

## CHAPTER 21

### *Epilogue: Democratic Eruptions*

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The decisive difference between the “infinite impossibilities” on which the reality of our earthly life rests and the miraculous character inherent in those events which establish historical reality is that, in the realm of human affairs, we know the author of the “miracles.” It is men who perform them—men who because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action can establish a reality of their own.<sup>1</sup>

In his foreword to this volume, Gary Fenstermacher suggests that “too many public discussions on education are dominated by too few ideas.” *Why Do We Educate? Renewing the Conversation* aims at contributing important, yet generally neglected, ideas for public debate. No “answers” are proffered, but perhaps some extraordinary conversation starters are. In this final chapter, we shift the focus to Fenstermacher’s other concern: that too few people are engaged in educational conversations, that is, current discussions are not fully public, fully democratic. We follow Hannah Arendt (above) in accepting that humans are given the remarkable gift of making their own lives—and the accompanying responsibility to use their freedom to act, to make their lives worthwhile or flourishing. Education prepares us for accepting this responsibility, that is, makes it possible for us to live well and to live well with others.

Indeed, democracy and education can be understood as two sides of the same coin. Democracies ideally provide, as our Part II contributors affirm, the contexts and conditions where freedom and action can be learned and pursued. Education adds the dispositions, skills, and understandings to make democracy, that “infinite improbability,” even imaginable. Needed to link freedom, action, education, and democracy, we believe, is a robust conception of the public, perhaps the most endangered of these concepts because it is so taken for granted in Western democracies. We contend that attempts to renew the conversation about education in a democratic society need to be grounded in an understanding of the possibilities of public and private spaces for dialogue.

In this chapter we use two sources to grapple with how to foster public discussion of education: our research on the role of public and private spaces in fostering dialogue, and our experience as teachers working in institutions that aim to foster education. Both sources help us to understand the depth of the challenge we must confront and how we might begin to use our freedom to act together.

### A Brief History of the Western Public and Private<sup>2</sup>

Any historical account of the public in Western society begins with the ancient Greek *polis*, the public space of Athenian society, in which people assembled to appear to one another as equals and regulate their lives together. Public morality and governance were constructed in the forum of the Greek city-state and kept separate from the private world of the household with its concerns for family and economic life. Public and private had distinct “out there” and “in here” locations and populations; only male citizens could appear in public where significant matters of common concern would be decided. All other people were confined to the private sphere. It was a Golden Age of Democracy—for those few allowed to participate. The rigid separation of private from public continued in the Roman interpretation of the public space, the *res publica*, but with the collapse of the Roman Empire and the development of feudal society, private and public became separate spaces with different populations: for example, the public noble and the private serf. Louis XIV could accurately say “*État, c’est moi*” (“I am the state”).

The collapse of feudal society with its reliance on traditional forms of authority invested in the clergy and monarchy led to the ascendancy of new ways of regulating common life based on the ideas of the Enlightenment—especially human reason. The dominant intellectual figure of the age, Immanuel Kant, explicitly linked freedom and reason, explaining, “Reason depends on . . . freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens, each one of whom must be permitted to express his reservations, indeed even his veto, without holding back.”<sup>3</sup> For Kant, reason had to be tested publicly (even if only hypothetically) and new public spaces briefly emerged where some citizens could appear and test their reason together. While public and private still had distinct locations, it was possible for some individuals to move between the salons, taverns, and coffee houses of London, Paris, and Berlin.

Writers, artists, civil servants, aristocrats, and business people from different classes, religions, and genders were able to gather, debate,

and be seen and heard by others in a new kind of *polis*, albeit one still restricted. These public spaces, however, were short-lived because of structural features. Their continuous expansion eventually changed their character; the “rational-critical debate” that was possible in face-to-face encounters over beer or coffee was no longer possible on an expanded scale. Soon debates among citizens were replaced by “minorities of specialists who put their reason to use nonpublicly and the great mass of consumers whose receptiveness is public but uncritical.”<sup>4</sup> The public space was dominated by emerging professional bureaucracies. The consequences are predictable: Democratic dialogue in public spaces where all are presumed to have equal status is not easy to accomplish in hierarchical institutions where some are “more equal” than others.

