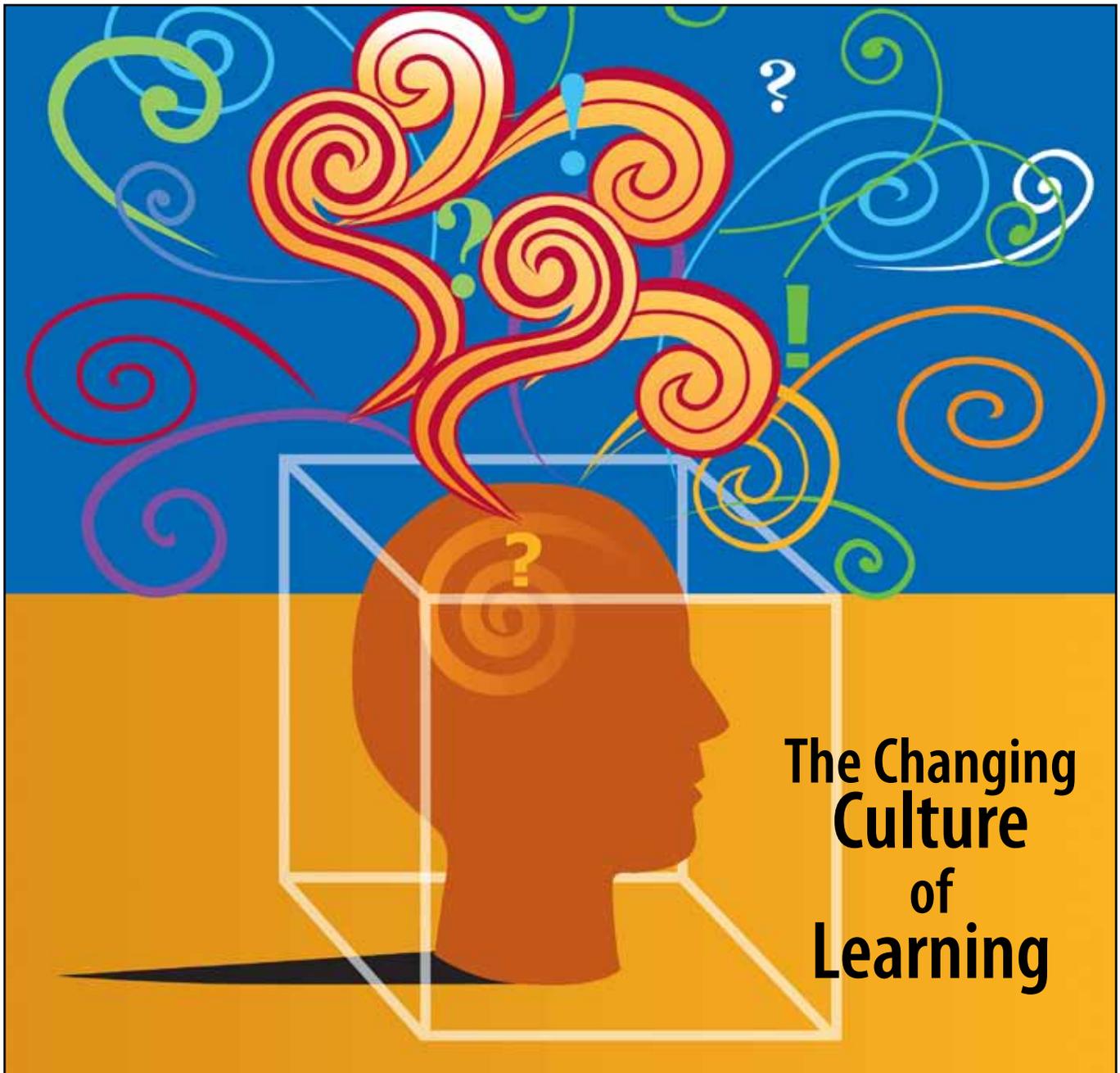


THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

# CONNECTIONS

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2011



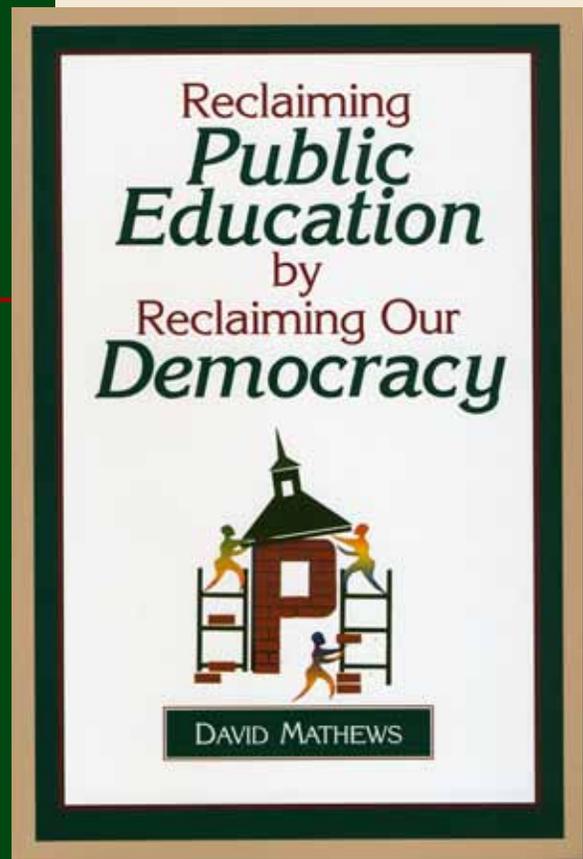
**The Changing  
Culture  
of  
Learning**

# Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy

By David Mathews

In his most recent book, Kettering Foundation president David Mathews considers what citizens and educators alike want from public education and how they might come closer to getting it. Mathews examines the obstacles that block them, beginning with significant differences in the ways that citizens see problems of education and how professional educators and policymakers talk about them. Discussions of accountability, the achievement gap, vouchers, and the like don't always resonate with people's real concerns. Mathews argues that this has resulted in a deep chasm between citizens and the schools that serve them.

*Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy* updates Kettering's research findings, restates and expands on ideas raised in Mathews' earlier book, *Is There a Public for Public Schools?* (Kettering Foundation Press, 1996), and adds material that illustrates how to build a public for public education.



Kettering Foundation Press | 2006  
165 pages  
trade paper \$9.95

To order this publication, contact **Agency for Instructional Technology** at 1-800-600-4060. You can also FAX your order to 1-812-333-4218 or send an e-mail to [info@ait.net](mailto:info@ait.net).

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. 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 website at [www.kettering.org](http://www.kettering.org).

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**Editor**

Phillip Lurie

**Copy Editor**

Lisa Boone-Berry

**Design and Production**

Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

**Illustrations**

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- Undertaking constitutional reform limiting the absolute powers of presidents or kings and adopting a system of divided and balanced powers.
- Organize free and fair general elections resulting in parliaments that actually represent various political forces, as long as they accept a democratic approach based on popular mandate and peaceful transfers of power.
- Initiate the implementation of economic and financial reforms and development of social policies in order to confront poverty, unemployment, and the other severe crises that afflict broad segments of our societies.
- Each peaceful, democratic path demands wider citizen participation to ensure the sustainability of reform and continuation in the devolution of power. It also requires independence from all negative possible influences from both regional and external actors violating.

## Two Years and Six Practices Later ...

By David Holwerk

I arrived at the Kettering Foundation in June 2009 after 30 years as a newspaper journalist, armed with some background on the foundation's work and a question that I couldn't answer about my former occupation.

I spent most of my newspaper career working as an editor in charge of opinion pages. In that work, calling on the public to do something—rise up, ask questions, demand answers, take action—is part of the routine. Most of the time, maybe 98 or 99 times out of 100, the public goes on about its business with no indication that it has read or heard about your call to action. But sometimes, that once or twice out of 100, the public would rise up and not only do what you had called for but act independently in ways that were totally unexpected in both their creativity and effectiveness.

I could never figure out what made those occasions different. I couldn't see that our editorials on those occasions were any better or even markedly different than our work on other occasions. So what, I wondered, had happened in those instances?

I groped for an answer in a paper I wrote for Kettering in 2008 (now, I am thankful to say, it is consigned to the depths of the foundation's archives). I didn't get very far, though; I simply didn't know enough to begin to figure out what the answer might be.

Now, after two years of working here at the foundation, I've begun to get an idea about the answer. The answer lay not in what I and other journalists did, but in what was going on among the people who read the newspaper. The difference was civic life.

That concept dawned on me after I had begun wrapping my brain around one of Kettering's fundamental insights: the six democratic practices. These practices are laid out in various places in the foundation's publications, most notably perhaps in David Mathews' *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*.

When I first came across the Six Practices, I wasn't sure what to make of them. They seemed like a metaphor or a theoretical construct. They kept popping back into my brain, though, and at some point several months after coming to the foundation full-time it dawned on me that they weren't theoretical or metaphorical at all, but rather a description of life as it is lived by real people in real communities.

I also realized that the way I had been thinking about why the public responded to some editorials put the question backwards. It wasn't the public response to the editorials that was different. It was that the editorials resonated with (or, in Kettering—speak, aligned with) something that was already going on in the community, completely unbeknownst to me and the other journalists involved.

Since then, I've been thinking about how to share this insight with journalists (and, more recently, with other professionals). I've tried various approaches over the past few months with opinion journalists in this country and with health journalists in South Africa. I've used a different version with broadcasters and still another version with a small group of legislators. I'm on the lookout for other experiments in the same vein—in all instances, beginning with the Six Practices. Two years into this work, I regard these practices as the core of what the Kettering Foundation has to say about the world.

I'm also increasingly sure that we have only begun to explore the ways in which the Six Practices open up opportunities for real people working on real problems in real communities. Working on that should keep me busy for the next couple of years at least.

**David Holwerk is Director of Communications and resident scholar at the Kettering Foundation.**

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