

THE KETTERING FOUNDATION'S ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

CONNECTIONS

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2012

EDUCATING FOR DEMOCRACY

Stories of
INNOVATION
in
**HIGHER
EDUCATION**





NEW from Kettering Foundation Press

Democratizing Deliberation

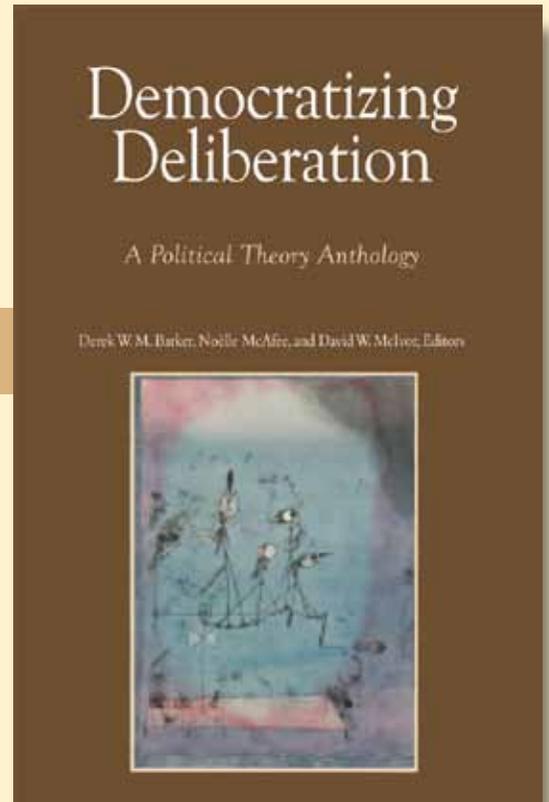
A Political Theory Anthology

Edited by Derek W. M. Barker, Noëlle McAfee, and David W. McIvor

Democratizing Deliberation brings together recent and cutting-edge political theory scholarship on deliberative democracy. The collection reframes deliberative democracy to be sensitive to the deep conflicts, multiple forms of communication, and aspirations for civic agency that characterize real public deliberation. In so doing, the book addresses many of the most common challenges to the theory and practice of deliberative democracy.

Kettering Foundation Press | 2012

\$15.95 • 184 pages • ISBN 978-0-923993-41-2



To read excerpts and purchase this book, visit www.kettering.org.

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit, operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering's primary research question is, what makes democracy work as it should? Kettering's research is distinctive because it is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation. The foundation seeks to identify and address the challenges to making democracy work as it should through interrelated program areas that focus on citizens, communities, and institutions. The foundation collaborates with an extensive network of community groups, professional associations, researchers, scholars, and citizens around the world. Established in 1927 by inventor Charles F. Kettering, the foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization that does not make grants but engages in joint research with others. For more information about KF research and publications, see the Kettering Foundation's website at www.kettering.org.

