

Explorations in Adult Higher Education

An Occasional Paper Series

Voices That Shape Our Vision



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Cover: *Let Me Go*, 2013. Oil on Wood Panel, 12 x 12 inches.

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SUNY Empire State College's occasional paper series brings together the ideas, voices and multiple perspectives of those engaged in thinking about adult higher education today. Our goal is to critically examine our theories and practices, to provoke dialogue, and to imagine new possibilities of teaching and learning.

Special thanks to our Empire State College colleagues whose ideas and insights, whose work and whose commitment to this project have made this publication possible: Deborah Amory, Pat DeCoster, Helen Edelman, David Henahan, Terri Hilton, John Hughes, Katherine Jelly, Casey Lumbra, Thomas Mackey, Michael Mancini, John McKenna, Erin Steinbach, Gina Torino, Tina Wagle, Kay Watkins and Patricia Wheeler.

The recordings of the webinar series, upon which this publication is based, can be accessed at the following links:

Saleem Badat – <https://ensemble.itec.suny.edu/Watch/i8N3KnGw>

James W. Hall – <https://ensemble.itec.suny.edu/Watch/i8MRw34A>

Elizabeth Minnich – <https://ensemble.itec.suny.edu/Watch/Ee48Nkp6>

The ideas expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of SUNY Empire State College.

Table of Contents

<i>Welcome</i>	1
Merodie A. Hancock	
<i>So Much More</i>	2
Alan Mandell	
<i>“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – Nelson Mandela</i>	5
Saleem Badat	
<i>Enriching Our Students’ Lives</i>	16
Alan Tait	
<i>Beyond Individualism</i>	21
Elana Michelson	
<i>“Education is a seamless web: one level of learning relates to every other.” – Ernest L. Boyer Sr.</i>	27
James W. Hall	
<i>Bringing About Change in Higher Education: Reform or “Splintered Dumbness”?</i>	36
Amy D. Rose	
<i>Beyond the “Absurdity”</i>	41
Richard Bonnabeau	
<i>“All men by nature desire to know.” – Aristotle</i>	47
Elizabeth Minnich	
<i>Misshaping the “Beauteous Forms of Things”: Minnich on Democratizing Education.</i>	56
Maureen Linker	
<i>“Democratizing Education”: To Fulfill Our Responsibility</i> ..	60
Katherine Jelly	



Joan Mellon, *Her Uncle Was a Taylor*, 2014. Oil on Wood Panel, 12 x 12 inches.

Welcome

Merodie A. Hancock

Within a few months of assuming the presidency at SUNY Empire State College in July 2013, I was asked about a theme for my inauguration. While I was new to the college, I had spent considerable time learning about our history, philosophies and culture. Like so many of my colleagues, I was already aware of the challenges in keeping Ernest Boyer's vision alive in today's resource-constrained and highly competitive academic environment. It was clear to me that, as a college, we needed to "re-emerge" with the same purpose and passion that drove our formation over 40 years ago. Hence, the theme of my inauguration – indeed *our* inauguration – became self-evident.

As with most insights, ownership cannot be traced to one or two individuals. So it was with the theme of re-emergence. We began to reflect upon our roots, both as an institution and as educators. Richard Bonnabeau's 1996 book, *The Promise Continues*, as well as numerous college documents and interviews with some of the founders, provided a rich background for understanding the college's history and for thinking about how to sustain its relevance and ensure its strength. And, in this spirit, we also reflected on voices whose ideas and value commitments have helped define and expand our understanding of what it means to be educated and to support each other's learning.

Though there were so many examples that we considered, in the end, we decided to highlight the words of three men from very different times and places, yet who share a vision about the power of education to help shape a well-lived and impactful life. Especially given that one of our founding mandates from then SUNY Chancellor Ernest Boyer was to "make the substance of education and educational processes more relevant for the individual and more responsive to the needs of society," we chose three quotes that reflect the intertwining relationships between education, personal growth and social justice.

What follows in these pages is a further exploration of these ideas and their significance to us today. I thank everyone who contributed to this volume, and hope that all of us can use the interesting and provocative reflections that follow as a motivating force in continuing the quest for what is at the core of SUNY Empire State College's mission: increased educational access and lifelong learning.

President, SUNY Empire State College
October 2014

So Much More

Alan Mandell, Editor

College Professor of Adult Learning and Mentoring
SUNY Empire State College

Sometimes it takes but one step. We would like to think so.

– Dorothy Day, “A Question of Comfort” (1953)

Higher education today – indeed, all education today – is preoccupied with, buffeted around by, calls for relevance. And, most often, such relevance is shaped by what are perceived to be the demands of the day. This means that what educational institutions do, their missions and practices, are significantly shaped by particular and highly politicized agendas that, over time, gain weight and legitimacy. It’s important to recognize just how hard it is to pull away, even a tad, from the ideas and the institutional ways that we take for granted. Still, as educators, this is our responsibility.

Right now, finding opportunities to engage in debate, to question the guiding ideologies of the times, to critically evaluate what we think and how we act, and to imagine alternatives is essential. If we are going to contribute to making a difference in the lives of many people (those who have been denied access; those for whom schooling has been dull and sapping), we have to face up to and directly take on truly hard issues about the goals of education, about the day-to-day experiences of teachers and students, about the intimate connections between labor and learning, and about the unending repercussions of what we do and what we fail to do. More specifically for us, if we are going to effectively question and work against the clamoring for efficiencies, the marketization of our every move, unrelenting and increasing inequality, the press of a perfect technological fix and the thinning out of spaces for even reasonably sustainable lives, we need to get back to essentials and try to hang in there together to figure out what exactly we can do. It’s big.

This volume, the third in our occasional paper series, *Explorations in Adult Higher Education*, brings together edited versions and responses to three talks offered in webinars celebrating the inauguration of a new president, the fourth president, of SUNY Empire State College, Merodie A. Hancock, Ph.D. It seems only fitting

(though, inevitably, not always comfortable or easy) that an experimenting institution founded almost 45 years ago on the spirit of critique and the call for change in higher education can use such an event to push all of us to think (again and again) about the world in which we live and to reimagine (or reinvigorate) the “vision” that animates institutional policies and priorities, as well as individual activities and judgments. We are most appreciative of Merodie Hancock and those in the Office of the President for suggesting this inaugural celebration direction and the three quotes that form its core, and offer great thanks to everyone in our Empire State College community – and, as you will see here, beyond ESC – who made the webinars and this new occasional series volume possible.

The words of Nelson Mandela, Ernest Boyer and Aristotle are at the heart of the three essays and six responses that follow. As Saleem Badat articulates for us in his three propositions, Mandela’s legacy is not only about the incredible power of education to transform, but about the limits of education – about what it cannot do alone, yet what needs to be done. James Hall reminds us that Boyer, then the chancellor of the State University of New York, whose vigorous support of an alternative college within a public higher education system led to the birth of Empire State College, never tired of pointing to the deep interconnections that weave together every level of schooling, and to the importance of championing forms of teaching and learning that respect the same “seamless web.” And Elizabeth Minnich uses Aristotle’s proclamation about a central aspect of our very being – the desire to know – to strengthen our commitment to thinking (and then rethinking) about equality, justice and freedom – three words too easily thrown about without sufficient attention to the complexities of what they mean and how they might inform whatever we do.

Thanks to Saleem Badat, James Hall and Elizabeth Minnich for their wonderful contributions and ongoing commitment to this project, and to Alan Tait, Elana Michelson, Amy Rose, Richard Bonnabeau, Maureen Linker and Katherine Jelly for keeping the questions flowing and for providing additional ideas, concerns and analytical entryways that we can take up together. In creating this particular kind of inauguration volume, our hope is that we can hear anew the “voices” of Mandela, Boyer and Aristotle, and use the visions they give us to better understand why we need change and to imagine what such change might look like. There is so much more to think about and to do.



Joan Mellon, *Remnants*, 2011 - 2013. Oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” – Nelson Mandela

Saleem Badat

I wish President Hancock well as she steers SUNY Empire State College in addressing in principled and creative ways the considerable challenges that confront higher education institutions today. Certainly, leading a university today is one of the most taxing of leadership positions.

Ladies and gentlemen, Tatamkhulu Nelson Mandela (1994a) implored: “Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all. Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfil themselves” (paras. 27-30).

He reminded us that “to be free is ... to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others” and that this was “the true test of our devotion to freedom” (1994b, pp. 624-625). He emphasized “that none of us acting alone can achieve success. We must therefore act together as a united people ... for the birth of a new world” (1994a, para. 26).

The reality, however, is that Mandela’s wonderful ideals have to be pursued in a less than propitious context of globalization and the dominance of the ideology of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism holds that “the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market” (Harvey, 2005, p. 3). Importantly, “if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

Neoliberal thinking and ideas have come to dominate economic and social policies, institutions and practices. For one, the conception of development has become essentially economic and reduced to economic growth and

enhanced economic performance. This is to be contrasted with development as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999, p. 3). Development reduced to economic growth has given rise to goals, policies, institutional arrangements and actions that focus primarily on promoting growth. Globalization and neoliberalism have brought in their wake a “market society” in which a rampant “culture of materialism” is in danger of transforming “a reasonable utilitarianism ... into Narcissist hedonism” (Nayyar, 2008, p. 5).

Not surprisingly, “the logic of the market has ... defined the purposes of universities largely in terms of their role in economic development” (Berdahl, 2008, p. 48). Public investment in higher education comes to be justified largely in terms of economic growth alone, and preparing students for the labor market. The notion of higher education as simply another tradeable service and a private good has influenced public financing, and has impacted the structure and nature of higher education. As public universities have sought out “third stream income” to supplement resources, this has often resulted in “at one end, the commercialization of universities (which) means business in education. At the other end, the entry of private players in higher education means education as business” (Nayyar, 2008, p. 9). Driven by market forces and the technological revolution, globalization is “exercising an influence on the nature of institutions that impact higher education,” on the “ways and means of providing higher education,” and is “shaping education both in terms of what is taught and what is researched, and shifting both student interests and university offerings away from broader academic studies and towards narrower vocational programmes” (Nayyar, 2008, p. 7; Duderstadt, Taggart, & Weber, 2008, p. 275).

Mandela (1990), who was wont to remind us that he moved among us “not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people” (para. 1), placed great emphasis on education. He observed that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (Mandela, 2003, para. 13); and that “Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of a mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation” (Mandela, 1994b, p. 166).

In the context of the ravages of colonialism and apartheid on the education of black and working class South Africans, and the necessity for the formerly oppressed to equip themselves to lead, govern themselves and build a new

constitutional democracy, it is understandable that Nelson Mandela laid great stress on literacy, reading and education.

Certainly, access to high quality education and higher education and meaningful opportunities to succeed creates the possibilities for the “daughter of a peasant,” the “son of a mineworker” and a “child of farmworkers” to rise above their parents’ station in life and carve out economically more salubrious lives. Still, dispassionate contemplation is necessary about the relationship between education and economic and social mobility, and education and social change.

While it is a widely-held belief that education is a critical instrument for social development and transformation, it may be “accorded (too) immense and unwarranted weight,” especially when it is considered in isolation from the conditions outside education “which may either facilitate or block the effects” of education (Wolpe & Unterhalter, 1991, pp. 2-3).

Education is powerfully shaped by the economic and social structures of our societies. It is the object and outcome of ideological and political contestation between different social forces that accord it various and often diverse and even paradoxical social functions. It, thus, operates within a framework of both possibilities and *constraints*.

Not surprisingly, education plays a contradictory role. It simultaneously conserves and reproduces certain aspects of extant social, cultural and economic structures, relations and practices, while it possibly erodes and transforms other aspects of these structures, relations and practices.

