
EDUCATING OURSELVES ABOUT EDUCATION – COMPREHENSIVELY

Hervé Varenne¹
Teachers College, Columbia University

I would put forward three assertions: first, that we have to think *comprehensively* about education; second, that we have to think *relationally* about education; and third, that we have to think *publicly* about education. (Cremin 2007 [1975]: 12)

THE CHARGE

In October 2007, all of us who contribute to this volume, along with colleagues from across the United States gathered to find out for ourselves and our peers what can be gained by focusing on education as a comprehensive matter that encompasses schooling but cannot be reduced to it. In my words, we gathered to educate ourselves about education, taken comprehensively, as well as relationally and publicly.

The sense that education must be studied comprehensively, relationally and publicly, is not a new one. Lawrence Cremin, the esteemed historian and President of Teachers College from 1974 to 1984, knew this well. The passage I use as an epigraph summarizes in a particularly

¹ With special thanks to Ed Gordon for his encouragement and example. I also want to thank all the participants in the Study Group who made all our meetings such a stimulating intellectual experience. I want to acknowledge most particularly Chuck Kinzer and Reba Page, for their readings of this paper. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Linda Lin.

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felicitous manner what was then an already an emerging consensus: Education is a total process of human transformation, and schooling is but a small aspect of this process. This is a sense that we inherit from the pragmatist philosophers, and particularly from John Dewey. Even if the goal is personal, the means and products of education will always be relational, and they will always have a public aspect in the political sense. Education always involves many persons and always has consequences for many. In the famous cliché, education takes a village that is also always a complex political field. Little of this is controversial. But putting these ideas into our research, policy, and advocacy practices has been hard. We hope that the thirty years that have passed since Cremin wrote will make it easier to recapture what remains powerful in formulations. We also seek to learn from their relative eclipse.

So, let us start.

It is easy to argue that education is a pervasive activity involving all people, continually, together and in public. How could this not be the case? How would people find out about what is most significant in their lives if they did not do it through a never ending process of mutual education? How do people find out about family relationships and their complexities? When do they find out about their nationality, ethnic identity, race, gender? Where do they discover the faith of their fathers, mothers, as well as all the other faiths that keep challenging them? How do they investigate the practical politics of their neighborhoods, or country? With whom do they explore who are to be their friends and, fatefully, their enemies? With and *against* whom do they debate and struggle? Whom do they have to take into account when they face the consequences of earlier decisions? These are our questions.

In various ways, all of us acknowledge that, mostly, people find out about their lives at home, with their peers, on the way to and from school or work, on the weekends, watching television. So far, so easy perhaps, until we follow children and adolescents into the schools to which their parents take them and which they must attend. By the 21st century, schooling has become an international fact of life so powerful that, everywhere, schooling and education have become synonymous.² Even Dewey, Cremin showed (1977), could not imagine how to think about a democratic education except in terms of a (public) school. In many ways, the same failure of imagination continues to characterize

² Here as elsewhere, I mean “fact of life” in the strong sense that was first proposed by Emile Durkheim (), and now given new power by Latour (2005) building on Garfinkel (2002).

educational research in all the fields from which the contributors to this volume hail. And yet we also all know that schools, because of their very political power end up limited to develop *certain* forms of knowledge; they are required to measure *certain* forms of achievement for *certain* purposes--particularly the granting of “rights and privileges” “appertaining” to various degrees. All forms of knowledge, achievement, or purposes not centered in schooling become peripheral, or only interesting to the extent that they impact school knowledge, achievement or purposes. All people who may impart information or attempt to shape people, from parents to preachers to journalists, become suspect--particularly if it is found that they do not quite support what schools teach.

Our collective sense is that we should try again to imagine research into education that is not bounded by the school, and that this must be done precisely because we are concerned with such public matters as language, health, art, technology, science, etc. Of course, we cannot ignore schooling. As John Baldacchino puts it in his paper (Chapter 10), we must work out of the school, and also with it; we must work “outwith” the school, and indeed the family, the church, the gang, etc. Above all, we must investigate schooling, in its many manifestations, as we investigate any other institution that claims to educate--as well as those that make no such claim.

There are good reasons why schooling should have such a grip on our imagination, and why we should now wonder about its hegemony over education. As Dennie Wolf reminds us in her article for this collection (Chapter 10), schooling was first institutionalized when modern democracies began to organize themselves as a way to universalize certain experiences (literacy and numeracy, a sense of national history, etc.) that might be missed by some people. Schools were conceived as *the* way to make education public. They were designed by engaged political philosophers to erase the privileges of birth. The schools were expected to do so. And then something happened that now haunts us. Since the middle of the 20th centuries the most powerful social philosophers of our times, say Foucault or Bourdieu, have had an easy time arguing that schooling is more successful at reproducing birth privilege than at making it moot. This is altogether a major reversal that is, unhappily, confirmed by much social scientific investigation. Schooling appears to have become an instrument of privilege. As scholars “of education,” our own intellectual work, applying the best concepts and theories of our disciplines to “the problems with our schools,” is

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sometimes accused of being the tool of this reproduction of privilege. We must now ponder what to take into account to make sure that we do not end up reproducing what now exists.³

The stakes are high. Perhaps it will only be a matter of, once again, proposing reforms in curriculum, pedagogy, financing, political control, etc. Perhaps it is only a matter of designing better pre- and post-school supplementary programs. But, I suspect, many of us agreed to participate in this project because we have come to wonder whether there is something fundamentally wrong in the attempt to capture education for political purposes and then in granting exclusive privileges to the People of the School so that they can accomplish the task. What if education cannot be domesticated by the State or its Experts? As a cultural anthropologist concerned with the continual and continuing transformations of the conditions people make for themselves, I have become convinced that education is the core property that allowed humanity continually to escape the ecologies of its birth. If education is the motor of culture,⁴ then it is unlikely that it can be controlled in any conceivable set of curricula, pedagogies, funding formulae, tests and degrees.