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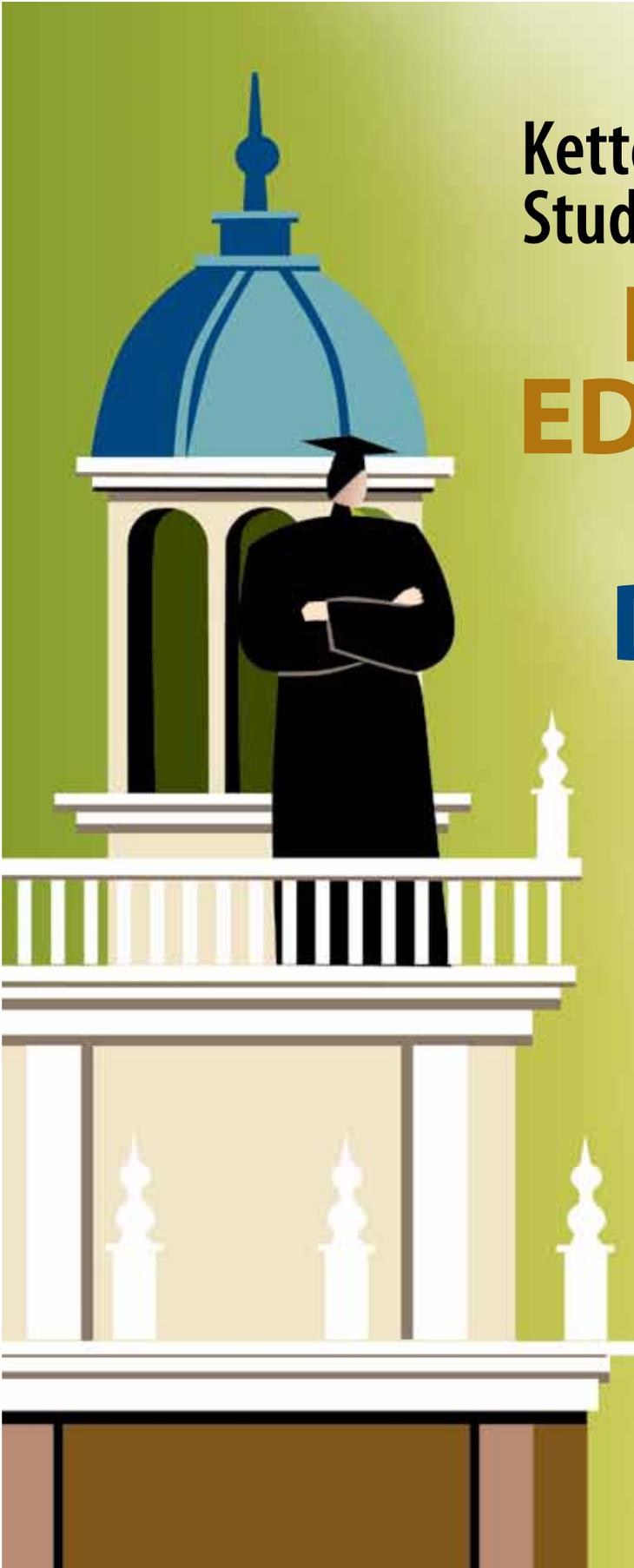
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CONNECTIONS

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Reviewing Kettering Foundation Studies of the Role of

HIGHER EDUCATION

in American Democracy

David Mathews

If we step back and look at the big picture of democracy today, that picture is particularly troubling. Americans are worried about where the country is heading; the economy tops the list of their concerns. Many have lost whatever confidence they had in the ability of government to solve our problems. Representative government, they feel, no longer represents them. People are also critical of most other major institutions, including those in education and government.

As you probably know, Kettering studies what it takes to make democracy work as it should. Some of that research is focused on institutions of higher education, specifically on their relationship with the citizenry. Historically, the country has relied on colleges and universities to keep our democracy strong. Most of these institutions still insist that they serve democracy, yet what they mean by democracy isn't always clear, especially when it comes to the role of citizens. Citizens may be seen as playing a limited and relatively passive

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role, albeit as informed voters rather than as active public agents who work with other citizens to solve common problems and make things that serve the well-being of all. Certainly colleges and universities understand citizens want an education they can afford. But, while understandable, the implication is that citizens are individual customers or consumers.

The Curriculum

Kettering has been studying the impact that institutions of higher education are having on the problems of democracy for some time. We began our research by looking at the curriculum. Many subjects, specifically the liberal arts or humanities, were to prepare young people for their role in democracy. We worked with faculty members who were trying to return the liberal arts to their historical mission as civic arts. Some feared that mission is being obscured or lost.

We found allies who shared our concerns in the Association of American Colleges and Universities and its company of scholars who produced the landmark report *A Crucible Moment*, as well as in crusading faculty members who have a passion for bringing civic engagement into liberal arts education. We are returning to this arena to see what has happened since we did the initial studies. We are also looking at all disciplines and professional studies to see what they imply about democratic citizenship.

