

Did I Teach Them That? The Implicit Power of Democratic Education

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Abstract

This article explores the implications of democratic education, not as isolated classroom exercises or even well-coordinated service projects, but as a general ethos that shapes institutions and subsequently becomes the greatest *teacher* of democratic values. In this article, the authors reflect on the general state of civic engagement in higher education, make a case for the importance of democratic civic learning, and finally issue a challenge to institutional leaders to think seriously about the environments in which students are educated.

Keywords: democracy; citizenship; voting; Corporatization; polis

In a recent edition of *Higher Education Exchange*, David Mathews (2011) begins by asserting that “the real school of education is, in fact, the entire institution itself; that is, the university or community college as a whole” (p. 3). He then asks readers to imagine the implications if this proposition were taken seriously. We accept Mathews’ challenge and explore the implications of democratic education, not as isolated classroom exercises or even well-coordinated service projects, but as a general ethos that shapes institutions and subsequently becomes the greatest *teacher* of democratic values.

In this article, we reflect on the general state of civic engagement in higher education, make a case for the importance of democratic civic learning, and finally issue a challenge to institutional leaders to think seriously about the environments in which students are educated. The environments in which students study not only affect how they learn, but also provide powerful (even if unintended) lessons that run counter to democratic ideals.

Democracy and Higher Education

American democracy is in a state of disarray and decline. In 2000, Robert Putnam’s groundbreaking book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* detailed the decades-long decline of citizenship and democracy in the United States. The recent *Crucible Moment* report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education cites a number of studies that further confirm this civic malaise. These findings include

- Among the 172 world democracies, the United States ranks 139th in voter participation. The report authors (McCormick Tribune Foundation, 2007) also note a dramatic decline in the “quantity and quality of civic education” (pp. 6-7).
- In 2010, only 24 percent of graduating high-school seniors scored at the proficient or advanced level in civics. There is now a decreasing trend based on data from 2006 and 1998 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).
- Among 14,000 college seniors surveyed in 2006 and 2007, the average score on a civic literacy exam was a failing grade of just over 50 percent (Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2007).

- Of 24,000 students surveyed, only one-third felt strongly that their civic awareness had expanded in college, that the campus had helped them learn the skills needed to effectively change society for the better, or that their commitment to improve society had grown (Dey et al., 2009).

All of this points to a sense of urgency to renew our democracy, and we argue that examining our collective commitment to civic learning is a key way of addressing this problem.

American higher education, almost since its inception, has been viewed as an important contributor to our democracy and as an agent in the shaping of its citizens. The Morrill Act of 1862 (the first federal legislation that led to the establishment of land-grant institutions) was passed with a clear recognition that higher education was not just about individual pursuits of happiness, but was intended to serve the common good of the nation. In the early twentieth century, John Dewey (1944/1916) made a compelling argument for the democratic function of our colleges and universities. After World War II, President Harry Truman appointed a commission to study American higher education—producing the landmark report entitled *Higher Education for American Democracy* (1947). More recently, scholars like philosopher Martha Nussbaum and education theorist Henry Giroux have made powerful arguments in defense of higher education's integral role in our democracy.

Nussbaum has championed the social and political benefits of education (particularly higher education) in works like *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (1997) and *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (2010). In the latter work, she claims that we are at a crucial crossroad:

Thirsty for national profit, nations, and their systems of education, are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive. If this trend continues, nations all over the world will soon be producing generations of useful machines, rather than complete citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition, and understand the significance of another person's sufferings and achievements. The future of the world's democracies hangs in the balance. (2010, p. 2)

For Nussbaum, the skills and attitudes that are crucial to a democracy are the kinds of skills and attitudes emphasized in a liberal arts education—one that teaches students quantitative skills and the fundamentals of scientific inquiry, but one that also emphasizes the arts and humanities (including the study of human diversity). Such an education cultivates “the ability to think critically; the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a ‘citizen of the world’; and, finally, the ability to imagine sympathetically the predicament of another person” (2010, p. 7).

