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SOCIETY'S FAILURE TO COMPREHEND THE EDUCATIONAL
INFLUENCE OF FORCES OTHER THAN SCHOOLS

Work in Progress by

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Abstract

There is a continued failure of our society, especially at the policy level, to comprehend that the conventional wisdom and dominant behavior of our people stem from non-intentional and intentional educating by forces other than our schools. When we recognize that education is more than schooling it becomes evident that forces as broad ranging as the family, media, religion, and peer groupings contribute significantly to the individual's knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Adapting educational policies to accommodate the influence of these forces is complicated by the political and social challenges associated with the attempt at Democracy in the United States. What is required is nothing short of a reinvention of the social and political framework of our society. While this would be a massive undertaking, the philosophical and theoretical grounds have been provided by scholars working over the centuries. One of the most critical actions required is the development of common purpose by communities at a local and national level. A general problem requires a general approach with a long-term goal that is nothing short of renewing democracy in the United States. We conclude with a sampling of issues that need consideration in order to approach making the Democracy work.

In the United States, many believe the burden of responsibility for educating our children rests almost exclusively upon public schools. The assumption that schools are the primary place for educating the young places the focus squarely on the teacher and the schoolhouse. It ignores the role that other institutions or individuals play in preparing the young for citizenship in a democracy and shifts the burden of educating the nation to thoughts of one central authority.

Our history, however, reveals that education has never been solely in the hands of the government. What has made America's educational system vibrant and equally controversial has been the involvement of every day citizens in the development of educational networks. Educational policies, both past and present, are devised by the state and federal governments in conjunction with individuals, communities, businesses, and religious institutions.

Education and schooling have always existed outside of our classrooms. What changes are our definitions of education and schooling, the scope of the parties involved in education and schooling, and the ways that educational policies are developed and introduced for political action.

The emergence of a multi-media society driven by numerous technologies has shifted our general understanding of how things work in a democratic society. Placing the focus on schools and schooling leaves a number of other influential forces out of most analyses of education in our democracy. Educative forces tend to be mutually interactive and connected. If education is reduced only to schooling, then policy initiatives are doomed to failure because they do not account for the varying influences of relevant educative actors or the general influence of culture upon how we think we constitute ourselves. Furthermore, reducing our scope of understanding to education as schooling does not provide opportunities to conceive of the diverse purposes each actor in the arena of education policy attempts to fulfill, let alone understand how structures affect outcomes.

Two key factors must be considered in any type of educational renewal. Foremost is the need to shift America's mindset from the "us versus them" perspective and the second is for a better advertisement of the larger purposes of education and schooling. To achieve either goal the populace must be re-educated and this can only happen through a simultaneous top-down as well and bottom-up process. Stakeholders must be encouraged to assume greater responsibilities as parents, citizens, educators and employers, and the government must be re-invented as a forum for the people. In order to achieve these goals and aspirations it is necessary to analyze the forces that shape our environments.

Educative Forces

In an effort to understand how intentional and unintentional educative forces work in the United States, a logical first step would be to identify what might be considered the general purposes of education. What are the goals we generally try to reach? The classic trinity of purposes for education included individual fulfillment, career attainment, and the education of citizens who both behave themselves and inspire moral action. None of the ascribed purposes can be fulfilled, or more than partially addressed, in schools alone, since so much is required.

A variety of other educative agents must also be considered if we are going to understand how we are educated. For most of our recent history, civic organizations (such as the Elks or Moose) have worked to educate members on how to both overcome collective action problems and understand how constitutionalism works.¹ Media also play an educative role, even more than ever now that they are

¹ Theda Skocpol's book, *Diminishing Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), makes the argument in a quite persuasive manner. Her concluding warning suggests that educating citizens in professionalized school settings means an increased likelihood that the benefits of

changing rapidly through new forms of technology. Religious organizations continue to be crucial educators and their purposes reach as far as to inspire civic endeavors as well as protect private interests.² Education also includes peers in school, in the neighborhood, online, and at work; and it includes participants within family networks. Commercial organizations also influence educative outcomes through workplace socialization as well as through ever-present advertising efforts. For those who live and work closer to the land, their daily interactions with the environment also play an important educational role. Finally, travel and experiences play a significant role in education. It seems there is no end to the places where educative forces are found acting upon citizens, whether they are young or old.