Students and Other Young People

Focusing on the curriculum naturally took us to what else is being done to prepare young people to be citizens. Students have their own frustrations with politics. *College Students Talk Politics*, a study Kettering did with the Harwood Group in 1993, found high levels of cynicism about the political system and uncertainty about students' ability to make a difference in it. A follow-up study, published in 2007 (before the Obama campaign) by CIRCLE, was more encouraging yet still reported students have some apprehension about the political system: "Students perceive politics, as it currently exists, as a polarized

debate with no options for compromise or nuance." More recent studies are even more discouraging.

Service and service learning have been popular and undoubtedly beneficial. Yet these programs don't necessarily prepare students for the work of solving problems with other citizens, including those who aren't like or don't agree with them. In addition, we began to look at the political socialization of young Americans who do not go to college and may have attitudes about politics that are quite different from those who graduate from our colleges and universities.

As is the practice at Kettering, diagnostic research is followed by research on experiments to solve the problems that have been identified. The first of these studies was done with the National Collegiate Honors Council. In 1996 and 1997, students in honors programs across the country organized a series of public deliberations on the future of higher education. Later, beginning in 2001, Katy Harriger and Jill McMillan, two faculty members at Wake Forest University, started a four-year study of the effects of introducing undergraduates to deliberative decision making and problem solving. This study—described in the Kettering Foundation Press book, *Speaking of Politics*—found that deliberative experiences give students an understanding of citizenship that is far more robust and practical than that of other undergraduates.

Faculty

We have found allies for our research in concerned faculty like Peggy Shaffer at Miami University. In the 2008 issue of the *Higher Education Exchange*, she spoke about her need to integrate her public concerns into her academic career. Of course, faculty members can join the

Rotary Club and take active roles in partisan politics. But they want more.

Scholars like Shaffer are on every campus and in a variety of disciplines, yet they don't always know one another. If they were able to work together across institutional and disciplinary lines, they might be a transformative force in academe that could help revitalize the democratic mission of their institutions. We are now doing more research with faculty members who are experimenting with what they call "deliberative pedagogy."

In the course of this research, we got to know another remarkable group of faculty members who are challenging the

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dominant concepts of knowledge as they attempt to create a more democratically relevant research, which they call "public scholarship." These faculty members range from those in philosophy and speech communication to those in professional fields like health care, cooperative extension, and architecture. The foundation has published a few articles showing that there are, indeed, valid ways of knowing that are distinct from conventional scientific methods. In addition to rational faculties, human beings have a capacity for moral reasoning, judgment, and practical wisdom, which are essential in politics.

Centers for Public Life

The foundation's most extensive research on experiments to reposition higher education in democracy has been

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with community colleges and universities that have created more than 50 centers for public, or civic, life. Not all of these centers are on campuses, but nearly all take their understanding of active citizenship

a heavy emphasis on rural community life and community building. Continued pressures on dwindling rural communities today are making cooperative extension departments reexamine their missions. For

democratic values have (or don't have) in development.

Ships Passing in the Night?

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of the centers and public scholars, and despite institutional campaigns for increasing public engagement, the relationship between higher education and the public has grown problematic. As citizens have become clearer about what they need and want from higher education, academe's traditional response about providing knowledge and service has become less persuasive. The most basic question a democratic citizenry asks is, how can we come together as a community to solve the problems of our community? Even though higher education has a great deal of useful knowledge and expertise to share, institutions have difficulty speaking to that question because technical assistance and service are about things that can be done *to* and *for* communities, but what people want to talk about is what *they* can do. I reported on this dilemma in the essay "Ships Passing in the Night?,"

example, expanding their focus to community development has relevance to both rural and urban places. Publications, such as Wynne Wright's recent article in the *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement* and Scott Peters' book *Changing the Story about Higher Education's Public Purposes and Work*, are moving the

conversation beyond the scholars who have met at Kettering. Most recently, this group of faculty and staff, which now includes scholars in community and economic development, is looking at the role

