

## Introduction

America needs a richer, brighter vision for its high schools. My primary concern is not the one we hear constantly today – that test scores are too low and that the achievement gap between rich and poor is widening and needs to be closed. I share the latter worry, but my main concern is broader: High schools today are not meeting the deep human needs of most of our students. Intellectually talented students are diverted from intellectual enrichment to a concentration on high test scores and top rankings; students with nonacademic talents are discouraged from developing those talents, and, forced into academic studies in the name of equality, they struggle to make sense of schooling that purports to offer a path to secure financial life. Students (and parents) are led to believe that the purpose of education is to get a well-paid job and achieve economic well-being. We seem to have forgotten that there is more to education than preparing to get ahead financially.

Educators once talked seriously about producing “better adults,” about encouraging the development of all aspects of a complete life: moral, physical, social, vocational, aesthetic, intellectual, spiritual, and civic. We once considered optimal development in these aspects of life to be the *aims of education*.<sup>1</sup> Aims (as I use the word) are importantly different from goals and objectives, ends we expect to meet with some specificity. In contrast, we cannot specify exactly what outcomes our aims must produce – they will vary with intensity and breadth over the individuals with whom we work – but they guide all that we do. We do not rely on tests to prove that we are influencing moral and social development, but we refer to moral and social aims in explaining our choices for the whole range of content and pedagogical activity, and we watch for signs that our efforts are producing positive results. Will what we are teaching (and how we are teaching it) somehow contribute to the development of better

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adults? How will we know if we are succeeding? We listen, watch, reflect, and live with the results of our decisions.

Some would object that “aims-talk” leads to interminable argument and distraction, but, in response, I argue that such talk keeps the intellectual door open to dialogue, reflection, analysis, collegiality, and creative planning. It *should* be interminable. We should never cease to ask the questions: Why are we doing this? How should we do it? What do we gain and what do we lose by doing it? Are we producing better adults?

I will posit the need for a unitary (or unifying) educational purpose: to produce better adults,<sup>2</sup> but I will caution readers at the outset that acceptance of this aim (or purpose) does *not* imply uniformity of those adults or of curricular content, school organization, or pedagogical methods. In what is suggested under this unitary purpose, there will be a wide space for variety and choice in all of these matters. Indeed, I will argue that commitment to this aim demands such openness to variety and choice. *Choice* will be a major topic throughout the book, but I will not emphasize or even endorse parental choice of schools. Properly guided student choice should be encouraged; it should displace – or at least greatly reduce – the habit of assigning students to programs and courses on the basis of test scores and grades. Teacher choice on content and method should be acknowledged as the hallmark of teacher professionalization. At present, there is far too much administrative coercion on both.

Accompanying that emphasis on choice will be emphases on collegiality and the use of interdisciplinary teams to make connections among the disciplines and to real life. All through the book, we will explore the “seven Cs”: choice, critical thinking, caring, connections, continuity, collegiality, and creativity.

In the first five chapters, I will use a dialectical method of sorts, moving from a search for the meaning of a better adult to exploration of how the result might be achieved. As we make progress in the search, we will also encounter new problems to be tackled. Thus, interim results and conclusions will give rise to new explorations and analyses. By the time we reach Chapter 6, a critique of contemporary Common Core Standards, we should be ready to say something constructive on both the organizational content of our high schools and how to prepare teachers to work effectively in them.

Among the points to be discussed here are several that may be controversial. I will argue, for example, that we should expand our curricula to accommodate a variety of talents and interest; we should revitalize vocational education. Looking back on our educational history, we see that the

U.S. comprehensive high school led the world in providing secondary education to large numbers of children. The comprehensive high school introduced a variety of tracks designed, ostensibly, to provide secondary school education to students with varying talents and interests. The idea of tracks (or streams) is sound and consistent with democratic ideals. Clearly, however, we have to eliminate the evils of tracking as it was implemented in the twentieth century. We can do this by inviting well-informed students to *choose* their preferred programs instead of *assigning* them to tracks and by ensuring that every program offered is of the highest quality.

Not only must the curriculum be expanded by the addition of vocational programs. It should also be extended to include matters related to competence in personal and family life. Knowing how important effective parenting is to educational success, our refusal to teach something about parenting in our schools is irresponsible.