So, in order to encourage improved education of people as citizens and workers, a multi-layered understanding of educative forces is necessary. Neuroscience suggests the brain is wired with an upper limit of people with whom we can successfully interact and that number may be as low as 150, which suggests a neighborhood or town may be a starting place for learning trust and friendliness and how to help each other. In the social sciences, it has been suggested that such experiences are what makes “social capital,” or the **trusting networks** (emphasis added) that serve as the webs of a vital community.³ As such, we must recognize that the webs have been unraveled by much of our postmodern condition—suburbs, sprawl, privatization of leisure and more. Here is how Robert Putnam put it:

Reweaving social webs will depend in part on the efforts of local leaders who choose to pursue their goals (whether teaching phonics, unionizing workers, or reducing on-the-job injuries) through the sometimes slow, frequently fractious, and profoundly transformative route of social-capital building. But reweaving will also depend on our ability to create new spaces for recognition, reconnection, conversation, and debate.⁴

If building social capital presents an arena of action where the education of citizens (who also become workers) occurs, that kind of activity alone may not be enough since it does little to establish shared understandings that enable cooperation at the national level, where broad publics can be formed.

We also need to develop ways to work in trusting relationships with those we don’t know. Certainly, the work to tie us all together can be done in some civic settings (associations) where the broader purposes of connecting us are part of the morality taught there. For instance, the Modern Woodmen have this simple goal they share; “Modern Woodmen of America will grow nationwide through members helping members **create a better tomorrow** for themselves, their families and **others**.”⁵ The emphases on creating a better tomorrow and others were added to highlight that the morality of caring for others can be informed through civic group talk about themselves and others. We should also recognize that such talk has served as a moral basis for action in the United States for some time even though it has not always been broadly inclusive.

educating in civic groups may be lost, and those benefits are both; “diminished democracy and losses in fellowship across class lines” (p. 292).

² Edward Banfield explored the negative effects of amorality governing human actions with others outside primary associations (families and gangs) had on society in his classic monograph, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Free Press, 1958). When religious organizations similarly establish morality within and amorality without, they may become miseducative.

³ While John Dewey used the term in 1900, much of the recent work on social capital began with James Coleman’s social theory monograph published in 1990. Coleman, J. S. *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

⁴ Robert Putnam and Lewis M Feldstein, with Don Cohen. *Better Together: Restoring American Community*. p. 294 New York: Simon & Schuster. 2003.

⁵ Found at; <http://www.modern-woodmen.org/Public/AboutUs/Vision+and+Mission/>.

Mis-Educative Forces:

The dark side of social capital, as many call it, suggests that not all forms serve the purposes of educating citizens for constructive participation in society. We know that too much bonding within any group with social capital can be problematic—that is how gangs are formed. If a person becomes convinced that in-group members are right and those on the outside (those others) are wrong, it precludes the formation of common bonds essential to collective action and what we call democracy. The linkage to others requires bridging and that does not come easily. Completing a high school program as well as completing some level of university education also significantly influences trust of others in general.⁶ We also believe that improving levels of generalized trust is likely to occur in general education courses in universities. While distrust of others, especially if it occurs because of race or gender, comes from mis-education, it is not the only kind of problem. To advance ideas of democracy, general education in the universities must also link to concepts introduced in the public schools as well as those provided by other educative forces. In particular, linkages to the work done in public schools will bridge the ethical with the practical purposes of schooling—leading to a more perfect union as well as a good life for all.

Another step toward our goal of limiting the influence of mis-educative influences would be to diminish distrust based upon the looks of another but it is also important that citizens find ways to avoid learning to obey too well. Authoritarian ways are certainly learned and should be strenuously avoided in democracies. As Jane Roland Martin put it; “Thus, for instance, home, religious institution, or neighborhood gang may object strenuously to the fact that school is teaching children to question the dictates of authority and to make up their own minds about significant issues of the day. . . .”⁷ If we want to address problems related to authoritarianism and racism/sexism, we must have ways and places where education teaches normal ways of behaving while also encouraging the development of individual freedom and expression.