For example, under certain circumstances education could be pivotal in eroding racism and different kinds of prejudices, and building respect and appreciation for difference and diversity – whether in terms of “race,” nationality, gender, sexual orientation, language or culture. Concomitantly, it could play no or little role in undermining class privileges or patriarchy or sexism, and may even reinforce these through its own institutional structure, culture and practices.

In a seminal article that analyzed the relationship between education and development and was tellingly subtitled “From the Age of Innocence to the Age of Skepticism,” Hans Weiler (1978) argued: “There is little evidence to suggest that education, even with a tremendous effort at reducing ... its own internal disparities, is likely to have an appreciable impact on the achievement of greater distributive justice in the society at large, as long as that society is under the

influence of a relatively intact alliance of economic wealth, social status and political power which is interested in preserving the status quo” (p. 182).

Proposition 1

This leads to my *first proposition*: Higher education holds the promise of contributing to social justice, economic and social development and democratic citizenship. Yet, this promise often remains unrealized and higher education instead becomes a powerful mechanism of social exclusion and injustice. The reason is that education is not an autonomous social force. It is a necessary condition of positive social change, but not a sufficient condition. If our concern is social justice and rich, rewarding and productive lives for all people, there have to be bold and purposeful social justice-oriented initiatives in other arenas of our societies if education is to contribute effectively to creating more just societies.

I mentioned earlier in passing the relationship between education and economic and social mobility. We frequently proclaim a commitment to social mobility: to people from historically and socially disadvantaged and marginalized social groups – the urban and rural working class, the unemployed, blacks, women, indigenous communities, Afro-descendants and the like – being provided opportunities to enter occupations and professions that tend to be filled by, almost as a matter of birth right, those who are from wealthy and middle-class backgrounds.

Facilitating social mobility is an important responsibility and function of higher education and universities. For too long, universities have, for a variety of reasons, provided access to mainly those from wealthy and middle-class families and our doors have been largely closed to subaltern groups.

Yet, formal equality and democracy are no guarantees of equity of access, opportunity and outcomes for subaltern social groups. It is precisely this reality that gives salience to the ideas of *social equity* and *active measures of redress* in higher education as necessary conditions for creating more equitable universities and societies.

Providing meaningful opportunities to socially disadvantaged and marginalized social groups to enter and succeed in higher education entails two things. First, we have to systematically identify and abolish all unjust structures, policies and practices at universities that discriminate and disadvantage people on the grounds of social class, “race,” ethnicity, gender, language, religion, disability and the like.

Second, we have to institute various measures of positive discrimination and empowerment, including critical academic transformations related to epistemological and ontological issues and curriculum, pedagogy and assessment; academic development initiatives; transformation of institutional cultures; and providing adequate financial support for talented students from subaltern social groups.

Fundamental here is taking teaching and learning seriously, activities that tend to be neglected and overshadowed by the supposedly more glamorous endeavor of research. The misguided naturalization of teaching and learning and its depiction as innate abilities or commonsense activities is untenable. We need much more rigorous theorization of teaching and learning and deep reflection on contextual realities, if we are to create meaningful opportunities for socially disadvantaged and marginalized social groups to succeed in higher education.

As a necessary consequence of the imperative of social justice, our students possess increasingly diverse social and educational backgrounds and experiences. They “know different things and in different ways to ‘traditional’ student cohorts. We have to engage with these students not as deficient but as different. This calls for thinking deeply about teaching and learning” (C. Boughey, personal communication, 2008). Curriculum is critical to equity of opportunity and outcomes and a social justice agenda, and a responsive curriculum needs to address simultaneously “economic, cultural, disciplinary and learning-related” issues (Moll, 2005, p. 2).

We have to recognize that while “academic language ... is no one’s mother tongue” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1994, p. 8), the achievement of academic literacy is more readily attainable for some students than for other students. This requires giving attention to how students are supported to become academically literate.¹ The academy’s “ways of knowing” are based on particular conventions and practices; these are more foreign to some students than to others. Greater student diversity entails the need to re-think the privileging of certain “ways of knowing.”

Many universities speak of the so-called “underpreparedness” of students for higher learning. Here, there is “the danger of labeling, and thus pathologising, the students as underprepared,” avoiding any “focus on the ‘underpreparedness’” of universities and academics.² Yet, underpreparedness on the part of students occurs “within an epistemic context that is in some way or another opaque or inaccessible to” them. It “is not some abstracted psychological condition” that students

possess, “but is a relation between a familiar cultural context, which (they have) internalised, and the unfamiliar cultural and institutional context (a university environment), which (they have) not yet internalised. *All* students experience disadvantage when they enter into university learning practices, but some struggle more with it as a consequence of their specific learning histories” (Moll, 2005, p. 11; emphasis in original).

Proposition 2

My *second proposition* is that if we do not take seriously the academic transformations that are required, we deny opportunities to people for no other reason than their social backgrounds. This is a tragic waste of the talents and potential of individuals from socially subaltern groups – from among who may be another Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Angela Davis or Nelson Mandela. It also compromises democracy, which usually proclaims the promise of greater equality and a better life for all people.

Proposition 3

My *final proposition* is that to confine higher education’s role and responsibility to promoting mobility into middle-class occupations and professions is to have too modest and limited an expectation of higher education. It also reduces the importance of higher education to its economic and labor market functions. On both counts, we unduly restrict the value of higher education and denude it of its critical wider social roles and functions.

Valuing Higher Education

There are at least three wider issues with which universities must engage.

First, a four-fold development challenge confronts all societies: How do we pursue *economic development*, with greater *social equity*, in a way that is *environmentally sustainable*, and also extends and deepens *democracy* in our societies? And crucially, how do we do this *simultaneously* rather than sequentially or consecutively?

How do universities engage proactively and actively with this significant four-fold challenge? What are the implications for the epistemic purposes of universities and the core purposes of teaching and learning, research and community engagement? Given our diverse and complex challenges, can we privilege the natural, medical and business sciences and engineering to the detriment of the arts, humanities and social sciences?

Second, universities have to contribute to forging a critical and democratic citizenship. Our task is not only to produce capable professionals; it also is “the arduous formation of a critical, creative and compassionate citizenry” (Higher Education South Africa, 2007, p. 8). As the Indian Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1917) put it, “We may become powerful by *knowledge*, but we attain fullness by *sympathy*” (p. 142).

Martha Nussbaum (2006) argued that in higher education, if is to be the “cultivation of humanity,” “three capacities ... are essential” (p. 5). The “first is the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions”; second is that students see themselves “as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern” – which necessitates knowledge and understanding of different cultures and “differences of gender, race, and sexuality” (pp. 5, 6); third is “the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (pp. 6-7).

The contribution of higher education to democracy and citizenship is, however, not exhausted by the “cultivation of humanity.” There are various ways that universities can, through the pursuit of their core purposes, contribute to the assertion and pursuit of ethical conduct, social and human rights, active democratic participation and critical citizenship.

Universities can, through their own ethos, structures, processes and practices, serve as models for the respect, defense and promotion of human rights, democracy and democratic participation. We should not conceive higher education in purely political and instrumental terms, for this misses its potentially vital cultural, expressive and symbolic contributions.

Third, our universities must proactively engage with our societies at the intellectual and cultural level as part of contributing to developing a critical citizenry. This entails a cognitive praxis of social commentary and critique, and the shaping of world views and ideas.

Beyond communicating with peer scientific communities, our universities have the responsibility, in the words of Stephen Jay Gould (2006), also to “... convey the power and beauty of science to the hearts and minds ...” of the general public. There is a “... long and honorable tradition of popular presentation of science

... ” and we should not make the “mistake” of “equating popularization with trivialization, cheapening, or inaccuracy” (Popular Science section, paras. 1, 2).

The issue of communicating beyond the confines of universities and scientific communities poses whether our universities and scholars engage sufficiently with the public and serve adequately as catalysts of critical public education and intellectual debate, as part of higher education’s rationale of advancing the public good.

What is involved here is more than simply transmission of some established body of knowledge to users in the wider society, but a matter of the involvement of scholars in reflexive communication – an argumentative, critical and thoughtful public engagement that shapes the very constitution of knowledge (Delanty, 2001). Its purpose is human freedom, through continuously extending and deepening economic, political, social and cultural opportunities and rights, so that all may lead rich, productive and rewarding lives.

Conclusion

To return to Mandela’s (2003) statement that “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world” (para. 13), I have proposed that while indeed “the world cannot be transformed without education,” education on its own “cannot transform the world” (Nasson as cited in Chisholm, 2004, p. 13). I also have proposed that if we are to go beyond the occasional “daughter of a peasant,” “son of a mineworker” and “child of farmworkers” entering a middle-class occupation, significant transformations are required within and outside education. Finally, I have proposed that if education is to be liberating and “ennobling adventure for individuals, communities, nations, and the world at large,” is to advance human dignity, solidarity and the public good, it must “transcend the edicts of market accountability and narrow commercial calculations and embrace the ethics of social accountability and an expansive humanism that will elevate and empower all ... people” (Zezeza, 2005, pp. 54-55).

With the passing of Nelson Mandela, the world lost a great person. Our greatest tribute to him will be to contribute through higher education to “the birth of a new world”; to ensure “justice for all”; “peace for all”; “work, bread, water and salt for all” (1994a, para. 26). As educators and students, realizing his call on us to “live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others” (1994b, p. 624-625) should be our enduring monument to him.

Notes

- ¹ Professor Sioux Mckenna of Rhodes University makes the point that “it’s more a case of discipline specific literacy practices being more aligned to some (middle-class) students’ home and school literacy practices than to others. Race, gender and language do not correlate evenly to higher education success internationally. ... Even intelligence is not a consistently good correlate. But socioeconomic status correlates to higher education success in all studies that take this into account. It’s an indictment on our system that we systematically privilege the privileged” (personal communication, 2013).
- ² My thanks to Dr. Sue Southwood of Rhodes University for this important point.

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Saleem Badat was recently named the first program director for international higher education and strategic projects at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York City. Prior to this appointment, he was vice-chancellor of Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa, the first CEO of the Council on Higher Education and director of the Education Policy Unit at the University of the Western Cape. Badat is currently chairperson of Higher Education South Africa (2014-2015), a member of the Board of the Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET), a member of the Carnegie3 Study on Poverty and Inequality in South Africa Strategy Group and Think Tank, a trustee of the Harold Wolpe Memorial Trust and Josie Woods Trust and a member of the Advisory Board of Nemato Change a Life (Port Alfred).

Badat is the author of *Black Man, You Are on Your Own* (2010) and *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid* (2002), among other volumes. His newest book, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment under Apartheid* was published in 2012. In addition, he has contributed numerous chapters to books and journals, has directed and authored various policy reports on South African higher education, and has made keynote addresses at conferences around the world.

Badat earned a Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology from the University of York (U.K.). He was awarded honorary doctorates from the University of the Free State and from the University of York. He also received the Inyathelo *Exceptional Philanthropy Award* in recognition of Excellence and Leadership in Personal South African Philanthropy.

Enriching Our Students' Lives

Alan Tait

It is an honor to be invited to respond to Saleem Badat's presentation, and to follow him in marking the passing of someone to whom the title of "hero" can truly be given: Nelson Mandela. Badat's three propositions for higher education and social justice are ones that I would certainly subscribe to, and ones to which I aspire in guiding my work at the Open University, U.K., long seen as a sister to SUNY Empire State College in its trajectory since the 1970s in challenging orthodoxies in education policy and practice. So I will make my contribution one that elaborates Badat's challenge for the continuing reform of policy for universities.

