Kemmis, the former mayor of Missoula, Montana, reminds us, “Taxpayers bear a dual relationship to government, neither half of which has anything at all to do with democracy . . . people who call themselves taxpayers have long since stopped even imagining themselves . . . governing” (Kemmis, 1995, p. 9). Getting people to vote is considered a major accomplishment and more often than not defines the limits of our hopes for civic engagement and serves to define the limits of democracy. In Hannah Arendt's eloquent and succinct words, citizenship is the “lost treasure” of American political life (qtd. in Dietz, 1987, p. 17).

This absence of any vibrant sense of citizenship may seem at odds with the explosion of community service programs, at least within our schools and colleges. But despite the attention paid to service, these efforts remain by and large emphatically extracurricular and have had virtually no impact on the curriculum itself. In effect, civic-mindedness is seen as residing outside the realm of what purports to be serious thinking and adult purposes—more a matter of heart than of mind, a choice, often short-term, rather than a lifelong obligation. We have in fact institutionalized the very divides that poison our public life—between

the most demanding uses of intelligence and civic virtue, between the ideal and the real, between a good and a successful life. The relentless dumbing down of our political discourse at virtually every level is the most obvious sign of the decline in the quality of our public life. There are others.

It would be hard to overstate the magnitude of the unmet challenges in this arena and our equally spectacular failure to address them: massive threats to our natural environment and the life it supports; spectacular inequities in the distribution of wealth; the absence of a sustainable policy with respect to the uses of energy; the awesome dimensions of our failure to educate our young; the recent and undisguised assault on the principles that define us as a people: the rule of law, the separation of powers, the relationship between church and state; our predilection for the uses of force.

And at a time of such high stakes, demanding challenges, when clarity of thought, respect for evidence, and appreciation for complexity is especially critical, the sensationalism of the media—the other major educational institution in our society—continues unabated. The dimensions of that distance over time are best measured by reminding ourselves that the Federalist Papers were published in *The Herald Tribune*. There is no more damning evidence of the failure of education in this country than the quality of what the public craves or tolerates in its media.

Yet despite the enormity, urgency, and longevity of these challenges we, the people, seem unable to do anything but watch and wait, presumably for the experts and the politicians to do something. They have not, and they probably can not; it is most unlikely that we can have a viable democracy made up of experts, politicians, zealots, and spectators.

All of this might make some sense if the challenges of creating an effective citizenry were indeed light on the intellectual demands and poorly served by the resources of the classroom, and the task of enhancing one's effectiveness in the work place well met by schools. Alas the opposite is closer to the truth: classrooms are not particularly well suited for learning the world of work whereas they are uniquely well designed for learning the arts of citizenry. As in classrooms at their best, civic consciousness and behavior are formed at the intersection of study and engagement—reflection and action—and in public settings where difference and conflict are plentiful and treated as assets, instead of liabilities.

As for the presumed relationship between the classroom and work, the endless stream of reports over the past 50 years about the failures of our educational system to prepare our students for the “realities” of the current economy are eloquent testimony to the limitations of that project, as are the billions of dollars that have already been lavished in

meeting that agenda. Students continue to drop out of school in droves, and businesses increasingly are driven to educate their employees. Mastery of basic skills and a bare minimum of cultural literacy continue to elude vast numbers of our students, and that includes large numbers of our college graduates. Despite having a research establishment that is the envy of the world, more than half of the American public demonizes evolution. And don't press your luck when it comes to estimating how many of those who think they believe in it actually understand it. As a result of the current mismatch of structure and purpose, education is increasingly flat and irrelevant while the deterioration of the quality of our public life continues at its breathtaking pace.

Most startling and sobering for me in this saga is the failure everywhere to draw any connections between what is happening in our public life and what is happening in our educational institutions. We may be at the top of the list in the public's mind when it comes to influencing access to personal wealth; we aren't even on the list when it comes to responsibility for the health of this democracy. The failure to connect civic virtue and the disciplined uses of intelligence is omnipresent, even among educators committed to civic engagement. In its place is a marked tendency to emphasize the values of participation, transparency, and the avoidance of top-down as accomplishments in and of themselves absent an equal concern for the “what” of the conversation, for the character and quality of the content.

Democracy is not a romance about the value of folk wisdom; the innate simplicity of problems; or the self-evident nature of the values upon which democracy depends. On the contrary democracy rests on an appreciation of the inherent messiness and complexities of the world and the limitations of absolutes, even more of self-righteousness. Not only are axes of evil misplaced, so are axes of good—there is no issue in public life when decisions about what to do must be confronted for which there are not competing goods, competing rights, competing truths. That means no easy answers, no self-evident virtue.