To be sure, what the academy is already doing serves democracy in a general sense; that is, research and service obviously benefit the country. . . . Nonetheless, there remains the nagging question posed by people who want to talk about how they can come together and not just about what can be done for them.

into their communities on close-to-home issues, such as closing local grocery stores in rural communities, curbing childhood obesity, regulating smoking, providing adequate resources for aging populations, and ensuring enough water for future needs. Kettering has found a number of opportunities for joint research with these centers and reported on them in *Doing Democracy*, authored by Scott London.

Several of the centers are interested in showing elected officials, both local and national, the importance of National Issues Forums deliberations in creating a more civil and reflective discussion of highly controversial issues, such as the sacrifices that will have to be made to get the federal debt under control. These centers are an essential part of Kettering's *A Public Voice* programs in Washington, which show officeholders how citizens weigh options and deal with trade-offs.

I should clarify: the centers we have collaborated with in research aren't all called "centers." Some are in outreach programs and cooperative extension divisions. For example, over the past three years, a group of faculty and staff have been looking at the relevance of the original mission of extension, which included

PROFESSIONALISM AND DEMOCRACY

Professionals in many fields share the concerns that public scholars at the centers have about their relationship with the public. The role of professionals in a democracy, as Woodrow Wilson noted, is inherently problematic. Professionals are experts who presumably know best, and we all value the expertise of professionals when we are ill or in legal trouble. However, a democracy assumes that "we, the people" should decide what is best for us.

In today's political climate, people are distrustful of professional expertise. And professionals often have a jaundiced view of citizens. The distrust is mutual. Efforts to improve this relationship using accountability measures haven't been effective. Still, the mutual distrust is corrosive and needs to be addressed. The foundation has noted that colleges and universities educate most professionals. What better place to explore this problem?

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which has been published in several places, including the foundation's book *A Different Kind of Politics*.

Citizens who are asking how, despite their differences, they can come together to do something about their common problems see themselves as agents, workers, and producers, which is more than just their role as voters and taxpayers. Worried yet determined, this citizenry wants a stronger hand in shaping their future, and their instincts tell them that in order to do that, they have to do more work together.

Relating to these citizens requires colleges and universities to change roles from being "the sage on the stage" to being "the guide on the side." It also requires a review of just exactly what kind of democracy academic institutions want to promote and what role they believe citizens should play. Relating to citizens who want to rule themselves requires focusing not just on the difficult problems *within* a

democratic country (poverty, for example) but the systemic problems of democracy itself, the problems that keep democracy from working as it should (the sidelining of citizens, for example).

Beginning serious conversations about such challenges is proving difficult, however. Ironically, the barrier is not resistance to discussion of democracy but rather the assumption that the question has already been adequately addressed. As one university president said curtly, "My institution serves democracy just by being." To be sure, what the academy is already doing serves democracy in a general sense; that is, research and service obviously benefit the country, which is a democracy. Nonetheless, there remains the nagging question posed by people who want to talk about how they can come together and not just about what can be done for them.

What can be done about this impasse? Obviously, institutions have to pay atten-

tion to the immediate issues. Colleges and universities, because they are more important than ever, are under intense pressure to be managerially efficient in a distressed economy. People depend on them for the degrees that are the necessary passports to good jobs. In these circumstances, democracy and its problems gets only cursory attention except by the stalwarts who are specifically focused on democracy. The institutions that have mounted the American Commonwealth Partnership are among these stalwarts. They are using a National Issues Forums issue guide to engage citizens in defining the mission of higher education today. That's promising.