It is time to re-open all these questions, systematically, and from many different points of view. As McClintock argues in his piece for this volume (Chapter 2), it is not even a matter of “defining” education but rather of thinking through what we might wish to define. It is a matter of engaging in tough dialogues among and across the disciplines that have been called to address education for the public. This volume is one aspect of our attempt to engage in such a dialogue.

³ We need to play close attention to the fate of Oscar Lewis as he attempted to bring together the strongest psycho-social theories of his time. By doing so, he was led to postulate a “culture of poverty” (1966), a postulate, we now know, that cannot stand. Lewis’s problem, and this is also our problem, is that the very theories he was relying on were leading him to make the postulate. It is all too common for current researchers and policy makers not to notice that many of the current strongest theories continue to focus our attention on the social constructed self of the poor (“their” “identity,” etc.)—thereby reproducing modern versions of what of course is never now labeled “culture of poverty.”

⁴ I specifically did not write about education as the motor of “a” culture. “Culture” here refers to the human activity of transforming their conditions. McDermott and I have been exploring the consequences of such an approach to the very classical problem of “change” in human societies from a variety of points of view (McDermott and Varenne 1995, 2006; Varenne and McDermott 1998; Varenne 2008).

THE PROJECT AND THE PAPERS

In September 2006, Edmund W. Gordon convened a study group designed to build on his earlier work on supplementary education (Gordon, Bridglall, & Meroe, 2005). Gordon, among us, has the longest experience laboring to find approaches to education most likely to fulfill the goals that were assigned to schooling, particularly for the populations that keep not being served by schooling as it has evolved. In 2006, I had been working as guest editor on a special issue of the *Teachers College Record* (Varenne, 2007a).⁵ In that issue I brought together a group of young anthropologists who explored what a broad view of education might yield. I also published an attempt to ground in modern social and cultural theory Cremin's insight that education, taken comprehensively, is a matter of ongoing "deliberation." I invited Gordon to write some comments for the issue. I was honored when Gordon asked me to join him in directing the Study Group in Comprehensive Education that he was convening. In October 2007, we held the second meeting of this study group. At that meeting, the papers included in this collection were first presented and discussed.

In his 2005 volume, Gordon had focused on the range of programs designed by any number of non-school based institutions to help with academic achievement as measured by schools. In the special issue I explored the theoretical foundations for a theory of education that directly faced the reality that most personal transformations are the product of familial, communal, and indeed personal, *work* that mostly proceeds outside direct political controls.⁶ Ethnographic papers about people in various situations around the world illustrated what can be revealed about education when one refocuses attention away from schooling and its problematics.

The papers for this Volume Two explore what we know and, more importantly, *what we need to investigate* about education taken comprehensively. The papers are more than reviews of research. And they are

⁵ This issue was republished by The Mellen Press as Volume One for the "Perspectives on Comprehensive Education" series in which this volume is Volume Two. Volume Three will consist of research papers from young scholars from a variety of disciplines.

⁶ I take the word "work," or the word "effort" that Cremin used and that I sometimes also use, in the strong ethnomethodological sense. The word is related to the more widely used "practice" but adds connotations otherwise missing. In particular, "work" directly connotes difficulty, resistance, energy—as well as the facticity of the conditions and tools of the work, of the objects the work faces, and of the objects which it produces

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not research reports. Rather, they are suggestions for further research on the basis of what we know we do not quite know about people educating themselves. All the papers are “opinionated”---though many opinions and points of view are represented. They are also “disciplined” both in the sense that they are all grounded in disciplines with long traditions of investigation into all these matters, and in the sense that they are systematic arguments for particular forms of future research. Finally, all the papers address questions of burning public concern, from intelligence to language use, from the measures of learning to the attempts to change health behavior---among many other matters. Together, the papers present the kind of interdisciplinary collaboration that does not seek an artificial common ground and erases the significant differences that give life to discipline. Instead the papers are an occasion when all readers are challenged by what others are saying—and thus educate themselves about future transformations in their own work.

The papers are grouped into two rough categories, though most do something of what the others focus on. The first set of papers address difficulties and possibilities as authors deeply grounded in their academic disciplines seek to face education more comprehensively than the disciplines have often done. Some of the authors hail from developmental or counseling psychology (Chatterji, Iyengar, Koh, Martinez); Others from anthropology (McDermott, Varenne) and philosophy (McClintock). They ask the fundamental questions. What is the relationship between intelligence, education and human effectiveness (Martinez)? What are the variables to consider when investigating the outcomes of all educational programs (Chatterji, Iyengar, & Koh)? Is ‘learning’ really such an outcome (McDermott)? What, after all, do we talk about when we talk about education, and from whom might we learn the possibilities and pitfalls of attempting definitions (McClintock)?