Drawing on Nussbaum’s work, let us highlight just two contributions that liberal education can make to our development as democratic citizens. The first is what Nussbaum calls “Socratic thinking,” which is more than just being able to think critically or engage in critical analysis. Socratic thinking is the ability to think and reason with other people, indeed to think and reason through our dialogue with others. Nussbaum (2010) writes

Socratic thinking is important in any democracy. But it is particularly important in societies that need to come to grips with the presence of people who differ by ethnicity, caste, and religion. The idea that one will take responsibility for one’s own reasoning, and exchange ideas with others in an atmosphere of mutual respect for reason, is essential to the peaceful resolution of differences, both within a nation and in a world increasingly polarized by ethnic and religious conflict (p. 54).

The skill of Socratic thinking is not learned through the regurgitation of facts and the assembly-line style of content delivery that turns education into a mere means to an end (e.g. the college degree, the high-paying career). Socratic thinking *can* be learned through the careful, sustained, and communal engagement with art, scientific theories and practices, philosophy, music, and other experiences that provide insights about our world, define our humanity, and make life worth living.

The second contribution that a liberal education can make to our development as effective citizens is to cultivate our “narrative imagination” (Nussbaum, 2010, p. 95). The arts in particular play a special role here. They motivate us emotionally, not just cognitively, and this motivation encourages interaction with others in ways that alternative forms of information or discourse

do not. For example, statistics (think here of being bombarded with poverty rates, unemployment rates, percentages of people who suffer from hunger, etc.) may produce outrage but lack a human face. Moral and political arguments provide powerful justifications for our positions but can hardly elicit the empathy or compassion that we get from a powerful novel, inspiring song, or poignant picture. The arts nurture our narrative imagination and develop empathy and compassion.

Henry A. Giroux (2007) begins his book, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex*, with a provocative question:

What is the task of educators at a time when the forces of democracy appear to be in retreat and the emerging ideologies and practices of militarization, corporatism, and political fundamentalism bear down on every aspect of individual and collective experience? (p. 1).

The answer, in part, is for those in higher education to reclaim the democratic promise of our colleges and universities. While recognizing that institutions of higher education are not the only important sites in this regard, Giroux nevertheless insists that higher education “is one of the most crucial institutional and political spaces where democratic subjects can be shaped, democratic relations can be experienced, and anti-democratic forms of power can be identified and critically engaged” (p. 210).

Giroux advocates “engaged scholarship” and “critical pedagogy” (p. 5). The former emphasizes the public value of the research that academics do, and encourages scholars to make connections between their research and the common good. Although valuable, this “applied” form of scholarship does not require institutional change, but only individual committed researchers. Critical pedagogy, as spoken of by Giroux, is akin to Nussbaum’s “Socratic thinking,” particularly in the way it emphasizes the dialogue and communal aspect of thinking and learning. In short, critical pedagogy is like Socratic thinking in that it is about the skills and capacities imperative for a democratic and morally responsible citizenry. Indeed, Giroux sees higher education as both moral and political:

Higher education is a moral and political enterprise that must struggle against all forms of dogmatism, commit itself to the most meaningful principles of an inclusive democracy, exercise a rigorous practice of self-criticism, and provide a vision of the future in which students can function as informed, critical citizens capable of actively participating, shaping, and governing a world that takes seriously the relationship between education and democracy (p. 203).

Nussbaum and Giroux, among many others, believe that higher education is critical to our democracy. They also believe our embrace of the democratic role of higher education has waned in recent years—endangering not only higher education but our democracy.

Higher Education Falling Short

In their mission statements, colleges and universities across the country explicitly recognize their role in and responsibilities to our democracy. With the best of intentions, colleges and universities affirm their role in building communities, serving the common good, and bettering our democracy. Given all these good intentions, however, we are left with a compelling question: Given the importance of higher education to our democracy, and given the commitment of our colleges and universities to our democracy and to civic engagement, why is our democratic way of life in such trouble?