Although it may, on first hearing, seem paradoxical, I will suggest that we work enthusiastically to revive the spirit of the liberal arts. This does not mean prescribing a return to the classic great books or to any particular curriculum traditionally posited in the humanities. Rather, it means attending in a variety of ways and pervasively to the great existential questions about the meaning of life, truth, beauty, love, and goodness. In defense of this proposal, I will argue that it is unity of purpose, not uniformity of curriculum, to which we should be committed, and that argument will constitute the first chapter and establish the foundation for the following chapters advocating a variety of programs.

Another possibly controversial recommendation is that, if we are serious about encouraging critical thinking, we must say more about what we mean by “critical thinking,” and we must find a way to introduce the study of critical topics such as parenting, poverty, peace, and religion into our regular studies; we must do this without resorting to indoctrination. One way to approach this area is to introduce themes that can be addressed in various ways across the disciplines. Instead of offering new courses on these topics, we would ask teachers in every subject to introduce material on the chosen themes. Every major subject should contribute something to our thinking on parenting, peace, poverty, and religion. The themes should be chosen by interdisciplinary teams. This arrangement is an example of another major topic – collegiality – that will be emphasized throughout the book.

Yet another controversial recommendation will come toward the end of the book, motivated by the preceding chapters. I will suggest that the education of teachers should proceed more like that of engineers; that is,

four years of undergraduate teacher education should concentrate from the start in depth on education, on the school curriculum, and on teaching methods. It is ridiculous and embarrassing that we now so often assign middle school teachers to teach algebra when they admit that they do not know or understand the subject.<sup>3</sup> Many of our largest teacher training institutions do, of course, provide an undergraduate teaching major, but there is too little attention given to the high school curriculum in its collective entirety, and too much of it remains unconnected to the central project of teaching. Further, although these institutions produce most of our teachers, they suffer a lack of professional prestige. This is not a call to return to the teachers colleges of yesteryear, although we can learn much from that earlier movement and it should be reexamined appreciatively. There is a role for subject matter specialists, surely, but every teacher should know at least what every high school student is required to study. This means that every high school teacher should know the mathematics demanded of all students; the teaching of mathematics beyond that required level should be the domain of specialists.

What follows is a brief description of the chapters that support and fill out my main arguments: that unity of purpose can accommodate a variety of programs aimed at different vocational, personal, and civic ends and that teacher education must be designed to produce broadly educated teachers who are thoroughly in command of both their special subject and of the material that all students are required to learn.

Chapter 1, “Unity of Purpose”: Theology once served as the unifying purpose of curricula in college and secondary schools.<sup>4</sup> With its loss, the liberal arts have suffered fragmentation, and the associated disciplines have become more highly specialized and separated from one another. Is there a way to redefine the unity of purpose and make the much needed connections? How should we describe it?

Chapter 2, “Vocational Programs”: Fine vocational programs can be offered without sacrificing the unity of purpose. All students should experience a curriculum that includes the study of family, vocational, moral, and civic life. This can be done in a way that eliminates the evils of tracking as it was implemented in the twentieth century.

Chapter 3, “What Might Have Been: Women’s Traditional Interests”: In this chapter, I will ask readers to consider what the school curriculum might have looked like if women had been involved from the start. This exercise of imagination will then be applied to a set of recommendations on how to include much of this long-repressed material in today’s programs of study without changing the basic structure of the curriculum.

Language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies will remain at the heart of the curriculum, but they can all be stretched to include much of the material described in our exploration.

Chapter 4, “A Better Adult: Continuing the Search”: This chapter will concentrate mainly on moral education as a basic and universal element of the high school curriculum, but it will not neglect other features of what might be meant by the expression “better adult.” I will argue that consideration of moral life – of the “goodness” emphasized in the liberal arts – should pervade the curriculum. A course in moral education is not sufficient. The chapter will set the stage for further development of the concept.

Chapter 5, “Parenting”: Producing better adults implies producing people who will be more committed, more knowledgeable parents. We can teach much about parenting without adding specific “how to do it” courses that would be rejected on the grounds of overcrowding the curriculum, and we can do this without indoctrinating or moving too far in the direction of paternalism. We will ask what can be done in language arts, social studies, science, mathematics, and the arts.

Chapter 6, “The Common Core Standards”: We will look critically at the Common Core. What should we endorse? What should we reject? What should be further explicated?