The second set of papers focuses on matters of direct public concerns with practical areas of everyday life. How, where, when, and with whom do we learn about health (Walkley)? technology (Kleifgen and Kinzer)? science (Becker, Echeverria, & Page)? the multiplicity of languages around us (Garcia)? art (Baldacchino)? music and mathematics (Wolf)? The authors are all grounded in a variety of disciplines: anthropology (Walkley), sociology, sociolinguistics and linguistics (Garcia, Kleifgen, Kinzer), curriculum and organizational theory (Becker, Echeverria, Page, Wolf), art theory (Baldacchino), develop-

mental and counseling psychology (Gordon, Vergara). What is most interesting here is that all the authors address matters of profound public concern about which the school, in any of its forms, cannot do very much. Consider for example all matters relating to health. Consider how all knowledge about, say, cancer, HIV/AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, etc., evolves so fast that it can never be captured even by the most up-to-date textbook. As for science and math, we have now come to realize that they are discussed, taught, and learned, in many settings--including the religious. Most significantly, what is taught there can more or less directly challenge, or support, what schools must teach. Religious people have long complained that schooling undercut their teachings. The time has now come for school people to complain about religion undercutting their teachings. Similarly, in matters of technology, art, popular culture, etc., it is clear that schooling will never quite capture what peers, journalists, publicists, etc., also teach. Researchers into educational processes, and even if they are primarily concerned--with schools and similar institutions, must confront all this.

The papers

There is no way, of course, for me to do full individual justice to papers that stand very well on their own. What follows, then, is a very personal, and clearly opinionated, take on the papers in their variety even as I find echoes of our common interests in all of them. My goal here is to bring out divergences which, I believe, will be "occasions for productive ignorance" when, I have argued (Varenne, 2007b), it is most likely that we will experience education.

I start with an intellectual dilemma from which there is probably no escape. Chatterji and her colleagues, for example, are calling for "logic models" that "help specify empirically-testable causal pathways by which [...] various component elements are expected to inter-connect, leading to expected or unexpected outcomes" (this volume, p. 110). Martinez goes further in this search for causal linkages that school people might wish to manipulate:

Consider three unnamed constituents X, Y, and Z. Assume that according to our best psychometric and cognitive theories, they are ordered $X > Y > Z$, where the ordering reflects their relative importance in promoting effectiveness outcomes, their temporal precedence relationships during acquisition, their generalizability over contexts, or their superskill/subskill relationships. As these relationships are hammered out in research, they would identify cognitive capabili-

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ties which education (both within and beyond the school) could cultivate to greater or lesser degrees. (this volume, p. 90-91)

Contrast this to McDermott's elaboration of Dewey's warnings against "necessity":

The superstition of necessity is to think that activities and tools of inquiry actually, and necessarily, deliver "something externally made to be what it is" (Dewey 1893 /EW.4.21), as different from a new working hypothesis, a new contingency, a new thing made up, of the moment, and for the moment. (this volume, p. 68)

To illustrate why we must awake from this superstition, McDermott refers to various case studies, developed over a life time of ethnographic work he and some his colleagues in cognitive psychology have produced. If McDermott is right, then it is vain to try and elaborate models to predict the future. It may even be unethical to intervene in people's lives on the basis of the measures and predictions that the models suggest. McClintock approaches this from a related angle by bringing to our attention the German philosopher Schleiermacher:

[For Schleiermacher] Educating was an ongoing, ubiquitous hermeneutic activity, continuously interpreting oneself and the world, through which persons living in a given world formed their capacities to anticipate and act within it. A protean intention would lead to a tentative forming of a skill and the new skill would enable intention to differentiate and concretize in a drama of pedagogical contingencies. (this volume, p. 43)

This debate about the necessity/predictability of outcomes, as well as the politics and/or ethics of deliberately manipulating the conditions possibly producing these outcomes, is a fundamental debate about the nature of humanity in its evident capacity to change its conditions. We are not going to settle this debate but we do show that it is very much a debate about education as the process through which "people, everywhere, unceasingly, and always in concert with others, work at changing themselves and their consociates through often difficult deliberations" (Varenne, 2007b, p. 1562). From the point of view of the constituted public (governments and quasi-governmental agencies), there is much that is predictable---though the length of the list of variables to consider sketched by Chatterji and her colleagues makes one wonder (p. 124). From the same public point of view, "outcomes" may be most important.

But we must keep explaining that research and debate must move beyond the production of outcomes measurable through mandated means. Human polities are in continual movement, including movement in the organization and constitution of their governments. The problem, or the glory, is that the very historical development of humanity transforms hypotheses about the future into a past event. The hypotheses themselves, when they become public as, say, a “No Child Left Behind” legislative Act, transform the conditions that had grounded the hypotheses in some kind of verisimilitude. Earlier forms of modeling produced such “successful” tests as the Binet or SAT tests.⁷ They have now become historical facts for people to start manipulating. I suspect all the authors would agree with McDermott’s declaration that he is “opposed to measures of excellence and expertise disconnected from life.” But, of course: what is life? And how do we, as researchers, find out about it?