While public spheres briefly appeared and then disappeared, new private spheres of market and family were created alongside the professional elites. Control of work moved from individual wage laborers or property owners to large administrative/industrial complexes with accompanying bureaucracies. Simultaneously, the family, largely relieved of its economic power, became even more private, more intimate, and increasingly vulnerable to incursions from government agencies and institutions. The changes in both the public and private spheres resulted in a “re-feudalization” of society in the nineteenth and especially twentieth centuries, as professional bureaucracies assumed public power while the administrative state penetrated what had previously been private. “State and society, once distinct, became interlocked,”<sup>5</sup> leaving few autonomous public or private spaces.

### The Challenge of Creating Public Spaces in Schools

We seem to have backed ourselves into a corner: a good and worthwhile life involves our exercising our freedom to act in the world, which depends partly on our education, which, in turn, is decided by debate—in a democratic public sphere that is difficult (if not impossible) to find in increasingly bureaucratized societies. Thomas Green captures the critical role of the public in democracies:

Without public speech, the public dies. Politics degenerates into polemics, becomes partisan in the worst sense, even venomous, and we are left with nothing we can reasonably speak of as public education, public service, or public life. . . . We are thrust into a world of plurality; we must be nurtured to enter whatever public there be. The one is a consequence of birth, the other an achievement of life. It is, moreover, an educational achievement.<sup>6</sup>

Some contemporary thinkers despair of the possibility of genuine democratic dialogue in societies where public opinion is too often a commodity to be measured, manufactured, and manipulated. The political philosopher Jürgen Habermas, for example, believes that the power relationships and ways of thinking characteristic of modern Western bureaucratic institutions severely constrain democratic dialogue: too few people have too much power to decide for others. As a consequence, he advocates the rejuvenation of civil society, that is, the non-governmental agencies largely outside existing power configurations. He contends that amorphous discussions that begin on the periphery of society can eventually “force their way into newspapers and interested associations, clubs, professional organizations, academies, and universities. They find forums, citizen initiatives, and other platforms before they catalyze the growth of social movements and new subcultures.”<sup>7</sup> His examples include the successes of environmental activists and of the civil rights and feminist movements.

An educational example of what Habermas describes might be the parental lobby for special needs children. When we began teaching forty years ago, students with special needs were not in the schools in which we worked: At best, they had been placed in separate institutions. Over time, public discussions—initiated by the parents of children with special needs—worked on the schools in a “siege-like manner,” creating the possibility of educating all young people together in some meaningful way. Certainly we hope that the ideas in this volume will stimulate multiple overlapping conversations about education and democracy in coffee shops, book clubs, and community centers as well as in public bureaucracies and universities—and the halls of educational policymaking.

But we also hope the ideas will provoke discussion within existing institutions: in staffrooms, boardrooms, union meetings, administrator conferences, and parent associations. We are more hopeful than Habermas is that democratic dialogue can be approximated within modern organizations. While we admit we both have invested our careers in the very institutions that he criticizes, we have both experienced eruptions of democratic discussion in those institutions. As students, teachers, principals, superintendents, and professors, we have often been part of wonderful conversations where all participated, all listened deeply to our other dialogic partners, and all benefited from the experience. At board meetings the airing of a student or teacher complaint would break out into a general discussion about our adult obligations to children and the purposes of education. In a staff meeting, a

discussion about student fundraising led to a discussion about the ethical and political responsibilities of teachers and schools. In the staff room, a complaint about a child led to a discussion of protection of children's privacy. In university classes a presentation on child abuse sparked a discussion about the public's intrusion into people's private lives.

As school superintendents, people officially charged with providing educational leadership, we set about making the eruptions more frequent. We reasoned that we needed a public space, much like that provided by the Greek *polis*, a place where people could talk with one another about matters of import, but a place where all were welcome. We quickly realized that we had multiple opportunities for dialogue—when we learned to recognize them. We had board meetings every week, principals' meetings every month, meetings every day all day long for a myriad of reasons. And we reasoned that having those meetings could not be justified if they weren't mostly educational (considering that education was the enterprise in which we claimed to be engaged). We concluded that each meeting, including those that happened on the spur of the moment, provided an opportunity to discuss education. Moreover, our community schools and school boards were still places or spaces where governments ensured our freedom to deliberate locally, not appropriating to themselves the authority to be arbiter on all schooling matters. We were sitting on educational gold mines and hadn't realized it.

