

**“What we call the beginning
is often the end . . .”**

T. S. Eliot, “Little Gidding”

Education has been the focus of an avid debate since the 1980s. Claims that the nation’s public schools are inefficient range across many domains. In mathematics and science, schoolchildren in the United States do not achieve equivalently with those of other industrialized countries. Young adults enter the workforce lacking the skills to become efficient workers. Many teenagers use and abuse drugs and alcohol. Students are concerned only about themselves and not about others, and teachers and administrators cannot control violence in the schools. While many Americans are pleased with their local schools, they hold negative views about public education as a whole.

The authors of this book join the debate by raising a question implied by the issues above: what is the role of education in preparing people to become valuable members of society? Because the demands made upon citizens change as society changes, this question has to be raised afresh in each generation.

Several reports of the 1980s claimed that, to remain competitive in a global economy, the United States would have to provide new skills for its future workforce. We feel that people cannot gauge the effectiveness of education by focusing solely on its impact on the economy. We have taken a broad look at the way community is forged and the way it is maintained through the day-to-day commitment of its members. We have taken into account the diversity of people living in our society and our dedication as a nation to a goal of achieving equity for all. And we have considered the impact of fiber optic and satellite networks, computers, and video technologies on a growing understanding of the world as one society as well as our own nation as one.

The book begins with a series of questions asked by philosophers of education, James and Ellen Giarelli. Their experience of choosing a school for their daughter has led them to ask what we mean by educating for public life. Is there an alternative education for private life? What is the relationship between public and private schooling and education? Lastly, does the distinction we make between public and private education play off “more basic, perhaps pernicious, distinctions between public and private spheres, and

with that, gender-based hierarchies which valorize some lives while belittling others”?

Giarelli and Giarelli discuss these questions through an analysis of historical and contemporary literature. They use the arguments of R. Freeman Butts, who perceives several specific political values as central to the American polity and necessary for all citizens to understand, and Alisdair McIntyre, who believes that an educated public is impossible in modern society, as two limit positions among modern writers, in order to make problematic the phrase “public education.” They then show how feminist scholarship has problematized the very distinction between public and private, and they end their chapter by raising the implications of these changes for discussions about public and private education.

In the new environment described by Giarelli and Giarelli, how do we define what we mean by a public? What relation does our definition bear to what it means to be a valuable citizen? Tom Mauhs-Pugh tackles those issues in the second chapter. He argues that “the good person must develop within a robust environment supportive of the integrated self,” and that such a person becomes a valuable member of a particular public before he or she can become a valuable member of a broader society. Mauhs-Pugh uses arguments from the founders of the American republic to describe the circumstances in which the power of a central government may attenuate people’s attachment to a local community. He suggests that such attenuation has indeed occurred over the years, and that, as a result, many people today grow up in communities (and schools) that do not provide the robust environment best able to help them develop into valuable citizens.

Is liberal democracy faced, then, with an insoluble dilemma? Is it impossible to reconcile the need for attachment to a small, and, as Mauhs-Pugh seems to suggest, preferably homogeneous local public, with the need for attachment to a larger society that values pluralism and equity, intervenes at all levels of society to maintain those values, and, in some cases, may undermine the development of particularized attachments? Fay Kelle takes up this challenge in the third chapter. She follows another path by arguing that we need to develop a new kind of democracy. She sees the need for all of us as citizens, whether we be students, teachers, business people, or officials, to “reclaim the public schools as critical sites for the struggle over and creation of a democratic partici-

patory society." Democratic virtues and the practice of democracy are not, she claims, currently central to the education provided in schools in the United States. In fact, some critical and feminist theorists consider schools to be anti-democratic. Kelle is less pessimistic about schools. Hers is a vision of a society that supports transformative education in which schools enable students to learn to critique society, and not merely accept it as it is.

I think here of John Dewey's words: "the society of which the child is a member is, in the United States, a democratic and progressive society. The child must be educated for leadership as well as for obedience. He [and she] must have power of self-direction, and power of directing others, power of administration, ability to assume positions of responsibility. This necessity of educating for leadership is as great on the industrial as on the political side."¹ Kelle perceives a different need from the one put forward here by Dewey. He suggests that, because society is "democratic and progressive," all its members should have the opportunity, and learn the skills needed, to become leaders at some time. However, he does not suggest, at least in this context, that those who become leaders will choose to challenge the organization of society. Kelle does. The education she champions is one that is transformative; it provides students with the skills to critique what exists and to build a new and better society.