More Americans than ever are going to college, and there is strong evidence that college-educated citizens are more civically involved than those who do not go to college, so shouldn't our democracy be getting stronger?

We list below a few reasons for why higher education is failing to fulfill its democratic promise.

The Overpowering Consumer Culture

We all know that our educational efforts do not occur in a vacuum, and what lies outside our classroom is a pervasive and powerful consumer culture that dominates the lives of our students. Books such as *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* by John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor (2005) and *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need* by Juliet B. Schor (1998) are excellent examples of work that details the pernicious effects of

consumerism on our lives. Benjamin Barber's (2009) book *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole* also brilliantly critiques the effects of consumerism on our lives and on our democracy. Given the powerful forces of consumerism, it is apparent that the modest though important efforts toward civic education at our colleges and universities are insufficient to adequately address the problem.

The Corporatization of Higher Education

A thriving democracy requires a genuine commitment to something greater than oneself (in this case, our community) and a willingness at times to sacrifice our individual goods for the greater good of the whole. Democracy requires the kind of thinking that is beyond mere instrumental rationality—where each of us is trying to figure out the best means to our own narrow, personal ends. But higher education increasingly is dominated by instrumental rationality, the kind of rationality that works great in the corporate world but that, unhindered, can be disastrous for our communities. In *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class*, Christopher Newfield (2005) provides a powerful account of our recent history and how political, economic, and cultural trends increasingly have led us to think of the university in market terms. Again, a market mentality is not necessarily bad, but if that is the predominant way in which higher education is viewed (for example, researchers see the university as a place to develop new technologies for personal gain, teachers see it as a way to earn a decent living on the way to retirement, students see it as a site for credentialing in order to enter upon a well-paying career) then many of the other goods of education (for example, personal development, democratic citizenship, and more) fall by the wayside.

Fear of Politicization

The way we've been talking about higher education strikes many people as odd or even dangerous. They argue that higher education should not be in the democracy business. For example, see Stanley Fish's (2008) work *Save the World on Your Own Time*. He claims that training in democratic citizenship is best left to other social institutions—not our colleges and universities. The tasks of the latter are strictly academic. A college education is about thinking well and conducting research, not becoming a more moral person or a better citizen. If we lived in a flourishing democracy in which other institutions effectively trained us for

citizenship and effectively established just and productive relationships, we perhaps could live with Fish's position. As we have indicated, however, we do not live in such a democracy, nor do we have such effective institutions. So how will our colleges and universities respond? Fish claims that saving the world is not the faculty member's job. Why not? It's as if Fish is the cook on a sinking boat who, when asked to help bail out the ship, replies, "But that's not my job."

But if not the chef, if not all of us, then who? As Cornel West (2004) says, there "is a deeply troubling deterioration of democratic powers in America today" (p. 2). He wonders if perhaps we are entering a "postdemocratic" age, and concludes that "the great dramatic battle of the twenty-first century is the dismantling of empire and the deepening of democracy" (p. 22). How are citizen-soldiers going to be prepared for this battle? Why should higher education *not* help to train them? Given the failure of too many other institutions to inculcate the values of citizenship (from active participation in our communities to promoting social and economic justice and genuine equality), it is wrong for higher education—an institution through which an increasing number of our citizens pass—to simply ignore the situation and assume our democracy crisis will just work itself out. Higher education should not and cannot ignore the situation. If higher education is not in the business of instilling democratic values, then it fails our students and our society. It simply becomes a means to economic and consumerist ends (for example, the Gross National Product, high salaries, etc.)—ends that are not inherently wrong but nevertheless can run afoul of our deeper democratic aspirations.