To sort through such a world requires an ability to access information, a capacity to discriminate between the reliable and the unreliable, the essential and peripheral, and the opportunity and the willingness to engage with others who share your concern but see things differently. The great insight of democracy is the recognition that conflict is inevitable; its great challenge: how to resolve conflict in a non-violent and a principled way. Democracy, in short, requires the same demanding mix of intellect and ethics as does the education that would make it possible. They are two sides of one coin and their fates are deeply intertwined.

The depth of this connection has many implications. One is that civic engagement is anything but an add-on if what we are after is the intellectual

intensity and ethical vitality that make education and civic life worthy of the name. Recognizing the centrality of civic engagement to education is a return to an old idea and ideal of education—what the Greeks called *phronesis*—practical wisdom. Moreover building on the multiple connections between the demands of democracy and those of education has the intellectual and ethical firepower that would enable us to achieve the transformations of priorities that are called for. It will take unparalleled levels of collaboration among faculty across all divides; new models of the relationship between teacher and student; the return of values to the center without submitting to ideology, partisanship, or zealotry.

There are assuredly multiple ways of responding to this challenge, but whatever the differences, it requires finding ways to develop an ongoing and deepening dynamic between the world inside the classroom and the world outside. It means collapsing the divide between thought and action that the modern university has reified with its “pure” and “applied,” its notion of theory as something distinct from practice, its decided preference for the neat, the orderly, the answerable, the obscure.

Priorities need to be transformed so that enhancing the public good becomes an objective that is a match for private aspirations, and the accomplishment of civic virtue is tied to the uses of intellect and imagination at their most challenging. Our current ways of approaching agency and authority need to turn inside out to reflect the reality that *no one* has the answers to the challenges facing citizens in this century, and *everyone* has the responsibility to participate in finding them.

A particularly straightforward way of going about this is to place the civic challenges themselves at the center of an education, and to treat them as organizers of the curriculum. The curriculum would be organized around issues of self-evident complexity, urgency, and importance such as re-orienting our approach to health; recovering an acceptable balance in the distribution of wealth; reexamining the uses of force; addressing the threats to the natural environment and sustainable sources of energy; rethinking and redesigning our democracy. A focus on these or comparable issues would assume the commanding role of traditional disciplines. In contrast to the disciplines, such an issue-oriented curriculum generates structures of mutually dependent circles instead of isolating triangles—an organization of knowledge that connects rather than divides, expands horizons rather than limits them.

The point is not to treat these problems as topics of study but as frameworks of action—the challenge: to figure out what it will take to actually do something that makes a significant and sustainable difference.

This is a curricular design that is intrinsically open ended, contentious, dynamic, value laden, self-evidently impermanent and profoundly permeable—in marked contrast to the virtues sought and

claimed by the disciplines that constitute the current configuration of curriculum. And the challenge to student and faculty alike is how to put and hold things together rather than how to eliminate all but one.

In the commonplaces about thought and action we tend to get it backwards as if one stops thinking so that one can start acting. In my experience, both inside and outside the classroom, the closer one gets to the demands of effective action the greater the demands for thinking. Moreover that thinking is not limited to narrow versions of strategy: the importance of coming to grips with values like justice, equity, truth becomes increasingly evident as students discover that interests alone cannot tell them what they need to know when the issue is rethinking education, our approach to health, or strategies for achieving an economics of equity. In the language of students currently engaged at Bennington in such a curriculum: “deep thought” matters when you are contemplating what to do about things that matter.

The value of the past also comes alive. Engaging the past provides a lot of company—you are not the first to try to figure this out, just as you are unlikely to be the last. Even more valuable: history provides a laboratory in which to see played out the actual as well as the intended consequences of ideas.

One of the more compelling aspects of such a problem-solving, action-focused curriculum is the wide range of deeply relevant resources that can be effectively harnessed, in contrast to the more limited and conventionalized skills required to succeed in traditional academic settings. The limited range in our current roster of useful academic capacities, combined with a pedagogy that revolves around the activity of the lecturer and the passivity of the student, make it virtually certain that the distance between those who flourish and those who struggle can only increase over time. Alfred North Whitehead is as vivid as he is eloquent in articulating the consequences for the academy and for learning when the connection to the world atrophies. In an article published in *Atlantic Monthly* in 1936 on the occasion of Harvard’s tercentenary he observed:

a narrow convention as to learning, and as to the procedures of institutions connected with it has developed. Tidiness, simplicity, clarity, exactness, are conceived as characteristics of the nature of things, as in human experience. It is presupposed that a university is engaged in imparting exact, clear knowledge . . . The question is [instead] how to introduce the freedom of nature into the orderliness of knowledge. The ideal of universities with staff and students shielded from the contemplation of the sporadic life around them, will produce a Byzantine civilization, surviving for a thousand years without producing any idea fundamentally new. (p. 265-266)

He later adds:

This discussion rejects the doctrine that students should first learn passively, and then, having learned, should apply knowledge. . . . In fact, the applications are part of the knowledge. For the very meaning of the things known is wrapped up in their relationships beyond themselves. Thus unapplied knowledge is knowledge shorn of its meaning.