I empathize with the institutional leaders, who are pressed to respond to immediate problems, but they aren't the only ones who need to respond. Economic pressures inevitably raise basic questions for citizens about the role and mission of our academic institutions. In the recent Public Agenda report *Squeeze Play*, roughly half (49 percent) of the Americans surveyed said that their state's public university system "needs to be fundamentally overhauled." Pursuing the question of mission may be a better way to get to what kind of reform people have in mind. To be sure, citizens' concerns about getting a stronger hand in shaping their future won't be expressed in abstractions about democracy or higher education. But such a basic and pressing political concern may be reflected in what people say about reforming higher education. We hope to learn more about this in a new round of research based on the results from the deliberative forums.

Because Kettering does its studies *with* not *on* others, the foundation has to find academics who share an interest in the role of higher learning in democracy in order to carry out any of the research that I've just described. The purpose of this issue of *Connections* is, to play on words, connect with them and with citizens who care about the future of higher education.

David Mathews is the president of the Kettering Foundation. He can be reached at dmathews@kettering.org.



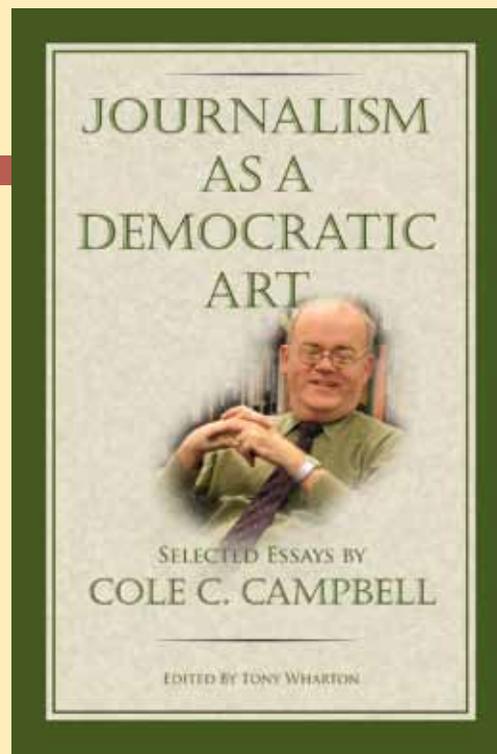
NEW from Kettering

Journalism as a Democratic Art: Selected Essays **by Cole C. Campbell**

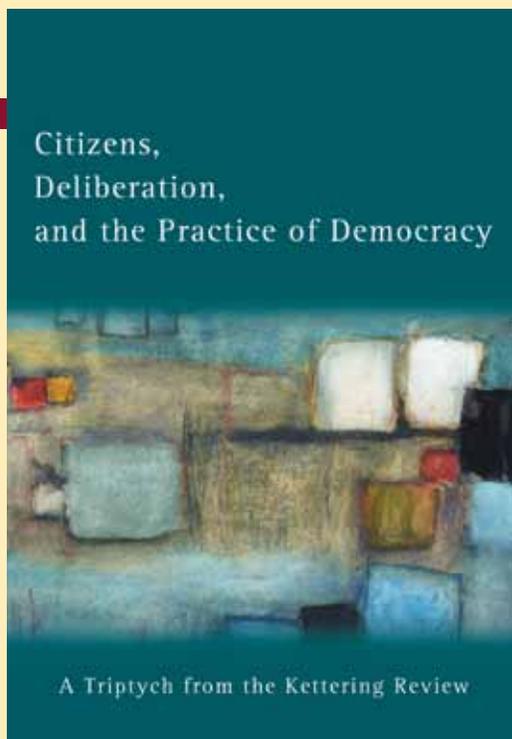
Edited by Tony Wharton

Journalism as a Democratic Art expresses at its heart Cole Campbell's belief that "people expect the press to help their communities solve problems." As one-time editor of the Virginian-Pilot in Norfolk, Virginia, and then the Post-Dispatch in St. Louis, Missouri, Campbell worked to align his profession with that belief, often facing considerable resistance from other journalists.

Campbell's essays address a variety of subjects, including a partly finished dictionary for journalists; timely essays written in the months after Hurricane Katrina and 9/11; and an interview by Jay Rosen, longtime professor of journalism at New York University.