Powerlessness

We all know that it often is difficult to feel that one person can effect much change. When we recognize the ways that systems shape our lives, making substantive change in the world seems even more daunting. Newfield (2008) makes the argument that academics (especially those in the humanities and social sciences) have been influenced by decades of intellectual trends that have focused on such social facts as the power of social institutions, the manipulations of the individual, false consciousness, and more. While such trends are compelling and insightful, they do not necessarily exclude individual initiative and the power of individuals alone or collectively to effect change. Systems may shape our lives, but they do not determine them. Those of us in higher education and especially in leadership positions have a great responsibility to reject any position that can be

defended with only, “That’s the way things are done.” We have power to affect institutions and create change. We are not powerless.

Lack of Will

Whether it is the dominant consumer ethos, corporatization of the educational enterprise, the market mentality, fear of politicization, or just a general sense of helplessness, educators (at least too many of them) simply lack the will to effect the kind of change that we need today in higher education. We know what the challenges are. We know something needs to be done. We know that our situation calls for bold moves and radical change. We might not know exactly the moves to make or what that change might look like, but we know the status quo is not working as it should. We must gather the courage to act. Giroux (2007) calls on educators to be “vocal and militant,” to make the case that “at the heart of any form of inclusive democracy is the assumption that learning should be used to expand the public good, create a culture of questioning, and promote democratic social change” (p. 117).

We are encouraged by the positive developments in our culture and even on our college campuses, but we believe these changes need to be more extensive in the direction of democratic education. It is not just about adding programs and constructing new buildings. We need a paradigm shift in how colleges and universities structure and run themselves. We need a culture change on our college campuses. *How can we expect students to develop the skills and capacities of civic life and be trained in democratic processes if they are part of institutions that are authoritarian, hierarchical, and increasingly run like corporations in which faculty are merely employees and students merely consumers?* In short, we—faculty, staff, and administrators alike—need to organize and democratize ourselves before we can hope to have a real impact on the democratization of our students.

American education scholar Ernest Boyer (1996) is noted for his efforts in calling to question the purposes of higher education. He sought to push institutions beyond mere programmatic thinking to serious reflection on their collective identity and commitment to *democratic* education. In other words, Boyer’s call was for higher education to “serve a larger purpose” (p. 22).

Much has been done in recent years to strengthen our nation’s sense of civic commitment. We have seen an increase in service-learning and community

service efforts across campuses. However, there is much work yet to be done. Despite all the good work done by civic educators, the 2004 Wingspread conference issued a report titled *Calling the Question* that concluded that civic engagement had brought about some change, but had collectively plateaued as a national movement. In their conclusion, Brukardt and colleagues (2004) wrote that “few institutions have made the significant, sustainable, structural reforms that will result in an academic culture that values community engagement as a core function of the institution” (p. 5).

In a recent assessment of the civic engagement movement, John Saltmarsh and Matthew Hartley (2011) brought together a number of scholars and practitioners to reflect on the current state of civic learning in higher education. They echo Boyer’s earlier proclamation that we are not suffering from a lack of civic programs; rather, our institutions have not engaged the deep nature and consequences of democratic engagement. Saltmarsh and Hartley note the many efforts on campuses that seek to place students in service to their surrounding communities; however, they see these efforts as falling short unless there is clarity on the overall democratic purpose of the activity itself. They argue that

Without the intentionality of process and purpose, there is a diminution of democratic potential. Students may learn, and important service may be rendered. But rarely does such an approach to engagement result in actively contesting a problematic status quo or engender concerted action to challenge and change it by every democratic means possible (p. 17).

The critique offered by Saltmarsh and Hartley clarifies the difference between what John Dewey (1916) describes as “activity” and “experience.” A true civic engagement experience requires reflective interaction with purposes and processes having a distinctly democratic character—e.g. values of inclusiveness, collaboration, reciprocity, and mutual respect. Democratic processes and purposes reorient civic engagement to what Saltmarsh and Hartley call *democratic engagement*—“engagement that has significant implications for transforming higher education such that democratic values are part of the leadership of administrators, the scholarly work of faculty, the educational work of staff, and the leadership development and learning outcomes of students” (2011, p. 17).