Our enthusiasm was not shared by those around us. We were initially greeted with puzzlement, some skepticism, and significant suspicion from the people—trustees, school principals, and teachers—we worked with. True, they were intrigued by the possibility of creating an inclusive dialogue as a way of being together. The idea of face-to-face dialogue about larger, significant human purposes that might have broad positive consequences resonated with them. Their experience, however, was that attempts at dialogue soon degenerated into monologues, or worse, pretend dialogues where the answers and the outcomes had been predetermined and the activity became guessing how to get there.

As we began to ask educational questions, we learned three things. First, it was clear that most people were not content with just being successful school functionaries; they wanted to be educators. This was a challenge: If we wished to be educational leaders, new language and new structures were needed. Second, schooling required, indeed commanded, the organizational imperatives of policies, budgets, blueprints, directives, and accountability schemes supported by its ideological vocabulary. We could not abandon this language or these structures.

Finally, we were challenged to reconcile the competing educational and schooling agendas. We seemed to lack the means by which to change the above situations—certainly, arguing successfully that they existed and were misguided was not good enough. We had to act and, as one of our principals put it, “we had to do everything at once one thing at a time.”

### Creating Private Spaces to Prepare for Public Dialogue

Our initial efforts to create robust public dialogues about education regularly flopped. People had difficulty understanding both what we wanted to discuss with them and why. Both reactions are understandable. The Garrison Keillor column mentioned in the foreword epitomizes the difficulty: Keillor is confident that education involves “test results,” leaving only two topics to talk about: how to get good test results and who to blame when the test results are not so good. His understanding reflects the current state of public discussion of education and schooling. The *school* reform literature (we are aware of no comparable *educational* reform literature) conceives of schooling as primarily about preparing people for their role in the national or international economy and uses the assumptions of economic development of the mid-twentieth century to conceive the entire enterprise as a private exchange of goods. The rich discussion about what counts as education to which the contributors to this volume refer is not on the public agenda (and sadly, not on the academic agenda for most faculties of education either).

Even more puzzling to many of the people we talked with initially was the goal of the discussions we were trying to initiate. What was the superintendents’ “grand design”? We did not have answers that we intended to inflict on them; indeed, we were not aiming for “answers” at all. We hoped to create a genuine dialogue in which all would share their understanding of education so that collectively we could better understand. Unanimity or even consensus was not only unlikely, but also undesirable—we would all agree about what counts as education when we all concurred about our life purposes and how we would pursue those purposes. Not likely. Truth be told, promoting discussion that would lead to *dissensus* is generally not considered a good career move for school superintendents.

We retreated. Those responsible for the educational leadership of the district regularly created private time together where we could talk about what we were attempting, share our frustrations, and celebrate what we believed we were learning. We discovered, ironically, that

creating public spaces required the construction of private spaces to prepare for the public. While the ideal public might be characterized as a space where people appear to one another and debate how they will live together, the ideal private might be understood as a sanctuary where people are hidden from view and safe from interference—where their ruminations did not have to pass the test of public scrutiny. Initially, outside our own group we met with small groups with similar institutional responsibilities, groups of middle school principals, professional development committees, and parent council executives. As we gained more confidence we declared some administrators' meetings, in-committee parts of board meetings, and gatherings associated with our invited lecture series as "private times," meaning that while the ideas discussed in those settings might very well be publicized at some point, the people involved would make no public appearance as individuals. In other words, ideas might be attributed to groups rather than to individuals.

We began to understand private and public as involving different conditions of communicating with other people.<sup>8</sup> If the private is indeed to be a sanctuary, people must be able to see themselves as relatively safe, that is, they must be able to trust the intentions of particular others. The public, however, provides no comparable safety. Other people are unknown to us and their intentions suspect. At best, we can act with confidence that they will respect the collectively agreed rules for participation. Seligman captures the distinction when he contends that trust in people in private must become confidence in institutions in public.<sup>9</sup> Public and private so understood are not simple dichotomies or even places (as they have been throughout much Western history), but a kind of sliding scale of mutuality and vulnerability. Armed with our new distinctions, we returned to the public of the school district.

We went back with a new language. We no longer talked about resources and products and, as time went on, infrequently used the terms pupils or students. We talked about children and young people—and we were amazed by the power of a shared humanizing vocabulary. It's a lot harder to imagine manipulating a child, especially a real child with a real name, for arbitrary purposes than to think in terms of changing raw material into material products by some predetermined processes as if every child is alike. It is equally hard to preconceive what each child ought to turn into even when we do think we know her or him. It has proved a lot easier for most educators to see themselves as part of an adult population with responsibility for the education of all children than as civil jobholders, or even as professional champions of

teacher rights in an adversarial system. Most important, we distinguished between “education” and “schooling.”