The papers on art, language, technology, science, mathematics and health, attempt to give us some information about the educating lives of ordinary people. They are people who do not have the authority to teach, but who nevertheless may not quite be under the total control of those who would limit their teaching. In that odd position which is really that of all of us, people encounter various claims about art, language, etc., and they must weigh them in the real times of their lives and in constant interaction with many more or less significant others that will both suggest curricula (what are the facts?) and pedagogies (how to deal with the facts). For example, anyone interested in, say, evolution, or ecology, will face, in no particular sequential order, what school teachers say about it, what preachers say about it, what the news media report about the controversies, what nature documentaries on television say about it. It may be true, as Foucault argued, that all human beings live in a kind of panopticon. But it is really a multi-dimensional panopticon with many wardens responsible to different powers who are often antithetical to each other. I suspect that, in the process, people learn as much about the nature of authority and the realities of the political landscapes as they may learn about evolution or ecology.

Walkley makes a closely related argument about our suffering bodies. She builds on her dissertation work (2007) where she examined the

⁷ “Success” here refers both to the ability of these tests to measure likely performance by an individual and to the political reality that, until recently, SATs scores were required by all colleges.

construction of lower back pain. Moments of pain, wherever they may be located in the body, would seem, in our societies, necessarily to lead to those with expert authority. Physicians, like scientists, know—or so we have been told. We must trust their knowledge—particularly when we cannot directly experience the grounds of this knowledge.⁸ But the “quest for health education” as seen from the point of view of the person in pain is anything but a straight walk to the nearest hospital. What people in pain discover again and again is the limits of medical expertise. Much of what ails us is not necessarily amenable to regular medicine. And even “regular” medicine is something of an oxymoron as doctors disagree among themselves. Particularly in the most serious of cases, like cancer, various therapies are presented as “choices” to be made by the patient. This patient is then submitted to a cacophony of many more or less commercial voices advertising this over that course of action—with much small print telling that tells “nothing is guaranteed.” So the patient, along with his most significant others and consociates, must seek and must educate. Medical experts must, of course also educate about one or another activity being truly dangerous (e.g., smoking) or truly beneficial (e.g., immunization). But the uncertainty that drives education will remain. Sometimes the call to change will be successful—as they appear to have been for smoking. Often, the calls will not be successful. In any even, we must remember that education is not indoctrination—even if sometimes we wish it more closely approximated it.

Garcia’s paper on language brings out something quite new in the tradition we inherit from Saussure, Chomsky, or even Hymes. Garcia teaches that the movement leading to the speaking of a particular language at a particular time is not an automatic or “natural” process. Brains may be necessary for language. Learning to speak may be all but automatic for children placed in proper communicative settings. But brain processes are more akin to limits (of the same order as the gravity and anatomy that prevented human beings to fly until airplanes were invented) than to determinants. How people actually speak is, also, a total educational process in which various aspects of language experience is brought out in what Jakobson called meta language (1985). Getting to speak a language is also a matter of deliberation and action.

⁸ I am thinking here that no human being, so far, has experienced the earth as moving around the sun. But we accept it. Most human beings do not fully understand Darwin, or the evolution of his theories, but many, if not most, accept the basic idea behind evolution. Most of us have never seen a virus but ... and so on.

Millions of immigrants to the United States have to decide whether to teach their children the tongues they brought from some old country, or how much of their resources to use to prevent this from happening. Innumerable people around the planet end up expected and expecting to use many languages to communicate with the many different kinds of people they meet. Garcia goes even further as she writes about “languageing” from the point of view of people in their local polities. There, “multiplicity” may not quite be the most salient issue but rather the negotiations about how to speak with whom.

In a related fashion, Kleifgen and Kinzer ask us to think about the many settings through which people encounter computer-mediated information. They are particularly concerned with the interactional patterns that characterize these settings. While many imagine the interaction person/computer information as a lonely form where individuals, by themselves, encounter a “virtual” reality, Kleifgen and Kinzer ask us to think about the crowds that almost always directly surround the individual and, of course, about the individuals to which they are indirectly linked through the machines. This raises the questions about political authority, resistance, *bricolage*, and thus education that all the other authors also address.

Baldacchino presents us with another challenge. He writes about the controversies surrounding whether art, or even the production of an art object, is necessarily educational. The paper displaces our gaze from the consumers of school teaching (“students”) to the producers of the historical facts such as works of art. What does an artist do that makes his work artful? And how does this relate to what educators might do next, wherever they encounter an object that claims the status of “art”---in school, museums, the streets. When first reading the paper, I got to think that the same question could be asked of educational researchers, and indeed of all producers of objects that are to stand as “science” rather than “religion” or “ideology.” What is it that makes our research precisely just that, “research”?

This, actually, is the question Becker, Echeverria and Page raise and it goes to the heart of our enterprise. Becker and her colleagues follow college students in a biology program wondering who is going to teach them what about “life.” In the process the students experience one of the hottest political issue of our days—the issue of reconciling what biology and religion appear to say about life. Becker and her colleagues remind us that *educators* cannot simply claim authority and allocate “who is right,” or “who should design science curricula.” The State may do so,

in the name of building democracy, and it may require its teachers to teach this but not than in its (public) schools. But *educators*, and particularly perhaps *democratic* educators in the Deweyan tradition, must accept that figuring out who may claim authority about “who or what is right” is an educational concern that will never be controlled by any State---particularly when the claims are about their own, personal, social, cultural, I would say human, life.