Saltmarsh and Hartley argue that without this intentional democratic purpose, civic engagement efforts are often pursued as ends in themselves and fade into the institutional rhetoric of stimulating economic development or improving the quality of life of constituent communities. This now dominant form of engagement reflects the general academic culture of higher education as overly technocratic and primarily engages by “applying” expert knowledge to largely passive communities who are more defined by their needs than their assets. This approach also constitutes a remarkably “apolitical” form of engagement where students see themselves more as service-providers than as partners and catalysts whose aim is to work collaboratively across differences to address common problems. In this sense, students replicate their educational experience. In other words, students are to communities as faculty are to students.

There is a growing focus of empirical research calling to question the effectiveness of current civic engagement efforts. In a national survey using the University of Michigan’s Personal and Social Responsibility Inventory, data from over 24,000 respondents indicate that students want their colleges to foster a stronger institutional emphasis on contributing to society or the common good. The data also reveal that the longer students stay in college, the wider the gap becomes between their support of social responsibility as a goal for college and their assessment of whether the institution provides sufficient opportunities for growth in this area (Dey et al., 2009). As students progress through college, they feel less confident that their institution supports efforts that contribute to the larger community.

A Radical Proposal

Campus as Democratic Community

Despite the many efforts to strengthen civic education being offered at colleges and universities across the country, there is no stronger influence in a student’s education than the environments in which he or she is educated. Educators understand that learning takes place far beyond the classroom. Markham (2007) has argued for the critical role environments play in character formation and education of the “whole person.” The communities in which we participate provide more than mere context for learning. They act as primary *interpreters* of the information we receive and *bearers* of an implicit content. In

others words, our environments determine the character of our learning and the ways we determine how knowledge will be applied.

Sara Evans and Harry Boyte (1992) have combined the ideas of public space and freedom for democratic self-organization and co-creation in the concept of “free spaces.” These spaces, which are critical for the development of democracy, are rooted in everyday life settings and places where people have the autonomy for self-organization and interaction with creative ideas. In these free spaces, people see themselves not as consumers of predetermined goals, but as co-producers of culture and public goods. Free spaces allow for the development of the political and civic skills required to be an engaged citizen in a diverse society.

We argue that the most effective civic learning in higher education will not only involve effective curricula, but will be determined ultimately by the degree to which institutions serve as vital “free spaces” for democratic engagement. *Simply put, we—teachers, administrators, and other campus constituents—must model the democracy we wish our students to learn.* This notion is well-articulated by Bernie Ronan, Associate Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs at Maricopa Community Colleges. Ronan (2011) argues for a developmental understanding of civic education, which sees “civics” as constituted by “skills and habits (what the ancients called virtues) [that are] built up over time and acquired through experience” (p. 34). He goes on to say,

Learning to be a citizen takes time; it unfolds over the course of a student’s academic career and continues to develop through a lifetime of citizenship. Therefore, schools and colleges have a responsibility to actively structure and encourage a range of civic experiences for students that unfold over the course of their time in these institutions. Colleges must ‘walk the talk of citizenship’ so that students see reflected in their educational experiences the values of democratic life that the institution stands for. They do this through the creation and nurturing of the *polis*, the ‘space of appearance’ that citizens create to speak and act together (pp. 34-35).

This *polis* (or community) that Ronan suggests should be intentionally and practically democratic. It should be evidenced not only by support of student government, but by how organizations operate on campus, how students are

treated by faculty and administrators, and how the constituent parts of the campus community relate to one another to sustain the good of the whole. Ronan advocates for “not just better civic experiences for students, but also an enhanced sense of the college as a civic agent that embodies in its practices the values and principles we as democratic citizens profess” (p. 37).

This implicit form of democratic education takes seriously what Colby et al. (2003) call the “hidden curriculum” of education institutions. They argue it is impossible to create a value-neutral environment where students learn only from the classroom experience without being influenced and shaped by the larger culture of their campus communities; therefore, it is important for colleges and universities to examine their institutional values and make conscious and deliberate choices about what students are taught through the integration of classroom instruction and campus community life.