Chapter 7, “Critical Thinking”: Critical thinking appears in the Common Core Standards and, indeed, shows up worldwide in statements of educational aims. Starting with a brief history of the topic, I will explore ways to encourage critical thinking in both our students and their teachers. Three ideas will be important: First, we should say more about what we mean by “critical thinking.” Second, we should admit that we probably cannot teach critical thinking without open consideration of critical issues; this discussion will underscore the need to include material introduced in earlier chapters. Third, teachers should be capable of critical thinking, and they should be encouraged to use it collegially to direct their own work.

Chapter 8, “Collegiality, Caring, and Continuity”: If teachers are to work effectively across disciplines under the guidance of a unified set of aims, they need opportunities to meet regularly for discussion on the connections between their disciplines and to life itself. This discussion should also include (and be inspired by) a dedication to the establishment of relations of care and trust. Teaching should not be defined as mere instruction.

Continuity will be discussed in some depth – continuity of place, curriculum, and people. Research has shown that continuity of faculty is

a vital factor in teacher and student morale. Instead of fighting a losing battle to get rid of ineffective teachers, we might do better to work cooperatively to make them better.<sup>5</sup> One way to approach this (to be discussed more fully in Chapter 11 on teacher preparation) is to establish a rank of master teachers who will work collegially with both their contemporaries and novices.

Chapter 9, “The Curriculum and Its Setting”: Schools should reflect the work and commitment of their communities. With the rising global concern for the natural environment, schools should give more attention to environmentalism in both their curriculum and physical structure. Students should be involved in planting and maintaining gardens, studying the ecology of their local environments. The emphasis on interconnectedness in nature should extend to an equal emphasis on interconnection in the curriculum. The obvious interdependence of people should be addressed in every subject, but social studies should serve as the integrating center of the high school curriculum. Extracurricular programs should also be thought of as integrating activities, activities that promote the development of citizens for participatory democracy. Perhaps these activities are best considered as part of an expanded curriculum – not “extra” or external to it.

Finally, we will consider the physical setting and structure of our school buildings and explore ways in which the schools might exemplify social and natural connections in their communities.

Chapter 10, “Planning, Enacting, Evaluating”: This chapter will look at the practical tasks of teaching. Planning, I will argue, is not just a matter of preparing lessons; it is better construed as a continuing personal program of preparing the teacher. A fundamental commitment of professional teachers is to continue their own intellectual growth so that they can respond with “spontaneity” to a host of student questions as both teachers and students seek intellectual vitality. The section on planning will be followed by one on pedagogical methods and ways to expand student choice. The chapter concludes with a critical examination of problems in evaluating the work of both students and teachers. Serious consideration is given to how good teachers might evaluate their own work.

Chapter 11, “The Professional Preparation of Teachers”: Perhaps the most controversial recommendation in this book is that preparation for teaching should be more like that for engineering; that is, four undergraduate years should be devoted to the school curriculum, history and philosophy of education, evolution of methods, and the social, personal, and political problems of education in a democratic society. I recognize

that many of our “second-tier” public universities ostensibly maintain such programs, but they are too often perceived as second rate. They should be vigorously revised and developed. Their outstanding features should be recognized, publicized, and appreciated. We will look at the historic reasons for trying to move away from serious undergraduate preparation for teaching – trying to raise the academic appraisal of teaching as a profession – and explore an alternative that puts high value on teaching and teacher preparation from the start. A realistic plan for teacher advancement is also considered.

Chapter 12, “Reflecting on the Brighter Vision”: This chapter will summarize the previous chapters and invite readers to think deeply about the problems identified.

Conclusion: Sometimes it is useful for readers to know where an author is headed so that they may prepare to agree, to argue against, to challenge, to anticipate great (perhaps insurmountable) difficulties, to suggest helpful revisions, or to decide not to read the thing at all. Readers should also keep in mind that, on many topics, instead of making definite recommendations, I urge them to think and engage in collegial discussion. This book is not a prescription for sweeping reforms that will involve semi-ignorant policy makers, throw teachers into confusion, make money for publishers, or tax students with yet more testing. Developing a richer, brighter vision will require many minds working together. In that spirit, here are some ideas to watch for.

High school education should recognize a unitary purpose: the development of better adults, “better” defined over the whole range of human attributes – moral, intellectual, physical, social, aesthetic, civic. Special attention should be given to moral thought and action throughout the curriculum. *Every* teacher is a moral educator.

Vocational education should be revitalized and expanded; it should be integrated with academic programs both physically on joint campuses and intellectually through a universal program in social studies.