Education involves everyone attempting to lead, and to help others lead, good and worthwhile lives. All must be involved as equals in ongoing debates about what counts as education and how this might be determined. Schooling, on the other hand, involves the contingent institutionalization of education. Some degree of consensus about education and some differentiation of responsibility must happen for schooling to be possible, but in a democracy that consensus must always be open and challengeable. All citizens have educational responsibility; only some people have the particular responsibility of teaching grade five, or administering the school or the school district. We emerged into the public of our community determined that we had dual responsibilities: as citizens we had to talk about education; as superintendents, we had to make education more feasible.

We also brought a new set of strategies to promote public discussion. We reasoned that other people needed the private time to think and prepare for the public arena, so we used our administrative power to facilitate that possibility. We encouraged and promoted the idea of protected private thinking time and space for principals, teachers, students, and others. We emphasized that public appearance and public performance must reflect personal excellence, reflecting meaningful use of private time. Finally we insisted that private/public considerations are not only prerequisite but also essential aspects of educational renewal. To accomplish this, we had to build in private space, time to stop and think—and to refine. For example, sometimes we had meetings where the only agenda was for each high school principal and vice-principal to tell a story about a school initiative or how their school dealt with particular children or issues. When everyone had told their story the meeting was over. Other times, with the board’s approval, we set trustee meetings aside for discussion only. In all cases, administrative decisions were held in abeyance—the only agenda was dialogue in order to understand better. The consequences were, at first, unexpected: better decisions, better responses to school problems, increased confidence and a renewed sense of common purpose (“we’re all in this together”), less seeking of localized advantage or personal gain.

For this renewal we looked to two sources. The first included scholars, some in education, some in other fields, who wrote about what we were experiencing and helped us to see things anew and to understand in different and better ways. In particular, we searched for vocabulary

and ways to talk about education and democracy. Many authors are present in this book in one way or another, some as chapter authors. One whose work is referred to in several chapters (including earlier in this one), Jürgen Habermas, is someone who has thought carefully about the requisites for democratic societies, including the public-private relationship and the tendency of hierarchical administrative systems to dominate or “colonize” human communities.<sup>10</sup> While Habermas is pessimistic about the possibility of making Western institutions fully democratic, we found resources in his work that helped us to promote democratic eruptions in schools and school communities, making them more (although certainly not fully) democratic. He helped us understand the inevitable clash between education and schooling and the importance of both maintaining the distinction and working out the complex relationship between the two. Indeed, while administrative power can be used to squelch democratic dialogue, under some conditions it can also be employed to promote public dialogue.

Administration is, of course, necessary for the effective management of the large, complex organizations which now are the reality for most of us. Organizational structures, with their divisions of labor, policies, procedures, and other standard practices, are the way large systems keep their promises to people both in terms of interactions and results. We need to know, with a high level of certainty, when the school bus will pick up our children. We need to know who to go to if our children, ourselves, or others, need help. We need to know that the people who teach our children are qualified to do so. We need to have a general sense about what will happen in emergencies of many different kinds. We need to know that our schools are safe places for children. It requires little imagination to understand that we could not do without reliable systems that deliver on their promises for the treatment of people in the system. No one in the school district, for example, could disregard or abandon their responsibilities as trustees, administrators, teachers, secretaries, or bus drivers while we talked about education. What we had to learn to do, however, was separate our private and public civic discussions concerned with education from our conversations about how to fulfill our institutional responsibilities: Were we talking as individual citizens or system administrators, for example? Hannah Arendt succinctly captures this distinction when she writes: “The moment we want to say *who* somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying *what* he is.”<sup>11</sup> This was not an easy distinction to make, and never an absolute, but one that we discovered many people found made sense.

We should acknowledge, however, that making such distinctions is extraordinarily difficult in large, hierarchical administrative systems. For many enterprises (e.g., manufacturing) this is not a problem; for schooling that aims to promote education in a democratic society, the problem is critical. There are real questions as to whether our schooling systems need to be such huge enterprises, with multiple hierarchical layers to “manage” large numbers of people. One casualty of the pressure to make schools and school districts larger with the avowed aim of increasing efficiency is the human conversation that we believe is essential to both education and democracy. When the public becomes too large and too distant from the private spaces available to people, and the administrative hierarchy too steep and cumbersome, face-to-face dialogue becomes impossible. Efficiency and legitimacy are always in tension in bureaucracies; it seems to us that too often the former has trumped the latter in organizing schooling.

