

CONNECTIONS

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2007

A Year's Review
from the Perspective
of Citizens

WHAT IF?

IMAGINE THIS

COULD IT BE THAT?

MAYBE THE QUESTION WE SHOULD BE ASKING IS...

Introducing the
READERS' FORUM
See page 33

What You Need to Know about *Connections*

With this issue of *Connections*, the Kettering Foundation introduces three significant initiatives for the newsletter.

The first is a decision to change *Connections* from a biannual publication to an annual. This new schedule corresponds with Kettering's review cycle, which goes like this: each year, Kettering focuses its research through a particular point of view, or, as we say at the foundation, lens. The foundation's research has three fundamental foci: citizens, communities, and democratic institutions. This reflects Kettering's hypothesis that democracy requires the following:

- citizens who can make sound decisions about their future;
- communities of citizens acting together to address common problems;
- institutions that are legitimate in the eyes of citizens and that support a democratic society.

By publishing *Connections* once a year, it will serve as a record of the foundation's research focus over the previous 12 months. Therefore, as you'll find throughout the following pages, this issue of *Connections* reflects the foundation's research over the last year—through the lens of citizens.

The second initiative is the addition of a new section, the "Readers' Forum." As its name implies, the new section



features reactions and comments by *Connections* readers, who were invited to review drafts of many of the articles that appear in this newsletter. With the help of our colleagues Connie Crockett and Alice Diebel, we interviewed 13 people from around the country about how their experiences relate to these articles. This feedback is organized into three articles related to the

foundation's hypothesis about democracy, as noted above. The "Forum" is described in more detail on page 33.

To make the new section a true "Readers' Forum," the foundation has devised a new way for readers to react to—and even to read—*Connections*. This is the third initiative: the creation of a new discussion area on the foundation's Web site, www.kettering.org. On the Web site you'll find a new section devoted to this issue of *Connections* and comment areas where readers can participate in a forum around the ideas expressed in the articles published in this issue.

The addition of both the print and online "Readers' Forum" is an attempt to help readers better connect to *Connections*—and the Kettering Foundation. But remember: the online forum will only be as good as you our readers make it.

—Deborah Witte and Bob Mihalek

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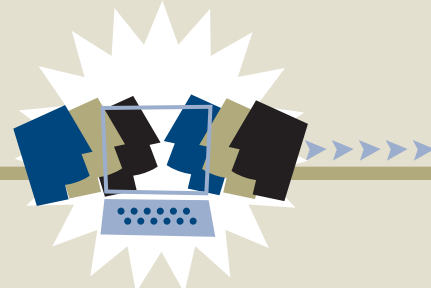
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Sources of Deliberation

Edited by Libby Kingseed, from Embedded Deliberation

Since the object of the research described in *Embedded Deliberation* was to learn something about the paths and patterns that lead from deliberation to action, we searched for cases in which we had reason to believe that deliberative practices had become fairly widespread and repeated over time. Two of our four case studies clearly focus their efforts on bringing citizens together in their communities for the discussion of community issues: West Virginia's National Issues Forums and Connecticut's Community Conversations about Education.

West Virginia's National Issues Forums

Established in the mid-1990s, the West Virginia Center for Civic Life (the Center) promotes "nonpartisan community discussions of important public issues." The Center is hosted at the University of Charleston. Much of the Center's success can be attributed to its director, Betty Knighton.

Besides assisting communities in framing issues for public dialogue, training moderators, and convening forums, the Center also works with other organizations interested in convening forums. This partnership is a strategic decision to maximize the impact of the Center's limited resources. The Center has helped the Prevention Resource Center, which designed and convened a series of forums on underage drinking across the state, and the West Virginia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, which convened more than 20 forums to increase public awareness on domestic violence. The Center is well established at the University of Charleston, where it trains students, faculty, and staff, thus embedding deliberation in some course curricula.

Connecticut's Community Conversations about Education

Since 1997, the Community Conversations about Education have involved more than 6,000 citizens in deliberative forums across Connecticut. Sponsored by a local foundation, the Graustein Memorial Fund, and directed by the League of Women Voters, the Conversations reached more than 80 Connecticut communities, some of which held multiple Conversations over time. Since Conversations aim at bringing together a diverse group—by race, age, education, income level, and gender—convenors plan outreach activities very carefully and try to address possible obstacles to participation.

Besides focusing on deliberation as a way to illuminate the complexities of a problem and enrich the public's judgment, Community Conversations have a significant collective action component. As stated in the *Community Planning Guide*, by the Institute for Educational Leadership and Public Agenda, the Conversations' purpose is to "help communities find common ground for public action and ways to work together to address educational issues." Several of the League's requirements are designed to create a fertile environment for action: A convenor must find five cosponsors; moderators help participants identify common ground and possible actions; organizers compile notes from conversations into a document that is circulated among participants and decision makers to promote change and local action; and convenors are encouraged to organize follow-up meetings, which build on the recommendations that emerged during the deliberation and give citizens a sense that deliberation is the first step of a process to promote change.

The Kettering Foundation, chartered in 1927, is a research foundation rooted in the American tradition of inventive research. Its founder, Charles F. Kettering, holder of more than 200 patents, is best known for his invention of the automobile self-starter. He was interested, above all, in seeking practical answers to "the problems behind the problems."

The foundation today continues in that tradition. The objective of the research now is to study what helps democracy work as it should. Seven major Kettering programs are designed to shed light on what is required to strengthen public life.

Kettering is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) research organization supported by an endowment. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's Web site at www.kettering.org.

Connections is published by the Kettering Foundation, 200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799. The articles in *Connections* reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its trustees, or its officers.

Editors

David S. Frech
Bob Mihalek
Deborah Witte

Copy Editor

Lisa Boone-Berry

Design and Production

Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

Illustrations

Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

Acknowledgments

Boyle, Phillip. "Do School Boards Matter?" *PRISM*, Spring 2004, pp. 19, 21.
©2004 Colorado School Board Association. Reprinted with permission of the Colorado School Board Association.

Cook, Brian J. *Bureaucracy and Self-Government: Reconsidering the Role of Public Administration in American Politics*, pp. 134-135.
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Derthick, Martha. *Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism*, p. 152. ©2001 Brookings Institution Press. Reprinted with permission of the Brookings Institution Press.

Frederickson, H. George. *The Spirit of Public Administration*, pp. 231-232.
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Wolfe, Alan. *Does American Democracy Still Work?* pp. 15-16, 47-48.
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Urschel, Jane W. "Fed Up! Can School Boards Reconnect with Communities in Order to Govern Education and Learning?" *PRISM*, Spring 2004, pp. 16-17.
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200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799; (937) 434-7300

444 North Capitol Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20001; (202) 393-4478

6 East 39th Street, New York, New York 10016 (212); 686-7016

www.kettering.org

Kettering Foundation
200 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2799

Nonprofit Organization U.S. Postage PAID Dayton, OH Permit No. 638
