



HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2013

Editors	David W. Brown
	Deborah Witte
Copy Editor	Joey Easton O'Donnell
Art Director/Production	Long's Graphic Design, Inc.
Cover Design, Illustrations, and Formatting	Long's Graphic Design, Inc.

The Kettering Foundation is a nonprofit operating foundation, chartered in 1927, that does not make grants but welcomes partnerships with other institutions (or groups of institutions) and individuals who are actively working on problems of communities, governing, politics, and education. The interpretations and conclusions contained in the *Higher Education Exchange*, unless expressly stated to the contrary, represent the views of the author or authors and not necessarily those of the foundation, its trustees, or officers.

Copyright © 2013 by the Kettering Foundation

The *Higher Education Exchange* is founded on a thought articulated by Thomas Jefferson in 1820:

I know no safe depository of the ultimate powers of the society but the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.

In the tradition of Jefferson, the *Higher Education Exchange* agrees that a central goal of higher education is to help make democracy possible by preparing citizens for public life. The *Higher Education Exchange* is part of a movement to strengthen higher education's democratic mission and foster a more democratic culture throughout American society. Working in this tradition, the *Higher Education Exchange* publishes case studies, analyses, news, and ideas about efforts within higher education to develop more democratic societies.



HIGHER EDUCATION EXCHANGE



2013

CONTENTS

Deborah Witte	Foreword	1
Thomas Bender	Reconstructing America's Public Life: An Interview	5
Harry C. Boyte	Reinventing Citizenship As Public Work: Civic Learning for the Working World	14
Thomas Ehrlich and Ernestine Fu	<i>Civic Work, Civic Lessons: Two Generations Reflect on Public Service: An Interview</i>	28
Martín Carcasson	Rethinking Civic Engagement on Campus: The Overarching Potential of Deliberative Practice	37
Nicholas V. Longo	Deliberative Pedagogy and the Community: Making the Connection	49
Edith Manosevitch	The Medium Is the Message: An Israeli Experience with Deliberative Pedagogy	60
Sean Creighton	Today's Civic Mission for Community Colleges	69
Alex Lovit	<i>Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis</i> Edited Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landman, and Sanford Schram	78
David Mathews	Engaging the Work of Democracy	83

RECONSTRUCTING AMERICA'S PUBLIC LIFE

An Interview with Thomas Bender

David Brown, coeditor of the Higher Education Exchange, spoke with Thomas Bender, professor of history and University Professor of the Humanities at New York University. Brown was interested in learning more about the implications of Bender's years of scholarship for reconstructing America's public life.

Brown: In your book, *The Unfinished City*, you described how Central Park and Union Square in New York have been important public spaces for most everyone to share. Are they examples of how “public culture” is developed through social experience?

Bender: I think they are. There are two aspects of a democratic public culture. One can be described as out-of-doors; this is about recognition. Bringing diverse people to a relaxing setting (as Olmsted described Central Park) enables some visual, and sometimes greater, communication across the boundaries of difference. Presumably this makes for a more tolerant public life and sometimes even greater benefits. The other aspect of public culture is “indoors.” This is the public culture that Habermas tends to have in mind: legislative, formal politics, not wholly indoors, but concentrated on rational debate, whether in the press (formal communication) or in a legislative chamber.

Brown: In *Intellect and Public Life*, you wrote that the “centrality of the city is being eroded, being replaced by translocal institutions (professions and corporations, for example).” What specifically has been lost by such displacement?

Bender: Basically, our whole culture is being suburbanized. Everyone in their place, and some of these places are placeless. The professions are linked by academic or professional journals and websites. You may have a colleague for years—either on the next block or on another continent—whom you never



meet. Corporations are connected by the movement of information and money. Most important, however, this kind of connection is organized around sameness, marked by homogeneity (training, education, work day, income, and so forth). The city brings a more vital, challenging, different confrontation. Most important, it offers serendipity. Back in the 1940s the social theorist Robert Merton, who was quite an insightful analyst of sources of creativity and ideas, argued it is a major source of new thinking.

Brown: If professions and corporations, more than not, reside in or near cities, why do you think they have withdrawn into homogenous enclaves? Don't those who work in such enclaves also have urban lives that reach beyond them? Wouldn't they still qualify as "cosmopolitans" according to Merton?

Bender: I think that more than ever we live in isolated enclaves at work and at home and even in our leisure lives "in the city." Driving into Manhattan from Bergen or Westchester County into the underground parking at Lincoln Center, for dinner (within three blocks if not in the complex itself) and seeing a play, opera, or dance performance is not a cosmopolitan experience. If kids grow up in upper middle class neighborhoods and go either to private or local public schools, it is living in a mirrored culture, not a cosmopolitan one. Of course, many break out of these tunneled lives, but that is far from the majority.