Before we attempt to imagine what might help develop individual expression, it is worthwhile to consider what John Dewey thought about the matter. Dewey argued that education had to include; “not simply . . . the training of individuals, but the . . . formation of the proper social life.”⁸ The essential issue is promoting actual self control, which is initiated by the individual within a social setting. No one can become an individual without society, but it is not easy to actually exercise self control and avoid being under the influence of external controls.⁹ The problem is that moral constructs inform the mind and suggest what should be done. We witness such phenomena within our own thinking when we consider what might make us good persons in the eyes of others. In fact, Max Weber was correct when he suggested that modern society, especially through its bureaucratic expressions, becomes an “iron cage” that limits our thoughts and actions in so many ways.

What might help us address the challenge of individualizing? Certainly, there is reason to suggest that we must each develop a powerful will that rests upon our own sense of aesthetic. Aesthetics, while a difficult subject, can be learned and developed across the curriculum. In fact, the sources or places where aesthetics are developed may be endless. We certainly see that appreciating, if not creating, art is important but popular culture, travel and developing musical tastes can also aid in the development of aesthetics. In effect, we need to know what we like and why. In addition, citizens must possess good reason for aesthetic sensibilities to the point that they can withstand normalizing influences.

Structures:

⁶ p. 100, Eric Uslaner. *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 2002.

⁷ p. 59, Martin, “Education Writ Large,” in *Education and the Making of a Democratic People* (eds. Goodlad, Soder and McDaniel). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers. 2008.

⁸ The quote comes from Dewey’s own pedagogic creed; see, *John Dewey on Education: Selected Writings*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, p. 439, 1964.

⁹ John Dewey, *Experience and Education*, Kappa Delta Pi Publications, 1998.

A second step toward understanding why we in the United States have continued to fall short of our idealized goals for educating our youth for participation in a democratic society stems from the structure of the government that offers public education. Today, national education reformers and those of us who talk about renewing education throughout the country must recognize that we have fragmented policies partly because of the diversity of the nation and partly because of the rules that structure public education efforts. The U.S. Constitution itself established a federal structure that has historically mitigated effective national-level reform by dividing efforts into what have become fifty-one units. James Madison, one of the most prominent of the founders, saw the federal (divisive) structure as a tool to prevent a majority from forming and abusing minority rights:

The influence of factious leaders may kindle a flame within their particular States, but will be unable to spread a general conflagration through the other States. A religious sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; but the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure the national councils of any danger from that source.¹⁰

With fifty-one divisions we have at least fifty-one important publics. Furthermore, the electoral process in the United States continually brings different publics into being so that each election sees a momentary public formed and only occasionally formed to promote a given educational policy. More often than not, education policies are created in the worlds of education bureaucrats, academics and interest groups. For instance, accountability reform emerged out of a variety of interest group and think-tank activities, with organizations such as the Hoover Institute at Stanford pressing for business-like, bureaucratic accountability, while other entities sought to address other approaches.¹¹ It is little wonder that John Dewey argued that the greatest challenge for democracy in the United States was forming a public that would coalesce and stay together long enough to enact policies that served it well.¹²

A corollary to the problem of structurally fragmented publics and policies is that would-be policy makers and reformers often seek to employ policy solutions that have unintended consequences, some of which work well. As an example, consider the major changes in higher education generated by the G.I. Bill, which was created to in an effort to avoid post World War I like unemployment problems, not really to foster education as broadly conceived. Some argue that mandatory schooling was in large part designed to get children out of the workforce rather than simply to pursue educational goals. Frequently policies are created as reactions to a problem that has already occurred, rather than being designed to prevent a problem in the first place. Also, by attempting to alleviate existing problems using an *ad hoc* approach, the solutions often come from other places. For example, consider the ways in which M.A.S.H. units developed in combat situations were later applied to emergency trauma in civilian life. Also, it has been observed that solutions often seek problems.¹³ In education, policy makers have adopted business models to solve education problems: privatize schooling, increase efficiency, use incentive pay. In the history of education in the United States, real changes in schooling have frequently been derived from

¹⁰ Madison's argument is a part of the famous "Federalist #10" (Johns Hopkins Press, 1981).