Zeus Yiamouyiannis has a similar vision. While he acknowledges his debt to John Dewey's ideas, he sees us facing different challenges from Dewey, because what it means to be a valuable citizen is changing, and because what we consider to be a valuable society is different from the valuable society of the industrial era during which Dewey wrote. Too often, claims Yiamouyiannis, education today is the transmission of the characteristics needed in the past by workers in industrial society. The skills of "collaboration, participation, initiative, expression, listening to and understanding many voices and many cultures, inherent to the emerging democratic, post-industrial society" are neglected. Yiamouyiannis's vision is for a society that encourages children to construct their own knowledge from an early age, that expects children as well as adults to "learn to communicate and receive knowledge," so that a true reciprocity exists in the learning process between child and adult. Like Kelle, Yiamouyiannis claims that a valuable citizen is a person who has learned to question what society expects, and

who then contributes to a redefinition of those expectations in light of the conditions of the time.

The discussion may seem to have taken us into a future far from the day-to-day activities of teachers in schools. Not so. Barbara McEwan, in the following chapter, describes how a program called *Judicious Discipline* establishes a supportive environment for the practice of democratic principles in schools and a bridge between schools and society at large. *Judicious Discipline* is based on the knowledge and practice of the rights and responsibilities of citizens under the American Constitution, particularly the Bill of Rights. In discussing the program's implementation, McEwan paints a dismal picture of teachers' and administrators' lack of knowledge about the American constitution, its application to their work in schools, and the limitations it places upon their arbitrary authority. McEwan finds teachers reluctant to give up their authority even when invited to do so in order to teach children how to behave in a democratic manner. Nevertheless, when they do agree to do so, teachers and administrators appear pleased with the effects of *Judicious Discipline* in two domains: on the cognitive knowledge and on the behavior of their students. McEwan's chapter offers an intriguing glimpse into the difficulties of implementing change and the way the language of schooling differs from the language used by reformers. *Judicious Discipline*, by its very name, adopts a terminology familiar to school teachers and administrators. As a result, though its acceptance by school personnel is made more likely, its effect becomes less transformative. Therein lies a dilemma faced by all who would reform society's schools.

Judicious Discipline provides young people with the vocabulary of the Constitution to use in their everyday interactions with their peers, their teachers, their families, and their acquaintances. It thus provides a link between generations and a common vocabulary shared by the world outside the school. In his chapter, Donald Warren describes the historical antecedents of such education for democracy. He explains how fragile republican government appeared to the founders of American society, and how they, and those who followed them, believed an education in civic consciousness and political behavior was necessary if democratic government was to continue. Warren examines the discrepancies that have arisen in the last two centuries between rhetoric and reality: who has been excluded and why; how the methods employed

in teaching democracy are often themselves undemocratic. In a truly democratic society, he suggests, one learns about democracy through one's encounters with all institutions, not merely the school; that, within the school, one learns about democracy from the organization and climate of the school, not merely from the curriculum, and from the whole curriculum, not merely from civics lessons. His chapter reminds the reader that the intention of civic education has been to produce not only good citizens, but also a good society.

What makes a good, or a decent, society? John Covaleskie grapples with this question. At the least, he argues, a decent society is one that does no unnecessary harm to any of its own members: "in a maximal sense, [a decent society] requires agreements about, among other things, the broad definitions of what constitutes 'harm'." For us to discuss such questions as, "What makes a decent society?" we need a social forum where different voices can be listened to, and engaged with, and where the contestation that may lead to a consensus can take place. Covaleskie suggests that "the schools might just serve as that forum." Covaleskie sounds a warning note by claiming that, if a society fails to shape children's character in ways that are socially desirable, it will, at a later stage in those children's lives, be faced with a stark choice: either to make them comply by force or to tolerate "the intolerable and the resultant unravelling of the social fabric."

A decent society is, by Covaleskie's definition, a compassionate society. A decent person is a compassionate person. Mary Stanley, examining the service experiences of college students, writes of the immediacy of compassion felt by a person when he or she develops, perhaps for the first time, a relationship with people less favored than him or herself. Such compassion, she suggests, may be quickly dispelled if it is not balanced by "an inquiry into the material basis of good lives and valued persons." Stanley examines the varied assumptions upon which service programs are based. She argues that in some cases, but by no means all, both the students in and the faculty who run such programs question the meaning given by society to ideas of justice and goodness, as well as the bases of economic, political, and social power. In our society, where "diversity will be the basis of whatever society the future holds," these issues are contested. Service programs, Stanley argues, provide an opportunity for students to reflect upon them.

In the last chapter, I consider what it means to be a valuable citizen in a society that values pluralism and equity but at the same time places greater demands on individuals than former generations faced. I explain how the demands grow out of new expectations of mental sophistication amplified by the new information technologies. In the environment created by satellite and fiber optic communications, the very terms "society" and "citizenship" become contested. New technologies create new complexities of social, political, and economic organization, in the same way that new ways of thinking about our lives create new complexities of individual development. Both these changes strain the democratic process and signal the emergence of new elites.

NOTES

1. John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (New York: Philosophical Library, Inc., 1959), p. 10. [First published in 1909 as one of the Riverside Educational Monographs.]