Brown: You have described "community" as a "network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds." Given your description 30 years ago, do online social networks qualify as "communities in continual transformation?"

Bender: I tried in *Community and Social Change* to distinguish two kinds of networks, only one of which I considered to be community. The connections of *most* online networks would not meet my definition of community. But by being selective, one could identify a subset that fit my rather tight definition of community as marked by mutuality and emotional bonds. But a larger network might be more apt for politics, if not community. The nature of Facebook connections is both familiar and not. The key to public politics is working together as strangers, with strangers, with people who are different but who can be brought together on the issue that forms the public.

Brown: Those who use Facebook are usually not concerned with strangers. If “public politics” is about strangers working together, where are the sites for such work? Can their origins be more or less accidental, or are they more likely to be intentional?

Bender: The growing residential segregation by class and race (at the lower income level) in American society makes any kind of accidental, diverse public coming-together somewhat unlikely. But even under these circumstances, certain issues might bring separated citizens together as a public for political work, albeit for different reasons. Environmental issues are particularly likely. Poorer communities of a city or region, who may be concerned with environmental justice movements—nearby dumping grounds, garbage transfer stations, hazardous material movement—and suburbanites—who are concerned for mostly aesthetic reasons, but also about health in the longer view—might come together in a broadly defined common cause at the local level.

Brown: In “The Historian in Public Life,” you quote John Dewey with approval: “Unless communal life can be restored the public cannot adequately resolve its most urgent problem: to find and identify itself.” Could you say more about why, at present, you think there is no “public sphere”; that there are “audiences, but no public”?

Bender: For Dewey a public must be aware of itself. I do not think the mediated world of our fragmented (no longer mass culture) society is aware of itself as a collectivity. We are media audiences, in a one-way relationship, despite “comment” opportunities. We are not self-constituted, which is, I think (now especially), a quality fundamental to the public. The public is not defined by space—whether material or cyber, though the public may be created in either of those spaces. I think Occupy Wall Street did form itself into a public, initially in a space but eventually nationally and beyond. Part of it was in physical space, part in cyberspace. In this way, strangers can become a public.

Brown: If “publics” are episodic and easily disbanded, wasn’t that true of Occupy Wall Street—that it was a brief phenomenon? Or does my question rely too much on whether media attention is too often the measure of what a “public” is?



Bender: Actually, I think that Occupy Wall Street fully succeeded. They are no longer physically a community, but their political agenda survives and has been incorporated into the current language of politics. The one percent has become a fundamental category of political discussion in the contemporary USA, both in private conversation and the public sphere. It is a huge victory to insert your language of protest into the mainstream public culture. And, it did this in competition with millions of dollars—tens of millions of dollars in the case of one right-wing defender of unlimited economic inequality. Pretty good, I think.

Brown: Is it possible in this day and age to strive for “a sense of commonwealth based upon shared public ideals, rather than upon acquaintance or affection”?

Bender: Yes, but it is important that these be pragmatic alliances, not dependent on either affection or acquaintance. Only the shared goal (improving the school or advancing the city’s environmental policies, etc.) is necessary. One need not be friends or even previously acquainted. That is politics, but not community. And it is unlikely to be a permanent association, although some issues do produce a more lasting public. It depends on the nature of the issues, whether it needs continuing monitoring.

Brown: What are some of the issues that you think have produced “a more lasting public,” and what do they have in common?

Bender: I think no public will be lasting unless it is incorporated into the structure of governance. If the public is an “act,” then it is not an institution. An organization/foundation can sustain this act to the point where its potential is clear, but if the appropriate level of governing power does not “adopt” it (it need not be an adoption of every detail and may refigure it), it will pass once its initiating urgency loses emotional power. We ought not forget that many of the programs we associate with social democratic aspects of the New Deal or the Kennedy-Johnson era were developed locally as publics to address immediate problems or foundations. Ford especially, in the 1960s, did so by helping fledgling publics acquire resources and political connections. The whole point of a public as I see it is a seedtime for the government. Publics and volunteerism cannot be sustained without some form of public support. The kind of transformative power the largest foundations

had in the immediate postwar period (or before, for that matter), internationally and nationally, is no longer possible. Seeding is all that can be done, and it is the essential starting point as a public emerges. It need not be constituted as a public agency; it only needs access to the relevant administrative/regulatory agencies—a permanent public interest lobby to counter private interest lobbies. For example, the long-standing organization worried about the dangers of the Indian Point nuclear plant on the Hudson River has achieved sustained pressure on the energy company and the federal regulators. That organization is important to the capacity of the group to sustain itself over many years.