The careful shielding of a university from the activities of the world around is the best way to chill interest and defeat progress. Celibacy does not suit a university. It must mate itself with action . . . Business requires for its understanding the whole complexity of human motives, and as yet has only been studied from the narrow ledge of economics. Also Art, Education, and Governmental Activities are gold mines of suggestion. It is mid-summer madness on the part of universities to withdraw themselves from the closest contact with vocational practices. (p. 267-268)

While the intended consequence of such a curriculum is to change the odds that our graduates are committed to—and capable of—effective action in the world about matters of great human concern, this objective in no way precludes the simultaneous pursuit of those areas of study that reflect our individuality and further our more personal objectives. The point of the curriculum envisaged here is to engage the dynamic between what defines us as individuals and as members of a community—the tensions between a public and a private life—not to avoid them.

Whitehead recommends the University of Paris at the height of its powers in the 12th and 13th centuries as a model for Harvard to emulate. Hutchins, in a series of lectures given at Uppsala University in 1951, refers to Whitehead's choice of the University of Paris because he shares Whitehead's enthusiasm for this model. Three things captivated Hutchins and Whitehead: the extent to which the university was a place where conversation and deliberation, across all divides of disciplines, class, and country, were its *raison d'être*; the selection of a content of sufficient magnitude and significance to warrant and sustain such conversation; and a unity of theory and practice, the speculative and the practical, thought and action as an inseparable continuum. The vitality of its education was achieved, in short, by focusing the formidable intellectual resources of the university upon the greatest challenges facing human society—most conspicuously in their case the monumental effort to reconcile reason and faith.

The mix of explosive energy, high stakes, and the great power of conversation when focused on things that matter is what remains most vivid in accounting for this remarkable choice. Everything is about connecting—those within the university to each other, those within to

those without. At the center is the endless discussion where purposes are shared and perspectives are richly diverse.

So what does this medieval university have to do with us? A lot. Most of all, it gets it right about what matters most: the interplay of thought and action, the thoroughgoing appreciation of the enormity of the intellectual challenges if the purpose is enlightened action, the centrality of the art of deliberation—thinking out loud with others as the way to determine what to do—in sum, the ingredients that reconnect and reanimate liberal education and the craft of citizenship.

And this is assuredly a time, akin to the glory years of the University of Paris, when we face problems having the scale, urgency, and complexity that can generate a curriculum capable of and worthy of creating and engaging a community of minds that is as richly diverse as the globe can provide.

For those who are worried about the daunting challenge of daring to contemplate such wholesale changes in how we go about our work—a word of advice. In my experience you take as much grief if you dare even to think about change as you do for something approaching revolution. In other words, contrary to what might appear to be reasonable, you get no credit for moderation when you are doing anything other than applauding the status quo. In short, if you are going to enter this arena at all, you might as well go for the gold.

Secondly, it is worth reminding ourselves that doing things in ways that undermine the conditions of intellectual community and narrow our horizons, demand as much energy, if not more, and cost as much, if not more, than doing them in ways that create community and extend our sense of what is possible.

Thirdly, we, not God or nature, made this world of higher education; hence, we can unmake and remake it.

Finally, the world is right in its ongoing passionate commitment to the power of education despite everything. Imagine what could happen if we do it right. Imagine what will happen if we do not.

References

- Battistoni, R. M. (1985). *Public schooling and the education of democratic citizens*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Butts, R. F. & Cremin, L. A. (1953). *A history of education in American culture*. New York: Henry Holt.
- Cremin, L. A. (Ed.) *The republic and the school: Horace Mann on the education of free men*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dietz, M. G. (1987). "Context is all: Feminism and theories of citizenship," *Dædalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 116(4), 1-24.

- Hutchins, R. M. (1936). *The higher learning in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- . (1947). *Education for freedom*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Kemmis, D. (1995). *The good city & the good life*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Lynd, R. (1929). *Middletown: A study in contemporary American culture*. New York: Harcourt.
- Mann, H. (1855). *Lectures on education*. Boston: Ide & Dutton.
- Pangle, L. S. & Pangle, T. L. (1993). *The learning of liberty: The educational ideas of the American founders*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Ravitch, D. (2000). *Left back: A century of failed school reforms*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Sillars, M. O. (1956). Political perspectives — 1952: The promises of the candidates. *Antioch review*, 16, 327
- Walsh, J. J. (1935). *Education of the founding fathers of the republic*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Westbrook, R. B. (1996). Public schooling and American democracy. In R. Soder (Ed.), *Democracy, education and the schools* (pp. 125-150). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Whitehead, A.N. (1936, Sept.). Harvard: The future. *Atlantic Monthly*, 158(3), 260-270.