What is missing

Many other topics could have been addressed in this volume. We should have papers addressing religion, political identification, music, popular culture and the media, sports, history, the environment. Some of these are parts of school curricula, others are not, but they are, inevitably matters about which all of us do get educated and often attempt to educate. There are other, perhaps darker, matters that may be all the more important that they are harder to delimit. In a world where relations between groups are often shifting, how do we learn about which others and what they might have to offer? There is something profoundly educational about people in villages and shantytowns fantasizing about what they might find in Europe or the United States; then figuring out ways to get there; and then, if they do get there, finding out who they are made to be by their new significant others.⁹ All this is just as profoundly educational for the local populations watching the new comers. The old timers may have struggled for generations to make a place for themselves and they now find they have to start again with new partners. For example, until recently, across Europe and the United States people could ignore what Islam is all about. This, of course, is not the case anymore.

We also know very little about the processes that place people in various kinds of “illegal” or “anti-social” if not “psychopathic” activities---particularly to the extent that they are organized in gangs, mafias, insurgency groups, etc. Aficionados of the HBO series "The Wire" will remember a chilly juxtaposition in an episode of the 2006 season. There was a high school classroom where teacher and students struggled with the preparation for a standardized test they all knew they would fail. And there was a warehouse where older gang members were teaching a

⁹ As an Italian immigrant once said more pithily, as he is quoted on the walls of Ellis Island, “In Italy, they told me the streets of New York were paved with gold. When I arrived here I found out they were not paved at all. And then they told me that I was to pave them!”

new recruit how to kill a cop and quite possibly get killed in the process. Talk about high stakes testing! "Education," we are told again and again, is our best hope, but there is a dark side to both schooling and education with which we must all be concerned—particularly when we clamor, with the best of intentions, for school reform. It is all too true that good intentions pave hell. In this context, we should also pay attention to the way people, and particularly "the advantaged" learn about the details of school processes and find ways to cheat—legally of course. And so we should also have papers about people teaching and learning about schools as they pursue their own "quest for education."

In the spirit of our task in this second volume of the series, I would say that all the papers, including those that were not written, are "requests for proposals." It is exciting to imagine what will be brought out in these future research projects. And it is just as exciting to begin to imagine what policies we might end up proposing on the basis of what we will get to know. Wolf (Chapter 11), Gordon and Vergara (Chapter 12) move in that direction but much remains to be thought through. We look forward to the work of those who will respond.

None of the papers quite address however two matters of some theoretical import that are also fundamental to our work.

One is somewhat technical and concerns the relationship of our work with the easy dichotomy between "formal" and "informal" education. For many years it may have helped suggest the limits of a focus on schooling and the learning of school subjects. The categories now stand in our way.

The other concern is fundamental as it concerns the role of the democratic public in shaping the education of current and future citizens. As Wolf reminds us (pp. 299ff), those who constructed the facts of democracy by which we still live, facts like the Constitution, Congress, etc., also started sketching the plan for what would eventually become The School. The public, the original builders imagined, had to construct an institution dedicated to education to the extent that education, like properly political institutions, was essential to Democracy. Over two centuries, the debates about what this School would be, and what it would attempt to do, have continued. The vocabularies have shifted as we get to talk about "human capital" or "equity." But the concern is the same and we must deal with the relationship between democracy and what we are discovering about education.

FROM INSTITUTIONS
TO SPACES, MOMENTS, MEETINGS
AND CONVERSATIONS

As mentioned earlier, our work owes much to Lawrence Cremin who, as President of Teachers College, directly inspired and encouraged our work. Arguably more than most of the social scientists of his generation Cremin attempted to think through the implications for his work of what he wrote about as “education, broadly conceived” (1974, 1975/2007, 1976, 1978). But he also left us with several difficulties that we must specifically face. In particular, he wrote repeatedly about “individuals and institutions that educate” and proposed an open list including “parents” and “peers,” “families” and “churches” (1978, p.567). It is now clear that the word “institution” is problematic. What, after all, is a family? How could “it” do anything, let alone educate? Focusing on parents rather than families may help but it still leaves researchers with little guidance. What exactly would we study when we study “family education?” As McClintock (Chapter 2) also argues, taking Cremin literally leads to dead ends. By the time Cremin was writing, sociology had been moving away from a focus on institutions to a focus on moments, spaces, and above all interactional processes and practices variously framed by all those involved in control and resistance. To continue finding inspiration in Cremin’s efforts we must translate him into more contemporary language. I tried to do so recently (2007) and found the enterprise quite liberating. I could see how powerful was his insight, and how peripheral, though real, are the difficulties.

For example, Cremin was particularly interested in “families.” Strictly speaking, we cannot follow him with this interest *as stated*. We must rewrite it as an interest in people as *parents, children*, etc. People are not “members” of families. Rather they *make* families according to (or against) various warrants for doing what they do. The question then shifts from the shape of families (nuclear, extended, single-parent, etc.) to the people and conditions involved in the construction. It shifts to the power and authority of various people to do such things as define marriage and its privileges, zone areas for certain type of housing, require children to be taken away into special institutions (e.g. schools) for parts of their lives, etc. Emphasizing that families are made by those who make it their business, also emphasize the efforts of people to get