Indeed, if our school system had been too large, we would not have been able to access the other key source available to us for renewing our understanding of education: the people in our community. We learned to create opportunities for people to tell their stories and we listened carefully. The Educated Person Exercise exemplifies this attempt, but we discovered that we were surrounded by opportunities to learn from people—if only we stopped to listen. We heard stories about school staffs’ “adopting” children who had been moved from school to school because they had burned their bridges by their bad behavior, educational assistants who fed children who came to school with no lunches, special needs parents who said the school was the only safe and supportive place for them as parents of children who didn’t fit easily into their communities, teachers who personally sponsored children to camps and bought their school supplies, principals who praised, and prized, the work of volunteers, high school children who campaigned against racism, homophobia, and/or homelessness and for environmental integrity and social justice. There was no end to the work that was being done to enhance the lives of our community and the people in them.

The stories, particularly when they made a public appearance in some respectful way, provided a very different source of educational renewal than academic books and papers. They spoke to the human “miracles” that exist among all the improbabilities of which Arendt spoke. They interrupted the seemingly inevitable patterns of the prevailing conversations by introducing something new. In general, we did not discover new conceptual frameworks, new vocabulary, or general-

izable insights. Instead, we learned about the people we lived alongside, how they made sense of their lives and what was important to them. Thomas Green describes these as “umbilical stories”:

In the interior conversation going on as the speech of another campaigns as candidate for my own, some reasons offered may be clothed as arguments, but others arrive simply as umbilical stories. They stem from a narrative of memory, and their recitation presents neither arguments nor truth claims. It simply calls forth objects of recollection, making them present to some community of memory. Their recitation by some invites their recitation by others.<sup>12</sup>

The umbilical stories that make up our conceptions of education and democracy need to be told and re-told—constantly renewed—”so they don’t fade away as in a dream.”<sup>13</sup>

One such true story helped us begin to understand the complex relationship between the public and private—and the special place of the school between the two:

The phone rang in the principal’s home. It was four in the morning. Who could be calling at this time of the night? Billy (six years old and a much ravaged family sexual abuse victim) seemed to have disappeared, meaning run away, from his group home again. The police had been summoned and were out looking for him. Could the principal offer any clues to where he might have gone because he seemed to have connected with the school in a very positive way? The principal responded that he wasn’t sure he could help but when he went to school in the morning, he would check with Billy’s teachers to see if there might be clues to where he might have gone.

At five the phone rang again. Billy had been found—at the school. This scenario was repeated at least three more times—Billy kept running away to school. School seemed to be the one place in his life where he felt safe.<sup>14</sup>

### Connecting Public and Private

Billy’s story captures how schools exist in-between—between childhood and adulthood, between home and the world, between public and private, between institutions and communities, and can provide important opportunities to understand how the public dialogue so crucial to education and democracy is related to preparation in private. Indeed, the school’s capacity to educate depends largely on its understanding of both private and public purposes. For Billy, the school was a sanctuary where he knew he would be accepted, and “home” was dangerous. For many children, this is their reality. Schools can also be places where, as

children age, they have increased opportunities to play at, and experiment with, democratic ideas and activities in safe places protected from the actions of other children and shielded from the actions of adults whose intentions may be less than judicious and honorable. We are reminded of Sarah's story:

Sarah arrived in Miss Smith's grade four classroom in September with her pencils, books, and teddy bear, but without her voice. Sarah was a select mute, that is, she could talk, but chose not to. She followed Miss Smith's lessons and completed her work without difficulty. But she didn't talk to her teacher or her peers (who had become accustomed to Sarah's silence).

Gradually Miss Smith made the classroom a safe place for Sarah, beginning with conversations with Jane (Sarah's teddy). Sarah began staying after school and hanging around Miss Smith's desk along with Jane and another student, Mary. Eventually Sarah began to talk with Mary and Miss Smith—but only after school. In class, Sarah remained mute, but continued to attend and began to communicate non-verbally.

When Miss Smith thought that Sarah was ready, she talked with her about perhaps answering the math quiz the next day. Sarah agreed and they practiced together. When Miss Smith asked for answers the following day, Miss Smith called on Sarah, Sarah answered, and Miss Smith thanked her and went on with the lesson. Later Miss Smith called Sarah into the hallway so they could celebrate privately; this triumph was followed by many others until the climactic event: Sarah's speech at the spring school assembly. Sarah had joined the public of the school and Jane was relegated to the private of the cloakroom.