The first thing to identify in a very positive way is how far we have come. It is now almost universally proposed in education policy around the world that higher education should be more inclusive. If we think of the 1970s in the three countries best known to the contributors here – South Africa, the USA and the U.K. – universities in South Africa were organized on racially-segregated lines with comprehensive discrimination in terms of both opportunity and funding; in the USA, there were strong elements of the same system, but it was much more contested across the very varied state policies, with strong commitments in places to inclusion; while in the U.K. there was an overwhelming set of informal practices that securely restricted university education to children, mostly boys, of the middle and upper classes. Policy commitment to "adult" students, to part-time study and to diversity was nearly universally absent. We have a paradox that while neoliberal ideology, which seeks to marketize all spheres of human activity, has over the last 30 years become so dominant, as Badat observes, at the same time some of the most pernicious beliefs and practices that diminished so many on the basis of their class, ethnicity or gender have been driven significantly back or even out of accepted public discourse.

So the first comment I would make is that we – those who subscribe broadly to an agenda that resists the world as it is in favor of a more just world to be imagined – have successfully made changes. We can therefore be confident that we are able to move the agenda further along a trajectory of progressive educational reform in fulfilment of Badat's propositions. At the same time, however, we have learned that the move from an elite system of higher education – in 1970, only some 6 percent

of those who graduated high school continued on to university in the U.K. – to a mass system, has not necessarily brought the social justice that we thought would follow, and indeed the gap between rich and poor has increased in all of the three countries in focus. Badat is right, therefore, to make clear that reform of education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for progressive change, and that there is urgent need to reconsider how we go forward.

I also want to comment on our understanding of social mobility, and its adequacy as a framing for progressive social change. Central to Badat's arguments is, to risk my own summary, that in the context of increased rates of noncompletion in a mass higher education system, it is universities that fail students rather than the more dominant explanation that students do not have the necessary skills "since we started admitting these sorts of people." I want to reflect on the move that students make from contexts where higher education has not been part of the family or community. Empire State College and the Open University have many professors with rich experience in supporting such students. The journey that these students make can be both terrifying and rewarding, can lead to rich new environments and can sometimes fail, with the reinforcement of earlier educational failure making it all the more painful. Such a journey can be seen as part of the very widespread and long-term social process of "disembedding" as Giddens (1990) put it, where individuals gain access, supported in particular today by the technologies of communication and travel, to a wider set of experiences and activities than the local. This is often liberating for the individual, although it can mean loss for his or her immediate community. The social mobility agenda is, I would suggest at least in the U.K., inadequately conceived, and seen primarily as a means of leaving one's community, not moving with your community. It is an individualistic rather than a social vision for change; not in fact social mobility but individual mobility. An aspect therefore of the ways in which higher education can respond to Badat's inspiring insistence that social justice be articulated as core to its mission lies in reflecting on the adequacy of current models of social mobility. We can remind ourselves that when Michael Young (1961) satirized the rise of the "meritocracy," originally published in 1958, he intended to identify a dystopian future, not a positive social trend.

I also want to extend Badat's arguments to include consideration of the digital revolution and higher education, and to suggest that it is imperative that universities manage that revolution so that it serves rather than diminishes inclusion and social justice. The intimate connection of learning, education and technologies is by no means a recent phenomenon. The printed book from the

15th century in Europe began the mobility and democratization of knowledge, and was resisted and then controlled by both church and court. I take it as axiomatic that the digital revolution of, say the last 20 years, has already demonstrated the same capacity to revolutionize learning as did Gutenberg's innovations in Germany in the first half of the 15th century. In that context, it is core to Badat's three propositions that universities create strategies that serve the underserved and do not reproduce, wittingly or unwittingly, new forms of exclusion on digital grounds. This is particularly important where the modalities of technology-enhanced learning are so important, entirely the case at the Open University and increasingly significantly at Empire State College, but more widely on campuses everywhere, including South Africa, where innovation with technology is changing the ways in which learning and teaching is organized.

The landscape has changed in just the last eight to 10 years from one where technologies for learning were adopted primarily in distance and online programs to one where the application of digital technologies in educational contexts is near universal, in schools as well as university and college sectors. We have to find ways not of resisting the application of digital technologies to learning, but of ensuring that Badat's three propositions are supported and maintained. Indeed there is much that should support inclusion and social justice in education associated with the new technologies – above all, the capacity to access sources and experiences from where you are, and the skills of investigation that are inherent in using the Web, core to self-fulfillment and citizenry. These are being incorporated into educational practice both on and off campus, and make up an important constituent of what Badat rightly terms a “responsive curriculum.” There is much to be concerned about, too, in particular, the ways in which educational opportunity is redistributed through the digital revolution, once again along the lines of social class, and the cynical advantage taken by some of the for-profit colleges of people's desperate search for qualifications to support livelihood. The responsible university, I would suggest, must be at the same time cautious and fearless in engaging with the new technologies for learning, ensuring that its graduates are equipped for the next phase of their lives, both to engage critically with their societies and to be skilled in ways that support livelihood.

I want to focus lastly on livelihood, and to comment on how we understand the critique of study acting as preparation for the labor market. In the former elite system of university education in the U.K., graduates in all subjects were assured good places in the labor market, and there was little pressure to ensure that universities prepared its graduates for the world of work, at least outside the

senior professional programs of law, medicine and engineering. This has radically changed today, but there is a strand of the liberal vision for higher education that, I suggest, has continued to confuse university education as desirably independent of responsibility for preparation for work with a historical moment where for specific reasons this was the case. If we follow Sen's (1993) generous vision of what development could be, as Badat proposes, livelihood is central to it. This is not to the exclusion of other human needs. But livelihood is a human necessity, which neoliberalism has sought to remove from among the state's responsibilities, demanding rather a dehumanizing compliance as the price to be paid for a place in the labor market.

Core, therefore, to the range of outcomes we seek from higher education, along with the critical faculties and the capacity for empathy that Badat rightly identifies as under threat, remains the need to help our students gain a livelihood that engages rather than diminishes them. This does not, should not, mean "serving employers" in ways that exclude critical examination of values and practices. It should mean both engagement with those values and practices, along with the development of skills that will support livelihood. This is all the more important for universities such as Empire State College and the Open University dealing, almost by definition, with students with less access to the social and financial capital that makes routes into rewarding work an assumed progression. This line of argument places work as central to the human experience, demeaning and diminishing for many as it may be, but with the potential as we in universities know for it to be deeply meaningful and rewarding.

I propose therefore that in the mass democratic higher education system that we aspire to, we should positively turn universities toward the world of work, to engagement with employers not as their servants but as their social partners, and to the development of skills within our design for curriculum and teaching that will support the enrichment of the work experience and of our students' lives. This is as relevant to the humanities and social sciences as to the more professionally-focused curriculum domains. Universities with part-time adult students engaged with the new technologies for learning are in a particularly strong position to think through and develop practices to support such a challenging agenda. The embedding of our students in their communities and workplaces, rather than being separated from society on a campus, mean that the individual, family, workplace and community can be brought into relationship in order to contribute to and create new educational practices that both acknowledge where we are, as they must, but also propose a vision of where we could go, as universities should.

In this way, we will work out how education can contribute, as Badat proposes, to the urgent need for continued reform of our societies.

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Beyond Individualism

Elana Michelson

In 1966, as part of a visit to South Africa, New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy spoke to the National Union of South African Students at the University of Cape Town. “I came here,” he said,

because of my deep interest and affection for a land settled by the Dutch in the mid-seventeenth century, then taken over by the British, and at last independent; a land in which the native inhabitants were at first subdued, but relations with whom remain a problem to this day; a land which defined itself on a hostile frontier; a land which has tamed rich natural resources through the energetic application of modern technology; a land which once imported slaves, and now must struggle to wipe out the last traces of that former bondage.

“I refer, of course,” he added, “to the United States of America” (Kennedy, 1966, para. 1).

I think of Bobby Kennedy’s words quite often when I am in South Africa. And I thought of them again as I listened to Saleem Badat’s wise cautions concerning the role of higher education. His description of the marketization of higher education in the current period, his concern with the effect of neoliberalism on higher education, and his analysis of the contradictory role played by the university in maintaining or contesting social exclusion all spoke strongly to my understanding of the contemporary American academy. Like Badat, I mark with deep concern the reduction of education to economics and the reduction of economics to narrow, market-driven interests and demands. Current trends, from growing inequality to the withdrawal of public funding for higher education, turn the university, of necessity, into a moneymaking proposition forced to compete for the tuition dollars and turn students into consumers of an untrustworthy safeguard in the face of unemployment and economic insecurity. Education comes to be seen as the mechanism, not for an informed citizenry in a democracy struggling to perfect itself, but as an individual way of fitting oneself into an ever-narrowing, evermore corporatist social sphere. This is consistent, as Badat notes, with the change from the belief that education is a *public* good to the idea that it is a *consumer* good, and with the change in the meaning of the word “good” from benefit to product.

To be sure, as Badat also suggests, there is no necessary split between the desire for individual upward mobility and the aspirations toward a more just and equitable world. Unlike South Africa and, for that matter, much of the world, the United States has a long and honorable tradition of higher education in the service of social inclusion. We are part of a tradition of public institutions, land-grant colleges and historically black institutions that have educated our own version of the “daughter of a peasant,” the “son of a mineworker” and the “child of farmworkers” that Mandela (1994, p. 166) so eloquently evoked.

At the same time, if human beings are understood simply as individual aspirants to social mobility, education for workers, women and people of color is not a guarantee of equity and redress. Rather, such individuals must be understood as – in effect, read as avatars of – a more inclusive, collective sense of possibility. With the important exception of The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies, this has always been the limitation of SUNY Empire State College’s gloriously open, gloriously expansive vision of how knowledge might be gained, shared, recognized and assessed. In that way, we are a very American institution, grounded in a belief in the uniqueness of the individual and in upward mobility for individuals as a viable indicator of social equity. We were going to use education in the service of human well-being, but were going to do it one rugged, and sometimes not so rugged, individual at a time.

That individualism is under threat now by shrinking budgets and, perhaps more sadly, a shrinking of our sense of academic mission. In institutions like Empire State College, founded in the educational inventiveness and relative availability of resources of the early 1970s, there is a growing sense that the corporatization of education, the need to “market” ourselves in the face of increasing “competition,” and the growing curricular focus on the needs of employers will mean the death of creative inquiry on the part of students wishing to expand their intellectual, social, and creative horizons and curiosity. As someone who believes deeply in the intellectual and artistic abilities of ordinary people, I share those concerns.

But my deeper concern is elsewhere, and it has less to do with the threat to individualized educational inquiry, as such, than with the translation of the individual into an atomized economic unit whose well-being is his or her own business, in both senses of the word. There is, it seems to me, some good news. We are learning, of necessity, the importance of bringing students together in communities of inquiry and practice. We are drawing, with more and more skill, on the new opportunities for collaborative effort afforded by technology.

We continue to recognize the knowledge gained outside the academy in diverse communities and locations and to acknowledge students' own practices for creating knowledge and making meaning. We continue to grapple with the difficult task of preparing students for academic success while, at our best, not disparaging their multiple literacies as deficient and lesser. But what we are not doing is actively insisting that individual achievement is morally bankrupt if it does not also help to nurture what Badat wonderfully calls "human freedom, through continuously extending and deepening economic, political, social and cultural opportunities and rights, so that all may lead rich, productive and rewarding lives."

The educational system, as Badat challenges us to remember, is always a reflection of the society in which it is embedded. It both mirrors and perpetuates the values, power structures, and systems of inclusion and exclusion of that evolving society. At their best, there are times in which educational institutions are on the forefront of social change, providing a site of struggle for greater inclusion and equality. At those times, the university can become one of the public faces of outrage and hope, taking its inspiration and its agenda from the broader struggles and aspirations of people and social movements beyond its walls. At times such as those in which we are currently living, however, what the university all too easily becomes is a channel for individuals trying to survive in a society that has turned its back on inclusion and equality in favor of growing inequality and lack of opportunity.