together, to have children, to control these children, etc.¹⁰ This reveals the crowds of people involved in the making of families, and the many warrants for doing some, ranging from the professional to the political or the commercial--people like teachers, pediatricians, social workers, etc., or advertisers, toy manufacturers, television show producers, etc. And it also leads us to wonder about the power of those without specific warrants, like newborns teaching their parents how to handle them. What is directly relevant to our concern here is that most of the work done by this crowd is done through more or less elaborated instructions about what to do next, from laws, to child-rearing manuals, to cautionary tales told by old timers or Hollywood, to the mulling over of experience that we may perhaps recognize as preeminently educational. People do not make families because they “know how”; they find out how to make their particular families as they make them and this evolving knowledge may not be quite generalizable. Families are temporal and temporary. People come together and then they go their separate ways to be with other people under other forms of constraint. And then, in the times and spaces of our kind of modernity, they come and they go again. As the people return (from work, from school, from play) with new experiences, new hopes, new stuff, and the consensus of the preceding day is reopened for education.¹¹

Reframing research on family education as investigating the collective work of parents and many others is more than a technicality. Writing about church-going people rather than “churches,” or museum curators and trustees rather than “museums,” preserves what was most powerful in Cremin’s insight, while at the same time making it more compatible with recent social theory. Everywhere and “everywhen” it is people who find themselves alternatively, though often at the same time, students and teachers of those around them, often working with people who know little about what they are teaching, or people who are not interested in what they are made to try and learn. Above all, people educate themselves with people who have little if any direct authority over them, and who have no specialized expertise either on curriculum or pedagogy. This is why family education is so fascinating, particularly if we

¹⁰ The most systematic presentation of this approach may be by J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein (1990). It was immediately severely criticized by Bourdieu (1998) who defended his version of structural-functionalism.

¹¹ I develop the theoretical foundation of a focus on temporality in the analysis of educational encounters in a companion piece (in process)

accept Rancière's suggestion (1999) that the encounter between a new born and her inexperienced parents must produce continuing efforts to find out what is happening; it is not just a time for the triggering of biological automatisms.

This shift from institutions to spaces, moments, meetings, and conversations, is also a challenge to all the dichotomies that plague those who attempt to investigate education comprehensively. Even sophisticated scholars will equate this attempt with the attempt to study "informal" education, or "incidental" education. This equation makes schooling "formal," "deliberate," "planned," and limits any attempt to find deliberation in family life, or the unplanned in school. One could, for example, interpret all work on the "hidden curriculum" in schools as a form of informal education to the extent that it is not rationally planned or organized. Conversely, family members often plan quite deliberately their curriculum and pedagogy—and this is not only true of the very prosperous. Any attempt to code this or that as more or less formal will collapse even more completely when one looks at the details of everyday interaction in classrooms and homes, in supermarkets and work places. Dichotomies may be heuristic if they make us think about what to investigate. They become dangerous when they become common-sensical preliminaries. Thus our call to study education comprehensively should not produce another dichotomy between the "comprehensive" and the "partial," and then, worse, identify various settings as more or less comprehensive or partial. This is why we are getting to write, as I do in this introduction, about "education, taken comprehensively" rather than "comprehensive education."

Given all we can return to schooling and what makes it particularly powerful at this time in the history of humanity. Summarizing schooling as "formal" or "deliberately planned" is not enough. But we do need to specify further the practices that make schooling different.

BY WAY OF THE SCHOOL, INEVITABLY

It may be the glory of 19th century political thinkers and policy makers, from Horace Mann in the United States to Jules Ferry in France, that they developed more and more determinedly what the political theorists of the 18th century had only vaguely foreseen: A democratic polity, properly constituted, would require compulsory, state supported

and state controlled, action. And it may be the same thinkers fateful error that they could only imagine this action as producing schools.

The difficulty we are now facing may have been compounded in the 20th century when the democratic imperative to school was transformed into a fact of social nature. As Parsons put it, altogether starkly, schools would be the institutions formally designed to “socialize and allocate” (1959, p. 297) while other institutions provided for other social functions. In the best of systems, all these institutions would be rationally organized to produce just what the polity required. All this was not a matter of philosophy or ideology but of function and structure in complex societies.

The structural-functional argument may remain convincing when “education” is operationalized mostly as literacy or numeracy. Schools are, also, factories where people learn how to read, whether at an elementary or graduate level. Schools can be evaluated on the quality of their industrial production; and schools can be reformed by rooting out irrational prejudices as these get revealed.¹² But we also know that, ideologically, things are, and ought to be, more complex. Schools, in the sense of whatever times and spaces democratic states may organize for their children, should do more than mechanically produce a (post-) industrial citizenship. In the great humanist tradition, schools should also be where and when all people can reflect on the achievements of humanity as they prepare to contribute to this achievement. Schools should encourage critical thinking and give students a glimpse of all that they might not encounter in their everyday lives. One could go as far as to say there is only ethical rationale for making schooling compulsory, and that is the concern that some people will not be given the opportunity to reflect on their lives in a way somewhat disconnected from the exigencies of their everyday work lives.¹³ But of course, if schools were “just” such spaces, it would be all but impossible to operationalize what they actually “produced.”

¹² Brought up-to-date, this argument has become one about the production of “human capital,” on the one hand and, on the other, about taking into account all cultural issues when producing the means by which merit and its privileges are allocated.

¹³ One should at least consider the possibility that all skill training should be done by the industries that need workers with these. This has actually already happened in two large areas of modern industry. With the almost completely disappearance of “vocational training” in school, it would seem that even such highly skilled work as the work of electricians, plumbers, auto mechanics, etc., is developed through more or less formalized apprenticeship. The same is also true at various cutting edges in technology.