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Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy: A Triptych from the Kettering Review

Citizens, Deliberation, and the Practice of Democracy brings together writing by 19 leading thinkers on the contemporary challenges of democracy. These provocative essays, first published in three issues of the Kettering Review to celebrate 25 years of the National Issues Forums, challenge readers to rethink conventional notions of democracy, public deliberation, and citizenship.

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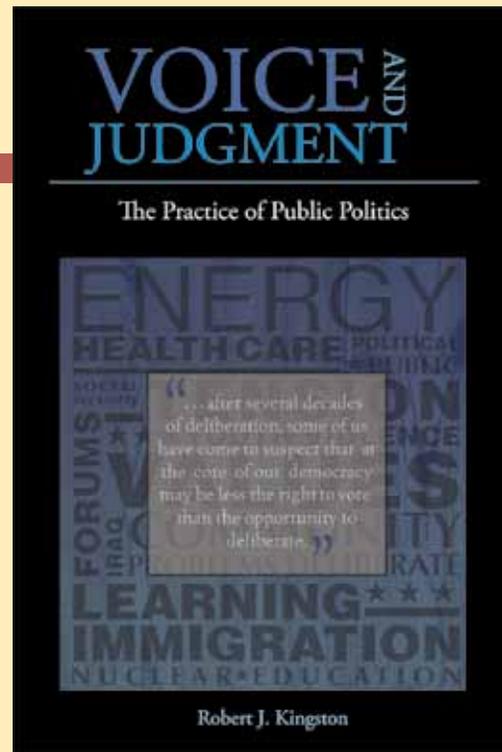
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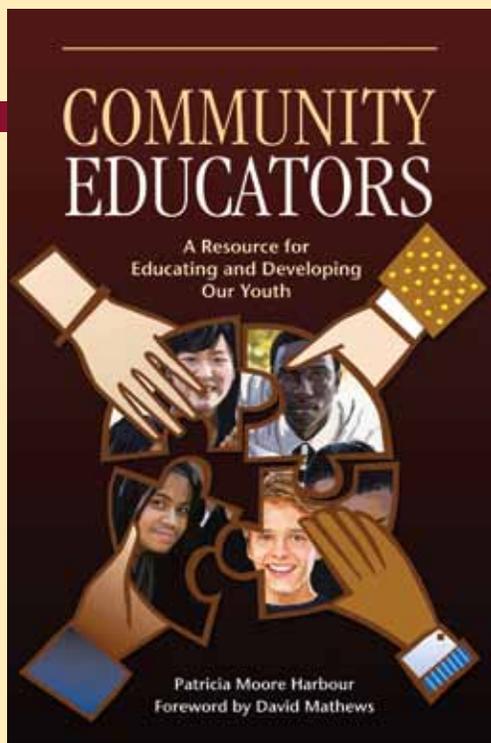
Voice and Judgment: The Practice of Public Politics

By Robert J. Kingston

"We are victims of argument and instruments, from time to time, of circumstance or the influence of others' whims. Our civic movement, however, is from a state of anxiety, puzzlement, blame, defensiveness, or anger, toward the place where contraries meet, where unavoidable tensions remind us that no life is lived without risk . . . or collaboration. A deliberative public begins with opinions but shares experiences; it recognizes shared concerns or 'values' in unexpected, sometimes unfamiliar circumstances; it responds to the divisive with restraint. . . . Public deliberation reveals not a verdict but the making of a 'public,' the formulation of a public will that can be described and put to use."



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Community Educators: A Resource For Educating and Developing Our Youth

By Patricia Moore Harbour

Community Educators asserts that the relationship between education, community, and democracy are inseparable and illustrates that education is broader than just schooling. Current thinking about education is challenged and reveals how the public participates in the education and development of youth. This book is a call for action and responsibility—both individual and collective—to transform education beyond simply reforming schools.

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