Brown: Both of us are admirers of Charles Lindblom's work as a political economist. Along with David Cohen in *Usable Knowledge*, Lindblom argued that much of the "new knowledge" produced in the social sciences is "ordinary knowledge"; that it is produced by the same common techniques and casual verification that are practiced throughout the society by many different kinds of people, and is not by any significant margin more firmly verified. Do you share Lindblom's view and, if so, does it mean that there is a certain amount of pretension in academe and professional practice?

Bender: There are two issues in the practice of social science and public knowledge. One is belaboring areas of knowledge that are already part of our common life and, sometimes in fact, merely reframing it as jargon. The other—and more common practice, I think—is the emergence of new and exciting insights or methods that end up being copied again and again because they are new and "hot." The sociology of the academic disciplines knowledge seems to encourage the routinization of knowledge. And "copycatism." A new idea or method emerges, and like lemmings a large number in the discipline jump in. There is change, but it is ever so quickly the "next big thing." Everyone jumps on and it lasts well beyond its proper shelf life. Then another episode. One good thing is that the results become silly after a while, and a younger generation can turn everything over. But too often, this has its internal dialectic; the new is often not driven by the world beyond the discipline, rather it is some kind of flipping of the method being dissed. I would add that doctoral training and

publication afterward is very much driven by “the literature,” rather than by issues in the culture and society at large. Scholarship progresses by building upon and critiquing that literature. That need not be isolating, but questions are framed too exclusively in terms of the literature.

Brown: You have argued that academic disciplines and professional communities have “become too self-referential.” What has to happen to change the status quo?

Bender: Here I revert to what I have said about Dewey’s notion of the scholar in public: to be pertinent to the public life of our communities, we need to listen to the framing of questions by the world around us and then draw upon our special knowledge that may help examine those questions. We will reach into the esoteric knowledge of our discipline and try to translate what is pertinent to the public question into the language of the public. If we thought of ourselves more as teachers and less as researchers, this would come naturally to us. That is what we do in an undergraduate class. We get rid of the esoteric jargon, at least in introductory level courses, and speak in a common tongue, bringing students to understand why some jargon of the discipline crystallizes the idea or concept. But to the extent our disciplinary professional colleagues are our *only* audience, we do not develop that capacity.

Brown: What accounts for research being the *sine qua non* of academic life? Is that what initially draws young men and women into a discipline or is it the expectation of others already in academe that dictates that research comes first with teaching and service trailing far behind?

Bender: In *Education of Historians for the Twenty-First Century*, I cite a study done now about 15 years ago at Madison by the current (I think still current) dean of the Stanford University Graduate School. One of the remarkable findings was that most graduate students entering the social sciences and humanities (especially in the case of philosophy and history) did so to be teachers. When interviewed later, after obtaining their PhDs, they overwhelmingly wanted to be researchers. Partly, there is some appeal, even joy, in research, but it is also a product, I think, of the graduate school ethos. Emulate your mentor, and since one’s mentor at a leading graduate school is likely to have a light teaching load and consider it a burden, the mentor model is a researcher. And to fail to be a researcher is to

*... to be
pertinent to
the public
life of our
communities,
we need to
listen to the
... world
around us.*

fail what is often (and regrettably) a father figure. (The book noted above, done for the AHA as secretary of a committee on graduate education, offered a number of suggestions to weaken that master-apprentice, mentor-model dynamic, but it is hard to break.)

Brown: Many academic departments seem resistant to any substantial change or, as you put it, “few would consider taking up the departmental challenge of adjusting their curriculum.” Is the problem really more organizational than intellectual? If so, what has to happen to overcome departmental inertia or intransigence?

Bender: One of the amazing things is that the structure of the American university (at least its academic structure) has barely changed since the 1920s, when departments, divisions, and deans established the structure. Yet the content has been completely transformed. It results in some clumsiness, but it enables individual anarchism for the faculty, which may foster innovation. My concern in that essay was less to change the disciplines than to make the work better in the formation of a liberal arts curriculum.

Brown: If the intellectual appetite of faculty, and the variety of such appetites, have changed, why have the academic “structures” remained relatively untouched?