In any event, recapturing the structural-functional take on the ideological imperative may be something we have now discovered is an impossibility. Schools, however organized, cannot be mere factories for the inculcation of skills and dispositions. And they cannot rationally allocate merit. Schools, half a century of research has shown, are always profoundly implicated in the reproduction of social and cultural forms. Many have argued, following Coleman or Bourdieu, that they are perhaps necessarily reproductive of social privilege. Others have shown that they are also productive spaces for challenging this order. Few if any research has shown that they are just factories for the development of human capital, or even that they are particularly successful at it. Well grounded is the social scientific skepticism of which we are the heirs.

But this skepticism cannot extent do our own activity as social scientists also deeply concerned with democratic action. We have several tasks that our polity actually gives us the authority, and duty, to perform. First we must produce better analyses of what exists; and then we must caution about what is possible given what we are discovering about humanity; and finally we must suggest plausible alternatives.

Given the descriptive and prescriptive failure of structural-functionalism, we must face directly the multiplicity of practices in the many settings that any conceivable school provides, each with their own constraints and openings for further practices. In this perspective, the School,¹⁴ as cultural pattern, is not a single “institution” but rather the open-ended set of classrooms (including lesson and non-lesson times there), corridors, cafeterias, many different kinds of offices staffed by many different kinds of peoples, boards of education, state and federal regulators, politicians, journalists, parents, grand-parents, etc.--as well as all educational researchers, professors, and the like, in schools of education, think tanks and NGOs, commercial enterprises, etc. This is not a closed set and certainly not a rational one. Rather, its is an open set in continuing evolution, expansion, and division.

¹⁴ I capitalize School to refer to the specific form that schooling has taken in modern America. As Ray McDermott and I have argued elsewhere (Varenne and McDermott 1998; McDermott and Varenne 2005), we are indexing the historically produced, “cultural,” system of accountability which catches every one in the United States—even if they try to escape it, reform it, play with it, subvert it, exploit it.

Consider for example, the explosive growth of “SES providers”¹⁵ on the national scene. I take this as another instance of the cultural evolution of the School as it becomes ever more baroque in its ongoing reconstitution. Jill Koyama recently (2008) used the deployment of these providers in New York City to give us a richer overview of the often paradoxical linkages that characterize the framing of schooling. She found Bruno Latour’s work (2005) an encouragement to trace the altogether contingent and yet powerfully constraining relationships between federal guidelines as implemented by regulators, the New York City mayor and the head of his department of education, the providers,¹⁶ the principals, the parents—all struggling to improvise up-to-then unheard ways to get what they could. Particularly paradoxical, is the reality that a massive effort to deal with school failure has to proceed through the identification of failure, at every level, from that of federal legislation, to that of the identification of schools and children who are to receive the extra help.¹⁷ It is hard to find rationality in this process, and the evolving organization is all but formless. But the whole, a cultural fact, is completely inescapable.

That schooling would not be reducible to “rational” or “formal” organization is not a problem for a cultural anthropologist raised on Claude Lévi-Strauss’s musings about “bricolage” (1966), or one who appreciates James Boon’s emphasis on the “extra-vagance” of all human practices (1999). Actually, if we were not so aware of the difficulties

¹⁵ “SES” stands here for “Supplemental Educational Services” and, in its current iteration, consists mostly of after-school tutoring services. This could be related to Gordon’s call for supplementary education (Gordon et al., 2005), but in a darkly ironic fashion to the extent that the providers are mostly large for-profit corporations.

¹⁶ To get a sense of the limits of rationality in the transformation of schooling, one has but to look at the web site for [Tutorsforkids.org](http://www.tutorsforkids.org) that lists the following as possible providers: “for-profit companies, non-profit groups, local community programs, colleges or universities, national organization, faith-based groups, private and charter schools, public schools and districts that have not been identified as in need of improvement.” The list of settings is similarly broad: “schools, public libraries, provider offices, family homes, community centers, places of worship.” (<http://www.tutorsforkids.org/providers.asp>. Accessed on May 20th, 2008).

¹⁷ As Koyama brings out, a school has to be labeled “failing” in order to get the special help SES providers are supposed to offer. The paradoxes here is that this makes it sensible for all involved to identify, if not produce, “failure.” Koyama shows several instances of the later as both school principals and SES staff collude in identifying a school as “failing” even when, on some other measurements, the school could also be identified as “successful”—measures that were often used in parallel by the same principals as they talked to parents, their peers, and other administrators.

schooling produce, we could actually enjoy the picture. But we cannot just enjoy another culture. Cultural anthropology cannot be a purely contemplative activity cataloguing what “man has said” (Geertz, 1973, p. 30). What we are learning about the inevitability of culture does present new challenges for those who attempt to imagine other ways to achieve the democratic ideological imperative.