This view of education is not new. Near the beginning of the twentieth century John Dewey (1916) pointed out that the most significant distinction between living beings and inanimate objects is that the living maintain themselves through “renewal.” For humankind this renewal entails a process of cultural transmission that Dewey calls “education in its broadest sense” (p. 3). In Dewey’s view, this form of education is ubiquitous and pervasive through the whole of human experience—so much so that the only way humans can control the educational process is to pay conscious attention to the environments in which students act, think, and feel. In short, if our aim is to educate for democracy, the school itself must be democratic. Carl Glickman (2003), president of the Institute for Schools, Education, and Democracy, presents the argument this way:

The public school is the primary institution for providing an educated citizenry for democracy. Yet most schools show in everyday action a disbelief in such preparation. Most operate on the basis of hierarchy, control, and power. They do not embrace equality among faculty, staff, and administrators, and they bypass any substantial contribution from students, parents, and local citizens in making important decisions affecting the school community. . . . Students every day see adults practicing a form of life diametrically opposed to what they hear espoused (p. 267).

We want to draw attention to the paradox that we often profess to prepare students for participation in a robust democracy while functioning in settings that are themselves undemocratic in nature. We echo the call from Astin and Astin (2000) in their Kellogg Foundation report, *Leadership Reconsidered*: “If the next generation of citizen leaders is to be engaged and committed to leading for the common good, then the institutions which nurture them must be engaged in the work of the society and the community, modeling effective leadership and problem solving skills, demonstrating how to accomplish change for the common good” (p. 2).

To be clear, we understand that democracy is imperfect and difficult. In fact, it can be argued that democracy is ineffective in a setting requiring business-like efficiency and depending on market forces to sustain it. We have little doubt that in these cases, democracy may appear cumbersome, but in the case of *public* education, the outcomes are worth the investment in intentional democratic practices.

Putting Students at the Center

Despite many claims of student apathy, there is reason to believe that young people desire to be civically engaged. According to research conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI), today’s college students are the most engaged in community-based partnership and social change work of any generation (Pryor et al., 2009). Although much of this work is reported as “volunteerism,” it does represent an essential disposition toward collective conscience and care for community that can be developed into deeper forms of civic identity and agency. Furthermore, students making up the Wingspread conference were clear that the manner in which they engage in democracy goes well beyond voting to what they called an “alternative politics” marked by service and other creative methods of pursuing change in a democratic society (Long, 2002).

Civic engagement scholars have begun to note the emerging need to rethink the role students play in the design and implementation of civic learning efforts. Matthew Hartley and Ira Harkavy (2011) call for a new form of leadership that should be central to the core work of the academy. They argue this approach should “challenge traditional norms about students as passive learners, the community as a laboratory and passive recipient of assistance, and the faculty

member as expert” (p. 67). Richard Battistoni and Nicholas Longo (2011) also advocate for a new way of conceiving students’ role in civic engagement efforts. They call for civic learning practitioners in higher education to focus on putting students at the center of the engagement experience.

Battistoni and Longo’s criticism is based on the observation that the majority of civic learning programs and initiatives are focused on administrative and faculty work directed at students, who are then mere recipients of the effort. They note that when campuses undertake the “institutionalization” of civic learning, the language often casts students primarily as passive recipients of the curricular or co-curricular program. They continue,

Measuring students’ awareness of community engagement is most often a matter of ‘informing’ students about community engagement opportunities as faculty or staff “lead” community-engaged initiatives. Institutionalization efforts rarely judge themselves on the level of student participation in the development and implementation of community-engaged projects and courses. They stop short of asking institutions to imagine their students as “colleagues” or “coproducers” in the process of civic engagement (p. 202).

We agree with Battistoni and Longo that the deepest form of *democratic* learning will occur when students are active in the co-creation of democratic spaces and processes with the institution. The civic learning activities that follow will then take on a new character as the product of public work before the engagement “activity” ever takes place. This approach also will incline students to see community groups not as passive recipients of services, but as partners in a deepening democratic practice.