Bender: I suppose it is because they were loose containers, and with growth and increasing resources (which is unlikely going forward from our present situation) efficiency was not a high priority. Duplication, odd juxtapositions, outliers, all of these and more were okay. There is something positive about letting faculty research imaginations flow without trying to restructure after each one, including those that fail. It is important to keep in mind how many research and teaching agendas fail or change. It could be chaos. And keep in mind, the two oldest institutions in western civilization, the Catholic Church and the university, are both slow to change—and frustrating for that reason, but perhaps for the same reason, they are still around. And the university at least offers many interstices into which one can, if one wishes and works at it, frame one’s own context for work.

Brown: Why is it that those in academe who would radically reform American society show little interest in reforming academe?

Bender: They are human; they have a good deal. As my father, who lacked even a high school education, said when I told him I hoped to become a professor: “Let me see, it will mean reading a

*... the structure
of the American
university...
has barely
changed since
the 1920s...*

*“No confidence”
votes in
university
leadership . . .
suggest that
the sleeping lion
may be
awakening . . .*

lot of books, and you like that anyway. And you will discuss these books with smart students. That should be enjoyable. And they cannot fire you.” Why rock this boat? Now that the postwar, growing, prestigious university—always getting better and better for the faculty—is at an end, we might see much more faculty concern with university reform. “No confidence” votes in university leadership at my institution and at some others of late suggest that the sleeping lion may be awakening, but who knows how they will balance the civic with the professional and the personal.

Brown: You have suggested “flipping the curriculum right-side-up.” That is, putting a discipline in the first two years of the undergraduate experience followed by focusing on “liberal learning” in the last two years in collaborative workshops. Is this being done or considered somewhere in academe?

Bender: To the best of my knowledge it has not been—and may not be. I first proposed this at a meeting called by the president of the Mellon Foundation. The foundation brought together a series of elite university presidents and deans and asked me to start the conversation. That is when I first formulated this idea. The response was very disappointing—not because no one embraced it, but rather for this reason: students are not ready for the disciplines in the first year.

Brown: How, then, would you counter such a response?

Bender: Were my task or assignment in that presentation to defend my position, I would have pointed out the stupidity of their particular objection. Institutions with general education programs for the first year also offer introductory courses to various disciplines, and students learn them. This was true of all the institutions present at the meeting. Disciplines, with their distinctive methods and rules of the road are actually easier to learn than large, amorphous bodies of knowledge. The challenge of the liberal arts (and public life) is to come to terms with and mobilize different disciplinary knowledge through what the philosopher Richard Rorty called “conversation.” That can happen only if you have command of a discipline and openness to other knowledge. In fact, history is one of the few disciplines to lack an introductory course.

Brown: In your essay “Do Disciplines Change?” (*Transforming Undergraduate Education*), you cite William James, who remarked

that “any discipline becomes liberal and humanistic if taught historically . . .” Are there examples of how this is currently being done in disciplines other than history?

Bender: Not only are most of the humanities historical in their pedagogy, but in general education courses, even the sciences, are taught in historical fashion, whether it’s the history of scientists and their discoveries or the history of the physical world itself. Many natural science disciplines are in fact historical: astronomy, geology, paleontology, evolutionary biology. In the past, historical treatment of the range of known knowledge was greater, but history is a natural way of thinking—or it is in the cultures I know best, those deriving from the Abrahamic religions (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity) who describe themselves by stories, by historical stories. We are a historical culture. I would argue that the humanities generally remain historical in method, even with some of the more recent (but now receding) theories of reading texts. But with ever fewer exceptions, the social sciences vital to our public life are becoming less and less historical. Rational choice theories in political science, economics, law, and to some extent sociology, do banish historical understanding, to say nothing of cultural understanding. Anthropology, on the other hand, has become more historical and more engaged with public issues, particularly in medical anthropology and family and race/ethnicity.

Brown: Finally, to return to your book *The Unfinished City*, can “cultural authority,” as you put it, still reside in universities and professions of practice now confronted with “the revolution in information technologies” and alternative sources of knowledge?

Bender: This future is very unclear. I do not think the university will be completely marginalized, but I think our culture may be quite different. I think we are on the cusp of a transformation equivalent to the Gutenberg moment: print transformed society and produced a particular kind of intellectual culture. I think that culture will change. Analog was one-dimensional; our digital world is much more open at least in potential, but it has yet to find its principle of authority. I doubt that the university will have the centrality it once had; the result could be richer or less so. There will probably be institutions that “validate” knowledge, places you trust, not unlike universities, but probably more nimble.

Brown: Thanks, Tom. I learned a great deal.