The task of higher education cited by Badat as "the arduous formation of a critical, creative and compassionate citizenry" (Higher Education South Africa, 2007, p. 8) has its own American echoes and its own American challenges. As an institution whose philosophical roots are in John Dewey, Empire State College, like our sister institutions, must recall that "a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey, 2008, *The Democratic Ideal* section, para. 2). Part of our challenge is thus to draw on our own American traditions of higher education for social justice and redress and to remember that the kind of education we envision cannot be separated from the kind of society we want to see. Our students need jobs, and they turn to higher education to give them tools to survive in changing times. But we also need to give them the tools to understand those times, to critique the very conditions that bring them to us in the first place, and to recognize their own political and cultural agency.

Nelson Mandela's insistence that "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" is, as Badat reminds us, only true to the degree that it erodes inequity and the bigotries that both reflect and support it. When it does not question an unjust status quo, it becomes one more vehicle to reinforce it. Our challenge is to help our students, whether individually or collectively, to understand the terms and conditions of life in which all of us labor, to listen to the voices of others and the Other, and to frame their own needs within the broader aspirations for a society of justice and dignity.

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Michelson has served as a visiting scholar and lecturer in a number of universities abroad, including the British Open University, the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand. She has been a trainer, materials developer, and consultant to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the U.S. and the South African-based Joint Education Trust.



Joan Mellon, *Revisiting*, 2013. Oil on Kitakata Rice Paper Sized With Polyvinyl Acetate, 8 1/4 x 6 3/4 inches.

“Education is a seamless web: one level of learning relates to every other.” – Ernest L. Boyer Sr.

James W. Hall

Association With Dr. Boyer

I appreciate the opportunity to reflect with you on a subject that I care about. And it seems entirely appropriate as an entrée into the next phase of the life of Empire State College of the State University of New York – an institution that many of us cherish. Empire State College is a powerful living expression of Ernest Boyer’s vision. And the quotation at the center of this webinar is very central to that vision: “Education is a seamless web: one level of learning relates to every other” (1995, p. xvii).

There are many specialists in Dr. Boyer’s theories and writings. They are generally active with The Ernest L. Boyer Center and Archives housed at Messiah College (Pennsylvania). Ernie, as he preferred to be called, met his wife, Kathryn (Kay), at Messiah and subsequently chaired its board of trustees.

Like many of today’s students, Ernie’s education emerged in pieces – he attended three colleges before earning his undergraduate degree. He pursued several employments. He made painful choices in order to prepare for a career in speech pathology. He held a residency in medical audiology at the University of Iowa Hospital. As dean at Upland College in California, he joined Goddard College’s Royce “Tim” Pitkin, Ralph Tyler and later Arthur Chickering in a project to examine values in small colleges. His interest in the broader world of education was now rapidly expanding. I worked with Ernie Boyer during his years as executive dean and then chancellor of the vast State University of New York system.

Dr. Boyer and SUNY: The Universitywide Vision

The SUNY system is unlike the public systems in many other states. SUNY consists of 64 constituent campuses. In SUNY, we see the seamless web of educational relationships. Ernie inherited a system that includes five threads of

that seamless web: four-year colleges for which the primary concern had been, for years, teacher education, that had morphed recently into offering the broad curricula in the arts and sciences; the research-heavy graduate university centers; the medical, legal and other professional specialized institutions; the technological two-year ag and techs; and, not least, the very broad-missioned community colleges. Systemwide meetings of the campus presidents inevitably required participants to recognize and connect with the wide sweep of public education in New York state. Ernie, as well as his predecessor, Samuel Gould,¹ with whom he had worked while Sam was chancellor of the University of California, Santa Barbara, joined together in Albany to re-create SUNY. Their common goal was to transform this disparate group of heritage institutions into a single, functionally interrelated, seamless university system.

Gould created a new Office of University Wide Programs, a novel idea in its time. Ernie undertook to create a true statewide system of higher learning. Scholars were to “visit” other campuses, sharing their research. They developed new universitywide organizations such as the University Senate and University Student Association.

My personal connection to this conceptual innovation was programmatic. Every SUNY campus during those salad days sought to employ the best scholars available from around the world. In those few years during the 1960s, SUNY employed over 2,000 new professionals *each year!* Imagine! While initially I was asked to improve and support academic faculty recruitment, I subsequently headed the Office of Arts and Cultural Affairs, block-booking the emerging professional dance, theater and musical organizations for extended residencies on each campus of the university. We also organized universitywide conferences, convened student choral groups and student theater productions, and asked professional-level faculty musicians to travel across the campuses. We held many of these conferences, for all kinds of universitywide groupings, including those in the arts fields, at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center. You might guess that had something to do with why I chose Saratoga Springs as the base for Empire State College!

Dr. Boyer’s Writing: The Carnegie Pulpit

Although Ernie was a prolific speaker in high demand throughout his early life, the flow of major books that represent his most systematic thinking begins in 1979, after his tenure as United States commissioner of education, when he became president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Provided with the time and resources to write, it was there that he produced most of his major writings. Now he had the capacity to amplify his long-held ideas and commitments. His many connections allowed him to draw together the range of intellectual and experiential firepower to work with him. And while he is generous in giving credit to all those who contributed to these projects, there can be no mistake that the final words are his.

The theme of the seamless web is expressed repeatedly in Boyer's speeches and writings. In *High School*, Boyer (1983) elaborated: "Each level of learning depends on the other ... if students make a poor beginning, prospects for future academic progress are diminished. Education is a seamless web" (p. i).

Carnegie provided him a secular pulpit. Boyer had come a long way from his pastoral assignment in a tiny, dying church in Orlando, Florida.

Working with him at SUNY, I drafted many pieces and proposals for his review or for his signature. Responsible for providing the agendas for executive staff meetings, I saw how deeply he thought about every agenda item, each document for distribution and each communication. He worked and reworked his texts, always aiming for the clearest, most direct expression of an idea. His skillful use of language was seen in his knack for catching a phrase or expression that captured his audience, no matter how little they may have known about the complexities of his subject. I have to smile as I recall an example from his book, *High School* (1983), which opens with the phrase "... educators and politicians have taken the pulse of the public school and found it faint" (p. 1).

He saw all of the institutions of life as necessarily interconnected. He constantly grouched about the extent to which so many of our institutions strive to disconnect, to separate, to live in silos. The high school, he noted, exemplified connection to community, to students and parents across ethnic and economic planes, to the elementary and middle schools, to colleges and universities, to businesses, to the military, and to local and regional political structures. As United States commissioner, he urged and funded programs that encouraged these relationships, believing that institutions that operated in isolation impoverished themselves and their students.

Boyer, throughout his lifetime, spoke softly but firmly, with an elegant choice of words – words over which he labored for long hours. His quiet demeanor nonetheless conveyed a passion and conviction for the principles he addressed.

In *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, Boyer (1987) wrote that “The integrated core concerns itself with the universal experiences that are common to all people, with those shared activities without which human relationships are diminished and the quality of life reduced” (p. 91). He also said that teachers must be “instructional leaders, who serve both as guides and mentors to their students, encouraging them to become self-directed learners and disciplined, creative thinkers” (Boyer, 1995, p. 40). He talked about “empowering the student” (p. 42).

In *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer (1990) again emphasized connectedness. The four approaches to scholarship should include, he said, *discovery, integration, application and teaching*. Scholarship, in this way, is connected to the wider world.

Ernie did not hesitate, as is often the fashion today, to introduce the matter of the building of character in students. He saw this as essential to the whole structure of connectedness. Character, for Boyer, has to do with ethical principles: honesty, respect, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, perseverance and giving (Boyer, 1995).

Ultimately, education is not only for the student, but also for the common good. As the Boyer Center (2012) now identifies the question, “What does it mean to prepare students to serve the well-being of global society?” (p. 2).

He railed against the traditional separation of so-called academic and nonacademic knowledge, separation that causes sharp division among students and faculty and, ultimately, undermines the public good. He rejected the common view that there is one education “for those who ‘think’ and those who ‘work,’ when, in fact, life for all of us is a blend of both” (Boyer, 1983, p. 305).

In similar fashion, he could take the complex and detailed issues of the common core curriculum, an issue of high (or low) debate today, and present clear, straightforward and rational recommendations.

Excellence, however, remained central to his themes of access and equity. Here is a blunt example of connectedness: “Schools that pass language-deficient students from one grade to another without providing special help perpetrate a cruel hoax. One failure leads to another; students become embarrassed, hostile, and confused. They fall farther and farther behind and eventually drop out or get a piece of paper that is worthless” (Boyer, 1983, p. 88).

Dr. Boyer and Empire State College

You may find it of interest that Boyer and I once had a discussion about the curriculum at Empire State College. I have never forgotten it. He lauded the concept of meeting the educational needs of each student with an individual curriculum. But he queried me as to how the broad, connected education he encouraged might be achieved at ESC. He was concerned with students who pursued atomized, small, discrete, overly self-centered studies. He used the term narcissism: studies focused on self that did not build upon the great ideas of the intellectual world and of our common cultural humanity. I explained that by beginning curriculum planning around a student's unique interests and abilities, ESC could inject a powerful motivation to learn. The result could be the pursuit of new ideas that could, with a mentor's guidance, grow into a fulsome curriculum, unique but connected. And he readily understood that the adult student, experienced in life, would bring a wealth of varied knowledge to that task. He also recognized that the *process* of assessment of prior learning could transform that prior knowledge and experience into a rounded and appropriate individual curriculum. Frankly, it was a lot easier to persuade Ernie than to gain the approval of state authorities for such a radical approach.

I think of this conversation as I recall that when, in an early heated discussion at ESC, I asked the seemingly obvious question, "How will we know when the student has met the requirements for an ESC degree?" The initial answer that I heard was, "We'll know it when we see it!" I could picture Dr. Boyer and the state regulators' reactions if I were to give that answer to them. That was the beginning of two approaches at ESC that became accepted early on: one, the idea that a degree could be earned in *32 months*; and two, subsequently, the existence and definitions of *areas of study*.

Boyer's life in Washington, D.C. as U.S. commissioner and later in Princeton with Carnegie was extraordinarily packed. He was called upon to speak widely across the nation and to a considerable extent, the world. His travel schedule, controlled by the government office, was staggering. He found his center in the family, and especially his spouse, Kay: always his rock. She, I might add, was deeply involved in discussions with him regarding a new college at SUNY. Later she, herself, became an ESC graduate, working with mentor Carolyn Broadway. Moreover, their son, Stephen Paul, studied with Ken Abrams in New York, while doing his work in Belize. And grandson, Gabriel, continued the pattern. Ernie used to comment, humorously, that he created the college for his family! But he

could see firsthand the need for new approaches. Even the college's name, Empire State College, may have originated with Kay Boyer. I won't mention here the many infelicitous names we batted around.

I should note here that Kay Boyer (2014) has authored a new book, *Many Mansions: Lessons of Faith, Family, and Public Service*. The volume, which I reviewed, describes two deeply shared lives that move from humble beginnings to leadership in the highest circles of American and international life. Kay Boyer's memoir of her life with Ernie Boyer is a beautifully written, often touching, professional and spiritual journey. The volume shares much new information regarding the family and Ernie's motivations as he moved through his career. She links her own journey to his as she expands her horizons through public service and leadership in nursing, midwifery and social services. (She builds her memoir through a unique structure around the numerous homes that the Boyer family shared as they moved from one post to another. What is so obvious is that they never lost their shared sense of purpose, obligation to service, Christian commitment and love. Once visiting the Boyer home in Slingerlands, New York, Kay Boyer showed us a tabletop covered with tiles, each bearing the title and date of a position held during his career.)