The evidence is clear. Schools are one of the few places where all are supposed to be welcomed and celebrated, no matter who they are or how they show up. At their best, schools become sanctuaries where talented, responsible adults help children figure out who they are and who they want to become.

Schools, however, are also public places where society attempts to make its purposes manifest, its principles explicit, and its needs apparent. The school is intended as a site of justice for equal opportunity and other forms of equality. It can be a place where nonviolence as a way of living together is learned. In schools, children are supposed to be socialized to the mores and conventions and introduced to the ideals to which our societies aspire, sometimes in contradistinction from those actually practiced in other places, including the home. We hope that in school young people learn that they achieve individuality not only for its own

sake but also for the sake of others and for the collective other, the public. Another story serves well here:

Mary, a very competent, outgoing and confident Grade 12 student, was being a particular thorn in the side of the board and the superintendent. We were involved in a public consultation process about a major reorganization of the school division—not closing schools but changing the communities and the children and young people they served. Mary, who was graduating and therefore not personally affected, nevertheless showed up at meeting after meeting criticizing the scheme, often being harshly critical of individuals on the board or the superintendent. To top it off the board, just prior to a meeting, was informed that Mary was being granted an interview on a popular local radio station.

It's not hard to imagine how the discussion started at the meeting. Mary needed to be put in her place, "shut up." The heated discussion about how to do this without looking like heavies worried only about our own credibility raged on for well nigh an hour. This, however, was a "private" meeting and after exhaustion and frustration was about to carry the day, one wise board member, who had been listening more than speaking (more in her own private world than in ours) spoke up. "*May I interrupt?* I've been thinking—isn't this just what we want our young people to do when they get out of school—isn't this just what we've been talking about when we talked about the 'educated person' *being a democratic citizen?*"

SILENCE. Then one after the other, all present entered a much different conversation. The agenda turned from how to shut Mary down to how we could make sure that she made a good appearance in public. In institutional terms, this meant, "how do we try to ensure that one of our students has been served well by her education for which we are responsible?" The superintendent was requested to attempt to meet with Mary to help her prepare her best argument, which he did.

Green captures this purpose of education neatly, describing it as the formation of a public:

I mean to be asking an educational question: What needs to be done, what skills acquired, what practices employed so that a public may emerge from the plurality in which we begin and so that it may be sustained for all the years of our lives and our children's lives?<sup>15</sup>

As superintendents trying to promote a public discussion of education, we had to learn some of the lessons that we regularly saw expert teachers teaching children: how to participate in public dialogue by

preparing carefully and deliberately in private. Testing the goodness of those private spaces involves public examination. Our responsibility as educational leaders (and not just system administrators) involves creating safe places for people to talk about education, where they can develop their understanding together—and then support them as they go into the public so those understandings are shared and tested in dialogue with other people who may have different perspectives, different ways of seeing the world, different notions of a good and worthwhile life and how it might be fostered. Like good teachers, we had to put our “best” thinking out there—in board, administrator, and other meetings; at legislative hearings; in conferences; in speaking and in writing—and also had to provide opportunities for others with whom we worked to do the same. Our strategy is not an “answer” in any conventional sense. Fostering democratic dialogue about education means starting over and over again: individual people with unique ideas in particular contexts at various times will generate diverse understandings (or not). That’s the curse—and joy—of education in a democratic society.

### An Invitation to Dialogue

We believe that the following words of a Navajo elder in *The Wind Won't Know Me* capture our challenge and its importance:

What is a human being? What do you mean by that? Aren't we all human beings? And she says no. “A human being thinks with his heart, a person who thinks of the good all the time, that has respect for life around him, that has respect for even the smallest rock. A human being is a person who talks to rocks, a person who thinks the rock will talk to him and teach him a lesson. The smallest thing that Mother Nature has made available to us. A human being must understand why we are here on earth, why the plants are growing, why we have the four seasons. Why we have the heavens, that is a human being, somebody that understands nature. Somebody who thinks he's not better than anyone else. That thinks everybody is equal no matter what color they are or what language they speak. That is a human being.” She says, “I don't want life to end. I want my children to grow and reproduce. And I want my children to get along with the white children, learn to share and live like human beings.”<sup>16</sup>

What an invitation to further dialogue! We hope that *Why Do We Educate?* is full of similar invitations for thinking about education, invitations that address the aboriginal grandmother's wonderings about who we are, what we have become, and who we want to become (and who, not what, we want our children to become). Contributors are open

about their fears, frustrations, and hopes, but determined not to yield to those who would hijack education or shut them out of the educational conversation. They hold it as a right, indeed a civic responsibility, to enter the fray that is democratic dialogue.