Putting students at the center of the visioning, planning, and implementation process introduces a healthy form of political engagement as they learn to negotiate differences in the structuring process itself. They also learn skills vital to democracy such as team work, public speaking, strategic thinking, and a deep understanding of *horizontal* relationships based on mutual accountability (Longo, Drury, Battistoni, 2006).

We also believe that putting students at the center of civic engagement efforts will affect students’ sense of intrinsic motivation. The realm of motivation

is often overlooked in these conversations, because it is something that intuitively seems beyond the reach of educators. How can we possibly generate the *desire* for democratic life in our students? We believe that motivation is as much the *result* of civic engagement as the cause. In addition to research supporting this claim (e.g. Colby et al., 2007; Kiesa et al., 2007; Youniss and Yates, 1997), Markham (2011) has described how involvement in public work shapes individual and collective character in powerful ways. It is commonly assumed that people decide to act based on rational arguments or theoretical frameworks that direct their actions; however, many times people will act for any number of reasons, and then because of the action itself begin to develop deeper reasons and motivations for continued action. In this sense, democratic action is a form of moral development that shapes our intellectual minds as well as our motivations.

We acknowledge the civic challenges before us as individuals and as a nation. We support the advances in civic learning championed by institutions and groups across the country, but we are sensitive to the shortcomings many of these efforts present. We believe a powerful way forward is to re-imagine civic learning, not just in a programmatic sense, but in terms of process. The “radical proposal” we put forward requires more than reorganization of classroom practices; it requires serious engagement across our campuses. The school itself must take on the democratic character we want to see in our students. We encourage institutions to take intentional steps toward becoming democratic free spaces where students learn not only the valuable knowledge required to be successful academically, but also to be confident public problem solvers and co-owners of the democracy we all must build together.

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She adds: “Democracies all over the world are undervaluing, and consequently neglecting, skills that we all badly need to keep democracies vital, respectful, and accountable” (Nussbaum, 2010: 77).

¹ In order to produce the kind of citizens we need, Nussbaum highlights seven things that schools (from K-12 to colleges and universities) can and should do:

- *Develop students' capacity to see the world from the viewpoint of other people, particularly those whom their society tends to portray as less, as “mere objects”*
- *Teach attitudes toward human weakness and helplessness that suggest that weakness is not shameful and the need for others not unmanly; teach children not to be ashamed of need and incompleteness but to see these as occasions for cooperation and reciprocity*
- *Develop the capacity for genuine concern for others, both near and distant*
- *Undermine the tendency to shrink from minorities of various kinds in disgust, thinking of them as “lower” and “contaminating”*
- *Teach real and true things about other groups (racial, religious, and sexual minorities; people with disabilities), so as to counter stereotypes and the disgust that often goes with them*
- *Promote accountability by treating each child as a responsible agent*
- *Vigorously promote critical thinking, the skill and courage it requires to raise a dissenting voice.* (Nussbaum, 2010: 45-46)

¹ Citizens (both national and global) who are empathic and compassionate are critical to establishing or preserving human interactions that are not reduced to market norms. In moral terms, such citizens treat others as ends-in-themselves and never simply as means to ends. Without the proper education, Nussbaum argues, “our human interactions are likely to be mediated by the thin norms of market exchange in which human lives are seen primarily as instruments for gain” (Nussbaum, 2010: 80). The proper education is one with a liberal arts structure. Such an education

can “supply a useful foundation for the public debates that we must have if we are to cooperate in solving major human problems” (Nussbaum, 2010: 94).

¹ We think it is important to keep in mind this point from Ruth W. Grant: “students arrive on campus with the most important tasks of character formation already completed. They are not blank slates or balls of putty. In fact, many of them are already better people than many of us will ever be” (Kiss and Euben, *Debating Moral Education*, 286).

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