Women’s traditional interests should be included in the curriculum through the use of interdisciplinary themes – on, for example, homemaking, parenting, peace, and religion. These interests should be *everyone’s* interests.

Much greater provision for choice (both teacher and student) should be provided.

The legacy or spirit (not the traditional curriculum) of the liberal arts should be preserved.

The centrality of relations of care and trust should be recognized in both planning and practice – especially in working with impoverished and

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academically weak students. A preparatory first year of high school should be provided, and continuity of teacher–student relationships should have high priority in the following years.

Teacher preparation at the undergraduate level should be revitalized and expanded across the disciplines, and provision for advancement within the teaching profession should be carefully defined and implemented. Teacher supervision should be conducted collegially by expert teachers in the higher rank.

We will start with an exploration of what might be meant by a “better adult.”



## 1

## Unity of Purpose

Many people today seem to believe that the main purpose – perhaps the only purpose – of getting an education is to make more money after graduating. Indeed, there is a move afoot to judge the worth of colleges by the salaries of their graduates. This move is motivated in part by unhappiness with the enormous increase in college tuition and the fear that graduates who have acquired large loan debts will be unable to repay them unless they can obtain well-paying jobs. One might say that making a lot of money provides a unity of purpose to aspiring graduates. But making money is not an *educational* purpose, and it is not what I am referring to when I argue for a unity of purpose.

Feelings run high on the matter of purpose. After an article appeared in the *New York Times* describing the rankings of colleges by graduates' salaries published in PayScale.com, two respondents wrote to praise the colleges from which they had graduated (Oberlin and Grinnell) for their low rankings on PayScale. The writers expressed pride on both the high academic rankings of their alma maters *and* their low rankings on PayScale. One quoted his former history teacher as saying, "Our graduates may not always do well, but they always do good."<sup>1</sup> One can admire the pride of these writers who have not given way to "money-grubbing" but still sympathize with the many students who have achieved neither financial security nor a sense of becoming somehow a better adult – one who "does good."

In this book, I concentrate on problems and debates about our high schools. However, disagreements over the purposes of higher education are closely related to those concerning secondary education, and a brief examination of the debate on higher education should be useful. If the purpose of higher education is economic gain, then – in the pursuit of equality – our society must try to prepare all students for college. I will argue that this

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move actually works against the equality it seeks, and it undermines both our democracy and the pursuit of genuine educational aims.

For centuries, the unifying purpose of higher education in the Western world was guided by theology. Andrew Delbanco puts it this way:

In the early American college, since all studies were unified as one integrated study of the divine mind, boundaries between “fields” or “disciplines” did not exist. “There is not one truth in religion, another in mathematics, and a third in physics and in art,” as one Harvard graduate (class of 1825) put the matter. “There is one truth, even as there is one God.”<sup>2</sup>

In the last half of the nineteenth century, theology began to lose its grip as a unifying force on the university curriculum. Instead of a concentration on the divine mind and the relation of human beings to that mind, university studies expanded to include agriculture, engineering, and the professions. By the middle of the twentieth century, the very idea of the university was challenged. Referring to Clark Kerr, president of the University of California in the 1960s, Andrew Hacker and Claudia Dreifus write:

In his view, the very word *university* was a relic of a fast-receding past. Its unitary prefix suggested a single focus, which was teaching, mainly of undergraduates, requiring little more than classrooms, a library, and some modest laboratories. All that had to change, Kerr asserted. . . . So he coined a new idiom, *multiversity*: an institution willing to take on any assignment related to knowledge, no matter how remote the association.<sup>3</sup>

The clash between practical knowledge and the knowledge centered on the divine mind (intellectual knowledge) was already in full force in the early twentieth century. Robert Maynard Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago, echoed and promoted the medieval view of unified mind and truth. Drawing on the *Summa Theologica* (Thomas Aquinas), Hutchins wrote: “Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same.”<sup>4</sup> Hutchins believed that the universities should not be in the business of professional training or any sort of vocational training. *Education* and *training*, he advised, are two different enterprises. His view is still embraced today by many critics of higher education, although few would endorse theology as a unifying purpose. Arguing for an end to vocational training at the undergraduate level, Hacker and Dreifus claim that it is “a huge mistake to squander years that could and should be devoted to enriching young minds.”<sup>5</sup> I will invite readers to consider the possibility that enriching the mind need not be abandoned in vocational education.