¹¹ See the book published by Hoover and introduced by John Raisian (Hoover) along with Ted Taube (Koret Foundation). The book is entitled, *School Accountability: An Assessment by the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education* (edited by Herbert J. Walberg and Williamson M. Evers) and it is available in a printed version from the Hoover Institute (2002) or online at; http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/Bridging-Differences/2009/05/dear_diane_it_was_wonderful.html.

¹² See John Dewey's, *The Public and Its Problems*, 1927.

¹³ Here we refer to the work of John Kingdon in, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, New York: Harper Collins. (1984) In it Kingdon suggested that in policy making; "advocates develop their proposals and then wait for problems to come along to which they can attach their solutions, or for a development in the political stream like a change of administration that makes their proposals more likely to be adopted." (pp. 93-4)

other arenas of action, with many generated by economic drivers with a primary interest in competition with other nations, or competitors from a variety of other places.

Challenges and Suggestions:

In the end, education in the United States of America, nominally a single problem of schooling, is actually a multi-faceted part of how the nation-state is constituted. Analysts, especially those concerned with renewing education, seldom look at education per se; rather they propose that we adopt some other single piece of a whole, which makes us inherently reductionist when we need to be holistic. Certainly, we have tended to place all of our education marbles within a small circle formed by the walls of a school or a school building of some sort.

To be more holistic, renewal of education must also address the many means by which children and adults are enculturated and how those values specifically influence the development of citizens and the political communities in which the citizens reside. In the end, education in a democracy must enable sets of associations and networks of relations that draw out and develop the human potential.¹⁴ All of them together constitute the substance of the community or cultural environment. Cultures and communities are like the water in which we swim—they encompass us all. For example, in China the traditional cultural hero is the scholar; in America the cultural hero is far too often the athlete or celebrity.

Among the foremost obstacles to recognizing how we are educated is the fragmented public, each part of which has its own agenda, which ensures the continual destruction of natural communities. It seems as if no one is looking after the interests of the whole and we don't seem to know how to achieve an understanding of the public interest or community. For example, the professionalization of the academy has promoted a fragmentation of knowledge that narrows interests. Narrow interests are evidenced in policies that favor any one discipline or approach.

John Dewey was one scholar who attempted to address the problem of organizing a mass of people into a public that understands the important tasks that need to be completed. Dewey believed that a "Great Community" must be formed through a variety of steps. First, we need to come to share in a set of concerns that impact all of us and are morally directed. In other words, one necessity for forming a public is a moral community that is driven by a sense of what is good for everyone—goodness being the basis for moral principles—a sort of do unto others morality. The morality of which we speak is akin to what many of us know as simply being friendly.

Aristotle made a similar argument about friendliness, justice and democratic forms of governance; "Therefore while in tyrannies friendship and justice hardly exist, in democracies they exist more fully; for where the citizens are equal they have much in common."¹⁵ Being directed to consider what is good for others is essential to the formation a public (or a democracy). In a sense, we also must learn democratic habits, because they channel our actions toward common purposes. Of course, if our common purposes are not recognized we remain fragmented.

Fragmentation of common interests also undermines the forms of trust essential for collaboration and cooperation in a democracy. Hume's story about the problem of trust may help us think about the problem of working for common purposes. In Hume's allegory, he simply argued that without a common sense of friendliness farmers may not trust each other enough to be of help so that neither could maximize

¹⁴ As John Dewey put it; "The idea of democracy is a wider and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion." *The Public & Its Problems*, Swallow Press, p. 143. 1927.