CONTRIBUTORS

Thomas Bender is University Professor of the Humanities and professor of history at New York University. He identifies himself as an intellectual and cultural historian, and his writings range over the history of intellectuals and city culture, the academic disciplines and academic culture, and most recently, the relation of cities and nations to global history. In all of these topics the definition and role of community and public culture play an important role.

Harry C. Boyte is director of the Center for Democracy and Citizenship at Augsburg College, a Senior Fellow at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and visiting professor at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in South Africa. In 2012, he served as national coordinator of the American Commonwealth Partnership, a network of higher education groups and institutions created by invitation of the White House Office of Public Engagement, which worked with the Department of Education to develop strategies to strengthen higher education as a public good.

David W. Brown is coeditor of the *Higher Education Exchange* and coedited two recent Kettering publications, *Agent of Democracy* and *A Different Kind of Politics*. He taught at Yale's School of Management and New School's Milano Graduate School. He is the author of *When Strangers Cooperate* (Free Press, 1995), *Organization Smarts* (Amacom, 2002), and *The Real Change-Makers: Why Government Is Not the Problem or the Solution* (Praeger, 2012), and *America's Culture of Professionalism: Past, Present, and Prospects* (Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming in 2014).

Martín Carcasson is an associate professor in the Communication Studies department of Colorado State University, and the founder and director of the CSU Center for Public Deliberation (CPD). His research focuses on utilizing deliberative engagement to improve community problem solving and local democracy.

Sean Creighton is the executive director of the Southwest Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE), a regional consortium helping universities transform their communities and economies. He has published and presented extensively on the impact of higher education, collaboration, and civic engagement. Sean earned his PhD from Antioch University, and is an elected member of the board of education in Yellow Springs, Ohio, where he lives with his wife, Leslee, and five children, Liam, Maya, Quinn, Audrey, and Juliette.

Thomas Ehrlich worked in the administrations of five presidents starting with President Kennedy, reporting directly to President Carter on foreign-aid policy. He has also served as president of Indiana University, provost of the University of Pennsylvania, and dean of Stanford Law School. He is the author, coauthor, or editor of fourteen books, holds five honorary degrees, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. He is currently on the faculty of the Stanford School of Education.

Ernestine Fu founded a nonprofit organization that brings music to seniors, disabled people, and homeless families. She has also helped State Farm Insurance fund youth-led service projects, and is now on the committee charged with shaping a new leadership and service center at the Presidio in San Francisco. She completed her bachelors and masters degrees at Stanford University, and is currently working towards a PhD in engineering.

Nicholas V. Longo is director of Global Studies and associate professor of Public and Community Service Studies at Providence College. He is the author of a number of books, articles, and reports on issues of youth civic engagement, community-based leadership, global citizenship, and service learning, including *Why Community Matters: Connecting Education with Civic Life* (SUNY Press) and a coedited volume (with Cynthia Gibson) entitled *From Command to Community: A New Approach to Leadership Education in Colleges and Universities* (Tufts University Press).

Alex Lovit is a visiting scholar at the Kettering Foundation. His research interests focus on the history of American political and civic practices, and he coordinates the Foundation's research project that takes stock of the civic renewal movement. He also works with the Foundation and external partners to develop issue guides used in deliberative forums about historical decisions. Alex holds a BA in English from Amherst College, and a PhD in history from the University of Michigan.

Edith Manosevitch is a lecturer in the School of Communication at Netanya Academic College in Netanya, Israel. She holds a PhD in communication from the University of Washington in Seattle, and has served as a research associate at the Kettering Foundation. Her research focuses on deliberation theory and practice, in particular as it relates to online deliberation and deliberative pedagogy. She serves as a board member of the *Journal of Public Deliberation*. Her writings have been published in the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* and *New Media & Society*.

David Mathews, president of the Kettering Foundation, was secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in the Ford administration and, before that, president of the University of Alabama. Mathews has written extensively on Southern history, public policy, education, and international problem solving. His books include *Politics for People: Finding a Responsible Public Voice*, *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*, and the forthcoming *The Ecology of Democracy: Finding Ways to Have a Stronger Hand in Shaping Our Future*.

Deborah Witte is a program officer for the Kettering Foundation and coeditor of the *Higher Education Exchange*. She has earned her PhD from Antioch University and serves on the board of the Southwest Ohio Council for Higher Education (SOCHE).

Kettering Foundation

200 Commons Road, Dayton, Ohio 45459-2799 (937) 434-7300; (800) 221-3657
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

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Bloomington, IN
Permit No. 26