Harry Van Arsdale, the labor leader who helped Empire State College to build a constituency among working students, was known for saying, "We are all members of a race, the *human* race." The Boyer quotation, the focus of this webinar, cuts to this key reality: that in life we need to strive as one interconnected people. Boyer's (1981) essay *Quest for Common Learning* defined "those experiences, relationships, and ethical concerns that are common to all of us simply by virtue of our membership in the human family at a particular moment in history" (p. 19).

Even in illness, Ernie never stopped working. His last writings were his thoughts about the education of professionals, such as architects and physicians. It is painful to read of his drive to complete his life work at Carnegie. In his final days, Ernie planned to visit Empire State College to speak at its 25th anniversary. He did not make it, but provided the "Forward" for the 25-year history written by Richard Bonnabeau (1996). Richard also recorded an oral history with Boyer for the ESC archives.

One day, in the winter of 1995, a large group of people gathered together in the chapel of Princeton University for the purpose of celebrating the life and work of Dr. Boyer. Many prominent speakers described his four-decade career,

characterizing him as “one of the most articulate and well-reasoned voices in the history of American education” (Boyer Center, n.d., para. 3).

Former U.S. Senator Paul Simon called him “a man of backbone, vision, and an understanding of humanity that combined to make him extraordinarily effective.”

Senator Mark Hatfield of Oregon said, “His leadership and vision helped us to shape education in this country today and for future generations to come.”

Such acknowledgement from colleagues, scholars, government officers and former students vividly demonstrated the impact that Ernie had on a highly diverse group – diverse in every way – representing every level of educational enterprise, “from cradle to grave” one might say, and diverse in age, race, denomination and talent.

That outpouring was a testimony to the centrality of the words cited for this webinar: “*Education is a seamless web.*”

Empire State College is a direct result of Ernie’s vision – a vision that captured the imagination of Governor Nelson Rockefeller, the legislative leadership of New York, the SUNY Board of Trustees, the national press, and, I hasten to add, the applause of most of the SUNY campus presidents. Many talented educators joined ESC to help realize this vision, and at least 18 of these later carried the vision as they led other institutions. Empire State College’s connections with Dr. Boyer are deep, and we are indebted to him, as he continued throughout his life to point to ESC as one of his proudest achievements. What better example of extending the seamless web: creating a real college for the generations who still yearned to complete a university education.

As we celebrate this heritage, we also celebrate Dr. Hancock as she is officially installed as president. Dr. Hancock, we wish for you and your dedicated colleagues much success as you lead SUNY Empire State College into a rapidly-changing world.

Note

- ¹ Prior to becoming the chancellor of the University of California, Santa Barbara, in 1959, Gould had been president of Antioch College.

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James W. Hall is the founding president *emeritus* and university professor of social sciences *emeritus* at SUNY Empire State College, and chancellor *emeritus* of the six-campus Antioch University. He currently serves as principal consultant for the Presidents' Forum at Excelsior College, and, over the years, has held other high-ranking administrative posts. A leader in education for adult students, Hall pioneered educational innovations that promoted access to learning, such as assessing prior experiential learning, contract learning and narrative evaluation, professors as mentors, flexible calendars, individual degree program planning, uses of technology in distance education and interdisciplinary curricular innovation.

Among Hall's many writings are *New Colleges for New Students* (1981), *In Opposition to Core Curriculum: Alternative Models for Undergraduate Education* (1991) and *Forging the American Character* (1971). He has served extensively as a consultant in accreditation, educational reform, university administration, distance learning and educational outreach. Hall also has held board leadership posts in organizations such as the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) and the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), as well as trusteeships at the Ernest L. Boyer Center at Messiah College and the United States Open University (British Open University).

Hall holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in American civilization from the University of Pennsylvania, earned as a Danforth Foundation graduate fellow. He also holds honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees from Granite State College: University System of New Hampshire, DePaul University (Chicago), Thomas Edison State College and SUNY Empire State College.

Bringing About Change in Higher Education: Reform or “Splintered Dumbness”?

Amy D. Rose

Although Ernest L. Boyer wrote, “Education is a seamless web: one level of learning relates to every other” in 1995, the idea of the “seamless web” consistently appeared in his writings. While this particular quote is included in the last book he published during his lifetime (one more was published posthumously), over the years, Boyer took up this theme in differing ways depending on the forum. As James Hall indicates, seamlessness for Boyer is about the interrelationships among the varying educational levels. So, what happens in college certainly builds on all of the education that came before college entrance. But in addition to this idea of levels, it also is clear that Boyer saw this seamlessness as embodying the best aspects of a liberal arts education. Additionally, Boyer pointed to an internal seamlessness; that is, the seamless web lies within the individual, as well. As a holistic approach, the individual and his or her experiences could not be divided. In Boyer’s view, each person is the sum total of his or her own experiences at all levels of the educational ladder.

It is important to keep these multidirectional aspects in mind because it is in the interaction of the individual with the institution that Boyer saw the possibilities for education. So for example, Boyer included within his thinking a deep commitment to liberal arts as a core educational value. He also was committed to redefining scholarship within the university and to innovation in teaching at all levels. He saw these multifaceted interests as deeply connected. In short, if we were to summarize Boyer’s preoccupations, they could be categorized as follows: 1) a common core; 2) connections between all levels of education from elementary to graduate study; 3) bridging the disconnect between research and practice – especially seeking different kinds of engagement as counting for academic research; 4) changing the discourse and scholarship on teaching at all levels; 5) restructuring the university to allow more permeability between the community and institution; and finally 6) a notion of community (Palmer, 2002).

Yet, despite the calls for change and the assessment that higher education, in particular, but all education generally, was problematic and in need of reform,

Boyer had little clarity about how to bring about change. As Hall makes clear, Boyer was well positioned to bring about change at all levels of education. Looking only at the latter part of his life, he was the chancellor of the State University of New York system from 1970 until 1977; he then was the commissioner of education from 1977 until 1979; and finally from 1979 until his death in 1995, Boyer was the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. He was considered to be a visionary leader in all of these positions, deeply mourned at his untimely death at the age of 67. He was the author or co-author of nine books and multiple articles. During his time as chancellor of SUNY, he oversaw the founding of Empire State College; set up a three-year Bachelor of Arts program; and established Distinguished Teaching Professorships to match the Distinguished Research Professorships already in existence, among many other accomplishments.

At the Carnegie Foundation, he oversaw or actually wrote or co-authored several important reports, including: *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America* (1983); *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987); *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (1990); *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation* (1991); and *Building Community: A New Future for Architecture Education and Practice* (1996).

Interestingly, Boyer himself saw the limits of his approach. As the author (or commissioner) of several influential reports, he was quoted by one writer as being extremely critical of them. Kaplan (1985) noted Boyer's musings that "a rising tide of reports on educational reform is threatening to engulf us" and that "reports on reforming education won't reform education" (p. 10). So Boyer was aware that writing reports would not produce reform. The key question was how to bring about his vision. Part of his commitment to this seamless web was to see the relationship among all stakeholders in the academic enterprise. In his view, faculty and administrators needed to work together and the focus needed to be fully on the student. The task of the faculty member was to gain deep professional knowledge about a field; to maintain a research agenda in that field; and to be open to and flexible enough to embrace alternative approaches to teaching, to thinking about teaching and to researching teaching.

Of course, very little here is (or was) new. Boyer's talent was in weaving together these disparate concerns into a coherent framework that allowed for research and further discussion. Thus, Boyer integrated a variety of interests into his own seamless web. He was continuously concerned with the increasing isolation of

the “Ivory Tower,” a theme he developed early in his career when he observed a new kind of college student emerging in the late 1960s and early 1970s. He noted the emergence of a new kind of student who could be defined by a search for meaning within the rigidity of an inflexible curriculum while also seeking to take this learning outside the academy and to apply it to a broader array of experiences than could be found in a classroom (Boyer, 1972).

Yet, very little has changed and what has changed was probably unanticipated and perhaps a bit perplexing. So for example, Boyer espoused a view of the educational community that included the free flow of ideas; a commitment to inquiry and broad intellectual pursuits. His work at the Carnegie Foundation also pointed to the need to pay closer attention to evaluation and to the value that students gained during their educational journey. While many colleges sought to implement the calls for broadened scholarship, it remains true today that most tenure decisions still rest on standard ideas of productivity. In a wry turn of fate, the emphasis on interconnection and layering has turned to distinct and unconnected metrics that identify learning outcomes in a measureable (i.e., simple and clear) rather than complex fashion. I would like to think that Boyer would have critiqued these numeric concerns, but alas, I am not completely sure that he would have done so.

Part of the problem of change ultimately stems from the difficulty of implementing change in a decentralized system. But in addition, we see how the ideal of a seamless web is undercut by the conflicting aims of accountability. In addition, the ideal of a core curriculum has moved away from Boyer’s initial thought, to more of an emphasis on core competencies and a turn to vocational education. At the heart of Boyer’s concept of the seamless web were the core curriculum and a commitment to diversity and access. While noting that students need to be able to follow their own interests, Boyer (1978) also believed that “truly educated persons also must move beyond themselves; must gain social perspectives, must see themselves in relation to other people and times, must understand how their origins and wants and needs are tied to the origins and wants and needs of others (pp. 6-7). Already in 1978, Boyer was bemoaning the increasing vocationalism of schools and universities while also noting the importance of studies within the common core. True liberal education would help us understand our commonalities. For Boyer in 1978, this common core included not only a common heritage and common present, but a vision of a common future or as he put it, “such a common course would spend some time looking at the ‘history of the future’” (1978, p. 14). Finally, Boyer bemoaned what he called, “our splintered

dumbness” (1978, p. 18). By this he meant the increasing separation of areas of knowledge and learning and specialization with no sense of community.

Palmer (2002) talked about Boyer’s conception of community as the integration of individuals with institutions and of a more holistic approach to learning, involving not only the intellectual, but also the affective or emotional aspects of learning. This approach recognizes diversity and the need to meet people where they are, while allowing them to experience the educational process in individualized and disparate ways. But it also means a coming together; an integration of this diversity into a whole rather into a “splintered dumbness.”

So what can we say about Boyer’s vision? It was broad and inclusive. It retained the continuous educational emphases on community and commonality, while embracing a diversity of method and learning approaches. It called for experimentation, a changing professoriate and the interrelatedness of all educational tiers. Unfortunately, the calls for assessment and for greater connection to the working world have become instead a new vocationalism and the loss of the liberal arts. It is time to re-examine the full extent of Boyer’s vision, while admitting that it falls short in solutions.

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Beyond the “Absurdity”

Richard Bonnabeau

Just as I sat down to write this essay on former President James Hall’s eloquent reflections about Ernest L. Boyer’s view that education should be a seamless web, my iPhone flashed. It was a CNN alert: “3 dead in shooting at Jewish Museum of Belgium” (Smith-Spark, Lopez, & Meilhan, 2014).

This news took me back to a time a number of years ago when I was at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, interviewing Boyer’s widow, Kathryn, for Messiah’s Boyer Center archives. I went on a journey of narrative that day in late December of 2003, starting with how she and Dr. Boyer first met. Both were teenagers beginning their studies at Messiah, which was then a junior college combining the last two years of high school with the first two years of college.