¹⁵ Found at; http://www.constitution.org/ari/ethic_08.htm. Also, see *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Book Eight, translated by J.E.C. Welldon. Prometheus Books (Buffalo, NY). 1987.

their economic opportunities. If one will not help the other to harvest when his corn is ripe, the other certainly won't return the favor when her corn ripens, even if that resulted in an outcome with significant economic, social and political costs. Simply put, competition between the parts tends to inhibit the integration necessary for cooperation.

The clearest approach to the subject stems from the growth of negativity which stems from societal fragmentation. By identifying the existing layers and degrees of fragmentation, it is easier to develop a strategy to combat them. Our society can be healed through many of the same issues that divide it. While the school seems to be the center of the storm, the problem truly lies in our communities. As Robert Putnam suggested, the "bowling alone" syndrome stems from people who do not know each other and yet, feel that they can exist without interacting with their neighbors. Currently, municipal governments, as well as school boards and corporate boards, function with little community interaction. Their operations are seldom challenged unless someone detects an action that might work against their self-interest. To make these entities more cohesive and mutually beneficial is to transform our communities into thriving centers of human interaction.

Social and religious institutions have to be re-invigorated as sources of civic action. Attempts to achieve greater degrees of community interaction have been undertaken by Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama in their calls for civic engagement; however, the trick is create more time for social interaction and then to bring larger audiences together. We need to recreate middle-America by making urban centers function like small towns and making small towns function like villages. Technological tools like the Internet were supposed to bridge these gaps by fostering social networking, but online networking has been less effective than expected.

A Few Additional Considerations:

It seems that a professionalized model of schooling and civic life, as we alluded to above, may actually work against some forms education. Professionalization has tended to narrow and mystify the profession by creating its own vocabulary. At times one wonders whether the whole purpose of professionalization is to create differences that in turn may be justifications to create monopoly. Does the professional class of educators then have a strong interest in maintaining barriers to education? Do we academics have a strong interest in maintaining such barriers? Furthermore, does the broader trend toward the professionalization of each organized activity lead to the two major problems facing our democracy—eschewing involvement in the community in favor of letting professionals run things along with fragmenting policy into a variety of parts in order to serve the interests of each professional group?¹⁶

The answers to these questions are yes and no. Class differences in a capitalistic society, such as we find in the United States, reinforce the idea that one group needs to have advantages over another. Education has emerged as a key factor in asserting difference. Public education in a society whose public decisions are dominated by elites tends to grant access to education to all, but not equal education. Under pressures from the elites, public schools establish a baseline for education and schooling, but provide the children of the elite an education that exceeds this baseline. Public education for the masses, as a result, often fails to match the best private education because resources are spent on public schools attended by the socio-economic elite and used to foster superior private education in other places. These practices, while evident in our society, undermine a true democracy. Fortunately, at the same time, it remains true that some public schools can produce students who excel those who attend the best private schools.

¹⁶ Theda Skocpol has argued that we have replaced federated civic activities run by associations of citizens with professionally led social movements that attempt to use membership as a financial and electoral resource only (128-134). *Diminishing Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life*, Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press. 2003.

Democracy can flourish despite obstacles, but broadening the base of those who have a say as contributing members of the public that run the democracy remains a problem.

And here lies the contradiction. Academics research and teach about such differences, but they often have interests in maintaining barriers by seeking to teach only the elite. A highly educated public is in the best interests of all citizens. The role of a teacher/professor/scholar requires being interested in ways that suggest how we might form an inclusive public system dedicated to the education all citizens need. In other words, educators of all stripes must work to mitigate the influence of forces that endanger the common good.

Conclusions:

Dewey was a progressive who challenged the values of his progressive contemporaries. While many progressives favored enlightenment solely for self-protection, Dewey pushed for enlightenment for society's advancement. His legacy is our mission. John Dewey even thought of those efforts in a religious manner:

Ours is the responsibility of conserving, transmitting, rectifying and expanding the heritage of values we have received that those who come after us may receive it more solid and secure, more widely accessible and more generously shared than we have received it. Here are all the elements for a religious faith that shall not be confined to sect, class, or race. Such a faith has always been implicitly the common faith of mankind.¹⁷

Future educators must find a way to navigate toward the establishment of a common faith in an educated citizenry. In order to reach that goal, we must realize that a whole lot of education takes place outside the school. Our perspective is that because the pieces of education are so fragmented and dispersed, what is needed is a strategy that links the various pieces into a coherent way of thinking. Using modern technology to generate bottom-up organizing as well as galvanizing the leadership of communities in all the different realms we talk about—media, churches, businesses, and more—to generate top-down organizing would all be part of the mix. A systemic problem requires a systemic solution with a long-term goal that is nothing short of renewing democracy in the United States.