However, a right is not a right without the provisions and conditions to make it achievable and sustainable, that is, the requisite private and public spaces. It is of some significance to us, as it was to our author-colleagues, that if we are to take the idea of education for democracy seriously, the talk about it must be regular, frequent, and open to all. Our authors have attempted to write for all readers, to open doors to the educational conversation for all to participate. Part of that hospitality involves providing appropriate guideposts or “wayfinders” helping people find their way into the educational conversation, with the realization that these openings are merely gateways into conversations that are both new and familiar.

Arendt’s words bear repeating here: “What saves the affairs of mortal men from inherent futility is nothing but this incessant talk about them, which in turn remains futile unless certain concepts, certain guideposts for future remembrance, and even for sheer reference, arise out of it.”<sup>17</sup> We hope that each chapter is a gateway to a conversation that must be continually revisited and explored. Each chapter attempts to raise questions about what was true and good, what is true and good, and what will be true and good. We believe that education is created among people as they reveal their anxieties and their aspirations, and their understandings about historical events, current happenings, and imagined future possibilities. Our writers offer their references somewhat tentatively, with a kind of courageous humility: “This is the way I’m thinking about this right now; maybe tomorrow it will be different.”

Our contributing authors also understand, as we came to understand in our work, that the right time to start is always right now with the opportunities and tools we have at hand. They demonstrate how to be expert and precise in employing our most important tool: language. Our words reveal our prejudices and intentions, putting them “out there” for everyone to judge. In a somewhat ironic twist, the implication is that the way out of our current dilemmas is the same as what got us in—more writing, more talk—but in more democratic spaces. Finally, they also communicate some urgency for democratic dialogue about education rooted in, and marked by, thoughtfulness and judgment. Being silent is not an option. Green laments that today few people speak powerfully about our ties to one another. He writes:

It is precisely this [public] silence about the nature of our presence to one another and from generation to generation, silence about the nature of the political office we share as citizens, that has permitted us to engage in a virtual deluge of deeply confused talk on [school] reform. We live in the presence of a broad movement aimed directly at the revision of schooling, yet the movement remains virtually silent on the role of education in the formation of the public.<sup>18</sup>

The current school reform movement has left us wondering and worrying, feeling excluded and confused, even resentful. We're unconvinced, uneasy, silenced—and still we feel implicated. What to do now? Green's suggestion (and ours) is to speak publicly and to create opportunities for others to speak, thereby creating, again and again, our democratic citizenship, and thereby reaffirming the freedom and power of education.

#### NOTES

1. Hannah Arendt, "What Is Freedom?" in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), 171.
2. For discussions of the role of public and private in education see Gary D. Fenstermacher, "On Restoring Public and Private Life," in *The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling*, ed. John I. Goodlad and Timothy J. McMannon (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 55–71; and David Coulter, "Creating Common and Uncommon Worlds: Using Discourse Ethics to Decide Public and Private in Classrooms," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 34, no. 1 (2002): 25–42.
3. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A738/B766.
4. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 175.
5. Craig Calhoun, "Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. C. Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 21.
6. Thomas Green, *Voices: The Educational Formation of Conscience* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 149.
7. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1996), 381.
8. *Ibid.*, 366.
9. Adam. B. Seligman, *The Problem of Trust* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
10. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 66.
11. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 181.
12. Thomas Green, *Voices*, 160.
13. Idea taken from the wonderful conclusion to Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1993), 142. "But neither will they curse our memory because we permitted, through our silence, democracy to pass away as in a dream."
14. This story, as the others here, is based on an actual account—anonymity protected in all cases.

15. Thomas Green, *Voices*, 149.
16. Emily Benedek, *The Wind Won't Know Me: A History of the Navajo-Hopi Land Dispute* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 272.
17. Hannah Arendt, "The Revolutionary Tradition in Its Lost Treasure," in *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1963), 220.
18. Thomas Green, *Voices*, 149.