Mrs. Boyer recounted how Ernie – as he wanted to be called by all whom he met – had sailed across the North Atlantic in June of 1946 with fellow Brethren in Christ students at the Messiah Academy to bring aid to farmers in war-ravaged Poland. He was 17. Their liberty ship, the SS Wesley Barrett, loaded with livestock supplied by the church, navigated a treacherous ocean still populated by mines broken from their moorings and floating aimlessly with deadly purpose. There were close calls, but about two weeks later, the veritable Noah’s Ark arrived safely. Once ashore, Boyer began to explore the ruins of Danzig (Gdańsk). People were living in makeshift shelters. This was the city, he was told, where the first shots of World War II were fired. Ignoring the warnings about landmines, Boyer walked among the pillboxes and saw the skeletal remains of dead soldiers with shards of their uniforms still clinging to them. A surviving photo of his visit shows him in a bombed-out church, assuredly a magnificent cathedral before the war. There, he leans against a pile of rubble, framed by shattered gothic stained glass windows, and illuminated in the darkness by a shaft of bright sunlight (Boyer, 2003; Boyer Archives Blog, 2013).

Boyer was a pacifist, as were other Brethren of Christ “sea cowboys” – a term they called themselves (Boyer Archives Blog, 2013). Too young to have served as a medic or in other alternate service, Boyer was, however, more than ready to help heal the wounds of war. Poland, of course, was the home of Auschwitz, the abattoir of the secular faith of extreme nationalism symbolized by the twisted cross. Whether Boyer knew of the existence of Auschwitz or not, I cannot be sure,

but I am certain that he saw WWII as yet another failure of education in “a race between civilization and catastrophe” – to borrow from H.G. Wells. The race was lost in the battles, in the death camps and in the atomic carnage of WWII, as it had been lost just decades before in the Western and Eastern Fronts of the “War to End All Wars.” Now was the time to rebuild, to start over, to have just one more chance, before the technology of the next war could drive humankind over the cliff of extinction. Young Ernie Boyer was there in Poland, doing his part, “where he saw such terrible destruction which deeply affected him” (Boyer, 2003, pp. 10-11), and not knowing that he would someday have such a central and powerful role in shaping education.

When we review the arc of Boyer’s career, there is an urgency coupled with a sense of destiny to reach a growing audience. He embraced this challenge with missionary zeal, as one ascent to greater heights followed another in a continuum of service and opportunity. His rise to national prominence was meteoric. In 1970 at the age of 42, he was appointed chancellor of the State University of New York, having served as executive university dean and subsequently vice chancellor under Chancellor Samuel B. Gould. Seven years later, Boyer joined the administration of newly-elected President Jimmy Carter as United States commissioner of education. His earlier interview in Washington concluded with him being offered the post, but his decision could await discussions with his wife and the chair of the SUNY board of trustees. As events unfolded, however, the media announced his appointment beforehand. Boyer had no choice but to accept, concluding “it must be God’s plan” (K. Boyer, 2014, pp. 172-174). Two years later, he ended his tenure with the Carter administration having made significant contributions to American education, as well as progress in correcting the long-neglected needs of Native Americans, a cause that he did not abandon for the remainder of his career (Boyer, 2014). After his work as U.S. commissioner of education, Boyer became the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Hall perceptively and eloquently refers to Boyer’s new post as the “Carnegie Pulpit.” Under Boyer’s leadership, the Carnegie Foundation, as Hall observes, issued one report after another, pointing out ways in which education could/should be improved and emphasizing the need for “seamless connectedness” from one grade to another, from one level to another, from preschool to graduate school. And I would add to this the next level of connectedness, the one that is the culmination of the others, and the one that Boyer was passionate about and knew was essential to the survival of civilization – lifelong learning – which he referred to as “learning that never ends” (Boyer, 1981).

Supporting his thinking about education was a substrate of moral purposefulness, which for Boyer found origins in his religious beliefs grounded in biblical principles. Developing moral character and civic virtues went hand-in-hand with education, a sentiment expressed throughout his career. This is why service to community, not perfunctory extracurricular school activities, but the kind of service that makes a difference in the lives of individuals and communities, was so important to him. He learned this from the example of his grandfather, Reverend William Boyer: “When Grandpa was forty, he moved his little family into the slums of Dayton, Ohio. He spent the next forty years running a city mission, working for the poor, meeting the needs of those who had been pathetically neglected, teaching them. He taught me, as I observed his life, that to be truly human one must serve” (Boyer, 1997, p. 12), principles that the Boyer newlyweds practiced when he became pastor of a dying Brethren in Christ church in Orlando, Florida soon after graduating from Greenville College in Illinois where he was class president and excelled as a member of the debate team.

Boyer’s commitment to pacifism and religious values was critical to his ascent as SUNY’s vice chancellor in 1967 and chancellor in 1970. It was a tumultuous time for SUNY. Campuses rocked with student rebellions. The Kent State massacre in April of 1970 brought the protests of hundreds of thousands of college and high school students to a fever pitch. In fact, some of the SUNY board of trustees wanted him to be tough – very tough – by having the National Guard protect SUNY campuses. Boyer did the very opposite. He met with the student leaders and listened to them, which did not happen at Kent State. As Kathryn Boyer (2014) recounted in her memoir about their lives, *Many Mansions*, in one encounter with angry students, Boyer even promised them that he would arrange a meeting with Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller – not really knowing in advance that the governor would agree. At another time, Boyer gathered 25 representatives among a throng of students protesting outside of SUNY headquarters in Manhattan to follow him back into the building to meet with the board of trustees (Boyer, 2014). Boyer had brilliantly calmed the waters of dissent. At the same time, he worked successfully with those trustees who favored harsh methods “to change hearts” (Boyer, 2003, p. 22).

Ernest Boyer’s view of the importance of education was not confined to American borders. In the depths of the Cold War, he established exchange programs between SUNY and Moscow State University, the first for an American university (Boyer, 2003, p. 170). Boyer recognized the importance of China and made several trips, the first when he was SUNY’s chancellor, and others when he was president of

the Carnegie Foundation. In 1988, when Boyer spoke before the Association of American Colleges, he said: “[I]t is a central obligation of our colleges and schools to help create in the minds of our . . . students an understanding of the human commonalities and interdependency of our world. . . . In the end, the future of the human family will be made secure not by putting weapons systems in space, but by building better human understanding here on earth” (Boyer, 1997, pp. 62-63).

Perhaps the most thoughtful valediction about the character of Ernest Leroy Boyer and the significance of his career is captured in the words of Dr. Carolyn Reid-Wallace, who had served on Boyer’s Carnegie advisory board and, at the time, was president of Fisk University: “In Doctor Boyer I saw a man who had in a very huge way, done the very thing that the people in his church teachings had been told that Christ had done. I call what he did a blessing, both to American society, and the least amongst us, and to the world” (Reid-Wallace, 2005, p. 5).

In his speech on his book, *The Basic School: A Community for Learning*, delivered at the National Association of Elementary School Principals in 1995, the year of his passing, Boyer shared a quote – a message for young people – from Polish-born American Rabbi and Jewish religious scholar Abraham Joshua Heschel: “Let them remember that there is meaning beyond absurdity. Let them be sure that every little deed counts, that every word has power, and that we can – everyone – do our share to redeem the world in spite of all absurdities and all frustrations and all disappointments” (as cited in Boyer, 1997, pp. 30-31).

In the end, Boyer found meaning in life, far beyond the “absurdity” he first confronted as a teenager on the cusp of manhood in the ruins of Danzig.

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Richard Bonnabeau received his Ph.D. from Indiana University in 1974. That same year, he joined the faculty of SUNY Empire State College as a founding member of its Niagara Frontier Learning Center. He also served as a founding faculty member of the Center for Distance Learning. In 1993, he joined the Center for International Programs as its associate director and subsequently director for academic programs and academic planning.

Bonnabeau is the author of a number of independent study course guides and is co-author, with James W. Hall, of a chapter on Empire State College in Cardozier's *Important Lessons from Innovative Colleges and Universities* (Jossey-Bass, 1993). In 2012, with Turkish scholars, he published a chapter in a book on ethnocultural conflict, and co-authored another chapter on Turkey for a global study on women and culture.

Bonnabeau is the author of *The Promise Continues* (1996), a history of Empire State College.



Joan Mellon, *Strolling*, 2012 - 2014. Oil on Wood Panel, 10 x 10 inches.

“All men by nature desire to know.” – Aristotle

Democratizing Education

Elizabeth Minnich

I love it that we have all been invited to think about the words of some people who have had a great deal of influence on our worlds, and especially on education. I should probably then warn you that I love it enough that I cannot read just one pithy quote, any more than I can eat one square of chocolate. One quote launches me into conversations with still more of those who are my thinking friends – people living or dead; close or far away – whose approach to important issues I feel a need to consult. Surely, one of the more lasting legacies of education is the gift of such friends, so I hope you will indulge me in proliferating quotes a bit.

Aristotle, Plus

The quotation I was invited to reflect on with you is from Aristotle: “All men by nature desire to know” (Book I, Part 1, para. 1).

It is a wonderful quote, concise and significant as the great philosopher usually is, and as soon as I start thinking about it, other voices pipe up with things to say about that “all,” that “men,” and about “nature,” and “to know.” We could generate controversial tomes about each of those, and here they are in relation.

To help me out, I turned first to two people from other times who knew just how profound and how hardy, how demanding, the desire to know can be. To go with Aristotle, then, two all-American classics, W.E.B. DuBois’ (1903) *The Souls of Black Folk*, and then James Oppenheim’s (1911) poem inspired by Rose Schneiderman’s rallying cry to workers.

[T]here must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammelled alike by old and new. ... I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. ... I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. ... Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly

America? ... Are you so afraid lest ... we sight the Promised Land? (DuBois, 1903, p. 108-109)

Our lives shall not be sweated from birth until life closes;
Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!
As we come marching, marching, unnumbered women dead. ...
Small art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew.
Yes, it is bread we fight for – but we fight for roses, too!
(Oppenheim, 1911, p. 214)

Education in Complex Relation to Equality, Justice, Freedom

I think we do know, and have long known, that beings with minds have a need to use them, and will use them, unless a whole lot of clanking machinery is put in place to forbid that desire, to control and direct it, to keep it within prescribed bounds, to keep it occupied with survival or with trivia, and even to convince some of us that it is *unnatural* and *wrong* for us, or some others, to feel, let alone to satisfy, that entirely human need at all.

Yet even when all that machinery is in place, people struggle to come to know; to be educated. Some of those struggles are unfolding right now, and by no means only far away and among others. Education is nowhere equally everyone's right *and* equally a real possibility, despite the efforts of SUNY Empire State College, among others but notably, to meet the need for both bread and roses in effective, creative ways.

If we reflect on our human need to know, then, we very quickly realize that this is not just an individual matter – that, indeed, from the beginning, education raises the issue of equality, so also of justice, so also of freedom. It does so as evidently in its failures as in its successes: an education that excludes or systematically devalues people is as wrong epistemologically as it is morally and politically. It is serving not excellence, but exclusivity, not truth but prejudice, and therefore, error.

But our heritages are rarely simple to sort out, and little, we know, is entirely pure or impure, correct or wrong. Along with DuBois, we may find our greatest inspiration in sources that later we also must question, from the ancestors, the “classics,” the “Founding Fathers,” to our very own parents and mentors. We may even be questioned ourselves. This, too, is what education is surely for. And so Aristotle, not among the apostles of an inclusive equality, nonetheless calls us to

it as educators. After all, he chose to give the desire for knowledge very deeply connected roots indeed, in the nature we all share.