Issues to Consider:

What needs to be considered in this vast educational enterprise so that it fosters democratic character in people? First, it is important for all to understand that education is not the same as schooling, and that schooling provides only a small portion of the education a child receives. This fact needs to be recognized not only by schools, but by parents, agencies, communities and policy makers to help develop a holistic view of education. But what focus should this holistic view take? Among the important issues that should be considered in developing this holistic view towards education are the following:

- Society needs to recognize that a child has formed many views long before ever arriving at the door of a school. As Goodlad points out, “by the time a child enters school, he or she is quite far advanced toward the adult who is to be”.²⁵ The role of parents, the media, and community—to name a few—have a dramatic and lasting impact on a child long before the child enters a school. And all too often this pre-school education is not directed towards developing democratic character.

¹⁷ p. 87, John Dewey. *A Common Faith*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1934.

- Of course there is an important role for schools, but schools need to pay attention to the educational surround of the students. Schools need to be aware of the “at large” sources of education in their communities, and adjust the curriculum in ways that make the total experience of a child one that promotes a democratic culture. As Goodlad and Martin point out, schools must have a “humanitarian narrative”²⁶ and they need to become “sites of democratic culture.”²⁷
- All groups need to acknowledge that that education can be “educative” or “mis-educative” as pointed out by Martin. Martin states that an “educative society is one that shapes its members for the better, not the worse,” and a mis-educative society “tends to transmit cultural liabilities rather than assets.”²⁸ This mis-education can take place in many venues, including the home, the media and in communities. The democracy, in general, needs to find ways to become more of an “educative” endeavor.
- All partners in this educational surround need to understand that democracy is, as Martin suggests, a “way of life or associated way of living.”²⁹ To accomplish this democratic character requires attention to the entire educational surround, as supported by Goodlad who suggests a three-pronged approach to the problem involving the “interpersonal and social, civic and political, and environmental and ecological”³⁰ aspects of life.
- Finally, we need to come to think more about faithfully working on concepts that establish the linkages between ourselves and the world in which we live if we want to maintain and make our democracy vital.
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What does all this suggest? Education for democratic citizenship requires the involvement of all who are significant players in the educational surround of child. We need to convince these sundry agents that they have a responsibility in helping shape the democratic character of children. As Goodlad points out, “There is a need for a surround that puts the well-being of humankind first and infuses all of our ubiquitous educating media with this mission”.³¹

²⁵ p. 12, Goodlad, “Convergence,” in *Developing Democratic Character in the Young* (eds. Soder, Goodlad, and McMannon). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 2001

²⁶ p. 4, Goodlad, “Convergence,” in *Developing Democratic Character in the Young* (eds. Soder, Goodlad, and McMannon). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 2001

²⁷ p. 58, Martin, “Education Writ Large,” in *Education and the Making of a Democratic People* (eds. Goodlad, Soder and McDaniel). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers. 2008.

²⁸ p. 50, Martin, “Education Writ Large,” in *Education and the Making of a Democratic People* (eds. Goodlad, Soder and McDaniel). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers. 2008.

²⁹ p. 57, Martin, “Education Writ Large,” in *Education and the Making of a Democratic People* (eds. Goodlad, Soder and McDaniel). Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers. 2008.

³⁰ p.13, Goodlad, “Convergence,” in *Developing Democratic Character in the Young* (eds. Soder, Goodlad, and McMannon). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 2001

³¹ p.14, Goodlad, “Convergence,” in *Developing Democratic Character in the Young* (eds. Soder, Goodlad, and McMannon). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 2001