AND ONWARDS

Of course, all I can do here is raised the issue. Our intellectual appreciation of the power of education must, also, move us to become more determinedly educators of those who are our primary audiences, that is our colleagues and those who come to us, whether as students or policy makers. In this volume, McClintock raises the same question in relation to Cremin’s legacy at Teachers College:

some institutional arrangements that he put in place persist nominally, but they serve purposes contrary to his own, and others have been dismantled, their parts strewn, languishing in uncertain use. One may rightly say that we, who followed, fumbled. But to recover, we must look wide and deep at what went wrong. (this volume, p. 30)

Cremin could not even shape the institution of which he was president in any way that might institutionalize his analyses. In many ways, since Cremin’s death, under our watch, schools of education have become ever more focused on schooling and its problematics. Some of our colleagues fought hard for this to happen and it may be inevitable. But we must persist.

Gordon and Vergara, in this volume (Chapter 11), summarize some of Gordon’s work building programs of supplementary education that are much more comprehensive than the impoverished version now mandated in New York City. We know the work of Comer (1996) to re-imagine the school. In recent years, Jeffrey Canada has become quite famous for his related attempts to do something for the poor of Harlem (Tough, 2008). In every way, these efforts to re-think schooling are more atuned to the realities of schooling than, say, those of Ted Sizer (1992). Gordon, Comer, Canada, all face the reality that all schools, including the mythical school of the American imagination, are intimately tied to the everyday life of their towns and neighborhoods; they are not the separate agent of a total state, or even a benevolent community.

Providing for the poor what the prosperous have is thus probably never going to be a matter of replicating institutions in their own neighborhoods, or increasing access to existing institutions. “Successful” programs cannot simply be scaled up, as if scaling did not necessarily new processes of resistance and transformation among all involved.

Again, we must imagine anew. Given the papers in this volume, I will briefly consider the implications of what Garcia tells us about “languaging” (Chapter 7). As we all know, the school imagination has produced three ways of domesticating language: reading and writing in the purported “mother” tongue of the children, teaching some of them one or two “foreign” languages, and bilingual education for those who came to the school without apparent access to the dominant language of the school. Garcia shows that this proceeds for the sense that children operate in terms of single languages that become “theirs” because it is their parents and that we must operate in terms of a simple dichotomy “mother/foreign tongue.” And Garcia shows that, almost everywhere in the world, children operate in terms of multiple languages, and multiple versions of their parents’ languages. Some ideologists of schooling may know this well enough when they build schools where one language, or one form of a language, is systematically enforced. Even French children, after their grand-parents were weaned from their local dialects or languages, find out in school that (school) “French” is something quite different from what they speak at home or on the playgrounds. All migrants know this also, including the most prosperous of migrants who may be in the position to use their multilingualism for social advantage. What schools should do about all this should remain an open question.

We do not have to worry much about technology and schooling to the extent that it appears people are keen enough to find out for themselves what is newly available out there. It may be something of a relief to find out that schools may not have much to do here, except perhaps stand out of the way. And this may be true of all forms of artistic expression—except perhaps if there is evidence that communal forces will not introduce children to other artistic forms than those they are most familiar with. Though even on these matter, one can wonder whether a movie like *300* will not teach more about Sparta, Athens, and the forces ancient Greece had to face, than the high school curriculum unit where the battle of the Thermopylae might be taught.

We could also imagine schooling in terms of what we know about on-going health education. It is interesting that health schooling remains a somewhat peripheral task. It is probably the case that people learn

more of what they may need to know later in their life in biology classes. In any event, adults, and even children, when they get sick, or are faced with situations where they might get sick, will always learn more from each other, their parents, their physicians, etc., than they will from their school teachers. Some school people may think this is a curriculum problem. Rather, it is an opportunity to imagine other means of spreading information and suggesting change in behavior. There may be something profoundly wise about a form of education where people learn outward from their experience that which they need to know, in the here and now, about this experience and what might need to happen to transform the experience. This is probably how most of us learn about cancer and then the various organs it might affect, cells, therapies, and even ways of dying. What is the exact use of a high school curriculum unit about cancer should be an open question.

Could we leave reading, writing, arithmetic, to the same processes that teach us about computers, new musical forms, disease and treatment? Would this produce the democracy our founding parents imagined? Closer to us, would this actually correspond to what Dewey suspected when he attempted to privilege education and local experience over the kind of schooling the 19th century had made? Cremin (1976) critiqued Dewey for, in a way, losing his nerve when he returned to schooling as the privileged form for education in a democracy. To the extent that schooling will remain with us for the foreseeable future, reforming schooling and supplementing schooling may also be worth our attention. But we must dare go much further. Above all we must keep educating each other about education, comprehensively.

We choose to face all this optimistically. As scholars we see a vast field of matters to investigate in a new way; as humanists we rejoice at the evidence that all human beings are continually involved in educational efforts; as participants in policy discussions we envision new routes towards our ideological goals. Of course, on matters of policy as on matters of theoretical framing we are far from unanimous. This is as it should be. We do all find dialogue most useful in sharpening our understanding, revealing our weaknesses, and leading to greater insight. This volume is, we hope, exemplary of this kind of dialogue.

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HERVÉ VARENNE is Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. A cultural anthropologist, his major interests center on the processes that produce particular conditions for human beings in history, and their consequences. His most recent book, written with Ray McDermott, deals with the consequences of American schooling (*Successful Failure*, Westview 1998). Three recent articles develop the themes: with Ray McDermott, "Reconstructing Culture" (2006); with Mary Cotter, "The Production of Difference in Interaction" (2007); and "Culture, Education, Anthropology" (2008). He maintains an extensive web site about this work at <http://varenne.tc.columbia.edu/>