Linking a human need or quality to nature is not only a more or less science-inflected statement; it has moral and political implications because it asserts that we do not have that need or quality by choice – it is necessarily part of us. That we all have a need to know is, then, something that could, or should, inform a call to equalize us through education. If we honor nature in us, as Aristotle assumes we do (why else invoke it in relation to knowledge?), a just response ought to start with an ethics of care, with concern about allocating the goods specific to human society – status, wealth, possessions among them – only after provision for the needs that enable our creation and pursuit of such goods in the first place. It would provide for the sustenance of life itself, and then, with Aristotle and others in mind, it would turn to providing for the hungers of mind and spirit.

I realize that may sound too communitarian, at the least, to some, but it can mean simply that we are right to provide free lunches and nurses' offices in public schools, and to take account of students' room and board expenses when determining financial aid. We do keep struggling to live up to the realization that education deals with naturally-embodied minds, not, as we say in philosophy, brains in vats (although, perhaps Aristotle would accept a brain, even in a vat, as still having that characteristic desire to know – we will not pursue that here).

Unfortunately, as in different ways all three of the opening quotations remind us, *nature* also can be used to legitimize inequalities. Here we need to move more explicitly from the use of *nature* to uses of *knowledge*, which includes knowledge about nature, with regard to equality, and so also justice, and freedom.

We may all have a natural desire to know, but even if we are empowered to seek its satisfaction, that which we are offered educationally may and may not actually be healthy. There is a painful irony along with inspiration in DuBois believing that Aristotle would welcome all equally. He did famously justify slavery on the grounds that some men are *naturally* – there it is again – slavish, and he did teach as science that females are failed males.

Scholars in many roles in differing times and places, including Aristotle, have taught as knowledge that humans are naturally ranked by “kind,” that we are not only different but hierarchically divided *not* by choice or achievement, not by human agency of any kind, but, yes, by *nature*, necessarily. Today, most likely we would say, “by our genes,” and we do know that not a few believe that “success”

and “failure” are genetically encoded, and I trust we know that this, too, is dangerous.

It is profoundly moving, our shared desire to learn, and it has broken tragically against barriers of injustice that, just as wrongly and tragically, have been worked into the knowledge that the hungry have been offered.

However enlightened we may now hope we are, we are not immune to passing on some of the injustices that have long skewed knowledge because its creators in a complex sense knew no better, and did not think themselves free. I find this entirely humbling: If we now cringe at some statements that really are not peripheral to a truly great mind’s work, imagine the moral failures others will see in our own if, as perhaps we can only hope, efforts to democratize education such as yours at Empire State College not only continue, but spread.

My own work, through many years and with many others, on transforming knowledge led me to this *credo*:

There is nothing ‘merely academic’ about how we think and what we think we know. We are creatures and creators of meaning. Among the many meanings that interweave our varied worlds, the meanings of *human being* are central. They can sustain us in peaceful, caring, just relation with others and with the earth we share. They can divide and rank us within systems of dominance. They can open us to love, friendship, respect, justice, nurture. They can enable us to enslave, exploit, rape, kill those who have been defined as less than fully human. We are called by inspiring and by disturbing meanings of *human being* to keep thinking, to hold horizons open. We, who are conscious creatures and creators of meaning, remain responsible. (Minnich, 2005, p. 1)

As educators, this general responsibility moves in close; becomes quite specifically ours. There really is nothing “merely academic” in what we do. I think many in education deeply believe that; I also think we mean many differing things by it.

What I mean is that, as Hannah Arendt (1998) said, knowledge – unlike thinking, about which I will say something in a minute – is a world-making activity. I agree, and world-making is a moral and political act.

We remember that in the years leading up to the genocidal Nazi regime, and in this country, the sterilization and incarceration of some of the “unfit,” there were great scientists and jurists and highly reputable universities that advocated

the practice of eugenics: of “good” breeding. As they were with livestock, these scholars were quite sure that knowledge told them not only how to improve human stock, but which “kinds” of us humans ought to be kept from breeding.

We can all adduce other examples of how, mildly to dangerously, knowledge has gone wrong in ways that reveal the mutual implications of truth, social systems and morality. A great deal of our scholarship and work with education in the last four or so decades has concerned ways to rectify prejudicial errors of omission and commission, and to inquire anew, to create more genuinely inclusive knowledge to be taught and itself critiqued in more inclusive educational places and spaces. We have not gotten it right. We have followed our desire to know for ourselves, as others will in questioning us.

Thinking

The question then becomes, for me, whether we can, whether we will, realize that as educators, our most important responsibility may well be practicing the arts of thinking with all those we can persuade and enable to join us.

I do not, or do not only, mean “critical thinking” as that is broadly understood. That is, I do not mean the kind of reasoning by which people learn to “make a good argument,” “to make a strong case” for a point – any point, whether they believe it, think it right and important and good or not. As Socrates put it, this is Sophistry, the art that can be used to make the worse seem the better case. I was reminded of that recently when a colleague proudly told me that he tells his applied ethics students that it does not matter to him what position they take. All that matters is that they learn to make a good case for it. I understand that he means to be saying that he is tolerant, that he is not there to tell them what is and is not ethical but, rather, to discuss these issues with them in order to teach them to think ethically for themselves. I think most philosophy professors would say something similar. But still, I want to say that this is not enough for what I mean by *thinking*.

What I mean is our reflexive ability to reflect *around* and *about* things, including ourselves, to step off the tracks and wander, considering things, including ourselves, from all sorts of angles. I consider such thinking to be a wellspring of human freedom as well as of conscience: reflexive, reflective thinking is how we see things differently, and so become able to judge, to choose, to change – which also means, to be responsible.

Recurring to our Aristotle quote, let me propose this, then: The desire to know can equalize us even when existent knowledge tells us that we are irretrievably unequal; that some of us ought not study at all, ought not, perhaps, even live. It can do so because it is a *desire* and, like most desires, it can be satiated but it does not then cease to exist. The *philosophia* that we all have refuses to let us stop seeking, and so it recurrently awakens thinking, that restless wind that blows everything down, as Socrates put it, and the gadfly that stings us into action.

Thinking, as John Dewey (2008) described, is *prospective*, whereas knowledge is *retrospective*. That is, while knowledge is the answer to questions that end with its achievement – we come to a reasoned conclusion, finish analyzing the data, comprehend in a final flash of illumination – thinking re-opens knowledge, as well as beliefs, opinions – anything it takes up – and, as reflection, inquiry, experiment sets off anew, not knowing where it will end. It lays paths, as Martin Heidegger put it, but arrives nowhere.

This dialectic, or regenerative tension, of thinking/knowing/thinking is, I believe, one of the reasons why close thinking relationships between learners and mentors are not just a fine thing for the learner, but a necessary thing for the mentor – and crucial for the health and safety of their, and our, shared worlds. That is, it is not only effective pedagogy that helps each learner individually, although it is demonstrably that, as Empire State College mentors know well. Such inquiries constantly refresh knowledge by holding it more safely in mutually communicating relation with the real, particular, plural, changing world.

Or, more simply: when learning only goes from knower to student, it takes a whole lot longer to sort out what we really do want to be conserving of our heritages, and what we really do not. Good teaching of thinking also is essential research for educational institutions that recognize their responsibility that comes with purveying world-making knowledge.

Learning relations that involve such genuinely shared inquiry also show us why mentors need not always be expert knowers of what they teach but also can be practiced learners available as thinking friends for those undertaking an inquiry. An honest inquirer, of course, precisely does not know where she or he is headed. We only know, we are only experts, after the fact, and if we do not want only to pass on what is known, we have to take the risk of genuinely thinking with our students, as they do with us.

Let me close these reflections with Aristotle and you, at Empire State College, by quoting my own teacher, Hannah Arendt; and then, to keep startling ourselves back into thought, I will turn to one of the more fascinating creators of the future, about which, although we can know nothing, as educators we had certainly better be thinking.

Here is Arendt (2003) on Socrates, who accepted the Oracle's statement that he was the wisest man in Athens by saying that, if so, it was because he knew better than others that he did not know. What he was, of course, was a thinker who is still teaching us those arts, and why they matter so much he was willing to die rather than cease practicing them.

[U]nlike the 'professional' thinkers, [Socrates] could be representative of our 'everybody' ... a man who counted himself neither among the many nor among the few ... ; who did not aspire to being a ruler of cities or claim to know how to improve and take care of citizens' souls; who did not believe that men could be wise and did not envy the gods their divine wisdom in case they should possess it; and who therefore had never even tried his hand at formulating a doctrine that could be taught and learned. ... [A] citizen among citizens ... claiming nothing [other than what], in his view every citizen should do and had a right to claim. (p. 168-169)

In an article titled "Does the Digital Classroom Enfeeble the Mind?" Jaron Lanier (2010) – whom you may know as a classical music composer, a computer genius, a virtuoso of virtual reality (which some say he may have named) – observed that:

To the degree that education is about the transfer of the known between generations, it can be digitized, analyzed, optimized and bottled or posted on Twitter. To the degree that education is about the self-invention of the human race, the gargantuan process of steering billions of brains into unforeseeable states and configurations in the future, it can continue only if each brain learns to invent itself. And that is beyond comparison because it is beyond comprehension. Learning at its truest is a leap into the unknown. (para. 22)

I wish you success in your leaps into both the known and the unknown, and happily trust that you will continue to teach us all what it means to democratize education by how you continue doing so.

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Minnich's published works include *Transforming Knowledge* (2004) (recipient of the Ness Award), and *The Fox in The Henhouse: How Privatization Threatens Democracy* (2005) (with Si Kahn). Her papers and essays appear in many anthologies and textbooks, as well as in journals and magazines. In the U.S. and abroad, speaking and consulting have taken her to hundreds of educational institutions and professional associations. She has worked as reader, speaker and/or consultant with many foundations including Ford, Kettering and Spencer, and with the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Carnegie Corporation.

Misshaping the “Beauteous Forms of Things”: Minnich on Democratizing Education

Maureen Linker

As a graduate student in analytic philosophy in the mid-1990s, I struggled to find the meaning and value in “S knows that p” formulations of knowledge, typical for the field. Knowledge, as I was instructed, consisted of a relationship between a subject “S” who had no specific individuating characteristics except that “S” was capable of believing “p.” “P” was defined as a proposition with no specific content except that it was either “true” in the sense that it accurately corresponded with some state of affairs in the world, or “false” in that it did not.

Drained from this formulation were the details, the particulars, the authority and power and challenges involved in transforming opinion and belief into knowledge. Who was “S”? I wondered. How does a person have a *relationship* to a proposition? Why are some propositions like “I know that water is composed of H₂O” deemed “intellectual” and “I know how to be a good friend” deemed “anti-intellectual”? (Ryle, 1949).

During this time, I happened upon Elizabeth Minnich’s (1990) brilliant and profound book *Transforming Knowledge*. Reading it I felt like I was being invited by an incredibly gifted scholar to travel back to the “classics” that first drew me into philosophy, and then ahead to a new conceptualization of knowledge that took seriously issues of power and injustice. I learned from Minnich *that* knowledge was socially constructed and perhaps more significantly, *how* it was socially constructed. I came to see how all of us engaged in the Western intellectual tradition were the inheritors of traditions that divided and conquered and took the experiences of the few to represent the many. Too often in the interest of isolating and examining particular aspects of human experience, philosophers had ignored or even vilified the lives of those with less power and privilege. As the poet William Wordsworth (1888) wrote in his poem “The Tables Turned”:

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;
Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beautiful forms of things: –
We murder to dissect. (25-28)

Minnich helps us to see in *Transforming Knowledge* that formulations like “S knows that p,” while seemingly objective and almost benign, actually preserve existing power differentials by treating all knowers as equal and all knowledge claims as purely factual. Of course, who has the opportunity to gain knowledge and expertise, as well as who gets to decide what will be included in the curriculum, are all matters having to do with the allocation of resources, power and authority.

In her presentation “Democratizing Education” Minnich continues the work of *Transforming Knowledge* by thoughtfully considering our Western intellectual roots in Aristotle’s claim, “All men by nature desire to know,” and then considering how the very terms “all,” “men,” “nature” and “know” carry with them a history of oppression, injustice, struggle and success. In her effort to both respectfully interrogate our history while critically challenging its painful consequences, Minnich reveals her deep and abiding love for learners and a truly democratic model of education. She writes,

Along with DuBois, we may find our greatest inspiration in sources that later we also must question, from the ancestors, the ‘classics,’ the ‘Founding Fathers,’ to our very own parents and mentors. We may even be questioned ourselves. This, too, is what education is surely for. And so Aristotle, not among the apostles of an inclusive equality, nonetheless calls us to it as educators. After all, he chose to give the desire for knowledge very deeply connected roots indeed, in the nature we all share.

For Minnich, there is something fundamentally human about our desire to know as well as our desire to create meaning and to be mutually understood. Similarly, philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007) in her book *Epistemic Injustice* described the harm done by what she termed “testimonial injustice.”

The primary harm of testimonial injustice is that to be wronged in one’s capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. When one is undermined or otherwise wronged in a capacity essential to human value, one suffers an intrinsic injustice. (p. 44)

What Minnich is committed to and Fricker supports, is the idea that an invitation to create meaningful knowledge with others in a respectful, just, mutually

responsible environment is as intrinsic to our humanity as food, shelter and family. When we are prevented or mischaracterized in our desire to know and make meaning, we are harmed on a fundamental human level. Moreover, as Minnich has consistently pointed out, our desire to participate in learning communities should not be premised solely on what goods and services our efforts can produce, but rather on the common good of human flourishing, the “roses” to accompany the “bread” in Oppenheim’s poem to which she refers.

With the increasing “corporatization” of the university and the demand for educators to quantify the practical outcomes of teaching and learning, a voice like Minnich’s is rare and invaluable. Minnich reminds us of where we have come from but also more importantly, where we could go from here. Transforming knowledge into a commodity to be bought and sold by the highest bidder is not progress. Under the guise of austerity, cuts to education are all too common while access to higher education is increasingly difficult for those with fewer resources. We are at a pivotal point in the construction and production of knowledge. Respecting our human desire to know as an intrinsic desire to investigate and create *value* in terms of responsibility, justice, critical reflection and care is a real possibility after 2,000 years of history as well as the efforts of social justice activists and scholars. Unfortunately, this potential to transform our understanding of knowledge is overshadowed by the rhetoric of profit and bottom lines. Minnich reminds us that it is not impractical to prioritize human value and that, in fact, the real bottom line will be measured by how well we incorporate the lessons of the past in our transformation of the future.

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“Democratizing Education”: To Fulfill Our Responsibility

Katherine Jelly

“All men by nature desire to know.” When Elizabeth Minnich invites us to reflect with her on Aristotle’s words and on their implications for higher education, she asks us to think carefully about each of Aristotle’s terms – “all,” “men,” “nature,” “know” – which raise such significant questions, alone and together, about the purposes, practices and possibilities of education. These questions, of course, are not new: How far have we come in making education available to “all”? How, where, when do we continue to exclude? How far have we moved beyond the exclusive term “men,” which continues to constrain and distort our inquiry and educational offerings? How far have we come in opening our definitions of “nature” to move toward more expansive, more equitable conceptualizations of the “natural”? How do we remain constrained by these paradigmatic, oppressive notions? Finally, what does it mean to “know”? What can one claim to “know”? Who defines what is “known”? And these are only the obvious questions. As Minnich says, “We could generate controversial tomes about each of those, and here they are in relation.” Yes, each of these terms is fraught; each has carried meanings that, over time, have served to limit, distort and exclude. Each has, with examination and reconsideration, gained more capacious meaning and potential; yet we must continue to hold up each term to rigorous and critical scrutiny.

When Minnich notes how key it is that *all* desire to know, when she points to questions that references to *nature* necessarily raise, and questions so illustratively what it means to *know*, she encourages us to plumb not only what Aristotle meant but also what thinking with him and with each other about his words *can* mean. And admitting that “we may find our greatest inspiration in sources that later we also must question . . .” she intends both to draw inspiration from *and* to question his thought. Responding to Minnich deserves the careful attention to her words that she has given to Aristotle’s. So, respecting her call to *thinking*, I would like to try to think with her as she was thinking with Aristotle and her other “thinking friends” – both to appreciate her ideas and to offer questions, as she has invited us to do.

How apt that she turns first to W.E.B. DuBois’ conviction that the “human soul . . . seeks to know itself and the world about it,” and then to Oppenheim’s poem:

“Hearts starve as well as bodies; give us bread, but give us roses!” Yes, Minnich says, despite the forces seeking to deny this yearning, every human being has a desire to know. And so, yes, because of shared need and because some are denied, “education raises the issue of equality, so also of justice, so also of freedom.” Opening education to all, providing *equal* education becomes a profoundly moral effort. Similarly, what we mean by *nature*, how we define what is *natural*, has served not just to distort but also to “hierarchically divide,” as human beings have been sorted and ranked “within systems of dominance.” Offering examples with which we are by now familiar, Minnich writes, “I trust we know that this, too, is dangerous.” Dangerous indeed, and leading to deep, pervasive injustice and damage.

It is our so-called *knowledge* of nature, Minnich argues, that has fostered this injustice, exclusion and suffering. Turning here to Hannah Arendt, Minnich reminds us that “knowledge . . . is a world-making activity” and “world-making is a moral and a political act.” So-called knowledge thus can be freeing or oppressive, illuminating or distorting. “We can all adduce . . . examples of . . . knowledge . . . gone wrong,” Minnich points out. Thus we must both continue to question its truth claims and recognize that even “more genuinely inclusive knowledge” must in turn be subject to deep examination. “[O]thers will [be] questioning us.” As well they – and we ourselves – should.

And here Minnich brings us to her formulation of thinking, so central to her thesis, and perhaps not so familiar as her earlier points regarding knowledge and nature. Rejecting current, widely employed notions of critical thinking, which suggest questioning, examining, developing rationale for an argument, Minnich argues that real thinking is not “merely academic,” but should rather “reflect around and about things, including ourselves. . . . [T]hinking re-opens knowledge.” It is this openness, Minnich suggests, that characterizes SUNY Empire State College’s mentoring model and makes such “close thinking relationships between learners and mentors . . . not just a fine thing for the learner, but a necessary thing for the mentor – and crucial for the health and safety of their, and our, shared worlds.” So we must practice “the arts of thinking,” and not merely “critical thinking” as it has been narrowly defined – and, I would argue, ironically enough, technically conceived.

Such inquiry, Minnich suggests, based in a “regenerative tension of thinking/ knowing/thinking . . . constantly refresh[es] knowledge.” “An honest inquirer,” she continues, “of course, precisely does not know where she or he is headed.” And so,

“we have to take the risk of genuinely thinking with our students.” Yes. Precisely. Contrary to the pervasive model of ‘teacher-asks-question-to-which-teacher-knows-answer,’ authentic teaching and mentoring – genuinely searching, engaged – rarely poses such a closed question. Rather, we must raise, and help our students to raise, queries to which we do not already have an “answer,” queries that open us to new understanding. Such queries are not only about equality in the relationship, about “thinking with friends”; they also are about *real* inquiry – inquiry that digs and opens.

And when Minnich suggests that through “such thinking ... we ... become able to judge, to choose, to change – which also means, to be responsible,” she is pointing, I would argue, to a necessary link between our thought and action, between thinking and the significance of what we think. Yes, we think – about ourselves and others, about our own and others’ views; and through doing so, we question, and deepen and question again our understanding. And we gain awareness and insight that not only allow for examining our values and giving voice to our views, but also support our agency and compel our action. So Minnich seems not to be letting us off easily. As educators engaged in the important, endlessly challenging project of supporting *all* people in their desire to know and of subjecting that knowing to “genuinely shared inquiry,” to radically *regenerative* thinking, we must not only share and examine what is known; we must take responsibility for what our tentatively held understandings imply, what they *mean* – morally and politically.

Yet, in my view, Minnich *is* letting us – by which I mean here Empire State College – off easily. At the end of her talk, she says, “I ... happily trust that you will continue to teach us all what it means to democratize education by how you continue doing so.” She commends us. But are we “doing so”? Might she, more helpfully, have *challenged* us not just to continue in the ways in which we *are* “doing so” but also to *do so* in the ways in which we are *not*?

I am referring here to some of the worrisome trends that I see, not just at ESC, but at other institutions of higher education, even so-called progressive higher education, as well:

As we move toward greater instrumentality in our academic programs – that is, toward supporting our students’ vocational goals – are we being vigilant in guarding an enduringly critical stance in relation to all that we support our students in pursuing? Are we slipping into merely supporting their learning what

is “known”? Minnich’s contrasting of thinking and knowledge is key here. As mentors and teachers, we are indeed responsible – not for our students’ merely learning what is currently accepted as known but rather for joining with them in thinking, in raising questions about that so-called knowledge. Only in that relation – to one another and to the knowledge we seek – are we enlisting education in the service of equality, justice and freedom. Instrumental and vocational goals are not problematic in themselves; nor do studies in pursuit of such goals preclude genuine, critical thinking. But we must be mindful always to situate such studies in this fundamentally reflective, critical stance.

Second, as we in higher education adopt new technologies available to us – technologies that can serve to open new worlds and to make education more accessible, we must be mindful, always, of how these technologies affect our ways of knowing, forms of pedagogy, and modes of relating to one another. Awareness and intentionality are key as we struggle not to be driven *by* but to make thoughtful use *of* the tools we employ. In our pedagogy, including the many modes and opportunities we provide to our students, we must be vigilant in examining our practice, whether in relation to how we work with students or to how we define and package so-called knowledge. “Information,” for example, the term so frequently used now when referring to material of any kind found on the Internet, is not knowledge; and “knowledge” is not, as Minnich points out, “thinking.” Referring to any and all that one reads on the Internet as information is not only a slippery slope; it reflects deep misunderstanding of the various purposes of the material being viewed and of the critical stance needed in relation to it. Similarly, calling ever-expanding communication on the Internet “increased connection” does not make it so; while the potential for more collaboration is there, so, too, is the potential for increased isolation.

Lastly, in this time when we at Empire State College are being challenged to re-envision our college, including our administrative structures, pedagogical models and academic programs, we must remind ourselves, as Minnich would say, not just to *think*, but to think *with* our “thinking friends.” If we at ESC are engaging in genuine, shared inquiry, our inquiry will demand change – and not just in *what* we think about our structures and models but in *how* we think with one another about these. We will need not just to step outside of “received” knowledge, to think newly about our systems; we also will need to step outside of constraining hierarchical relationships that can block openness and trust and distort the conversation. We will need to inquire and evaluate *with* our thinking friends. Dewey argued that if we cannot democratize our own, internal

institutional communities, we cannot democratize the education we offer, and we cannot help to democratize the society we serve. We need to democratize what we do – our purposes, our pedagogies, our processes *and* our relationships – if we are going to democratize education.

So, both pedagogically and organizationally, I would argue that Minnich’s commendation might more aptly have been a challenge: a challenge to us to re-examine all that we do, to move beyond a preoccupation with “survival or with trivia,” and to dig deeply into the questions before us, questions that matter because education is a fundamentally moral and political undertaking. We are, as she says, responsible. We must *think*, seriously, about all aspects of our enterprise if we are to fulfill our responsibility well – to our students and to society.

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Joan Mellon, *Snap!*, 2013. Oil on Canvas, 20 x 16 inches.



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