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Education: Constraints and Possibilities in Imagining New Ways to Assess Rights, Duties and Privileges

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> I believe in ... a great ... principle of natural law ... which proves the *absolute right* of every human being ... to an education; and which, of course, proves the correlative duty of every government to see that the means of the education are provided for all. (Horace Mann 1846/1957: 63)

> To leave everything to nature was to negate the very idea of education... Some positive organ, some administrative agency was required for carrying on the process of education... Any effective pursuit of the new educative ideal required the support of the state. The movement for the democratic idea inevitably became a movement for publicly conducted and administered schools. (John Dewey 1916/1966: 93)

> Five years ago, Congress and President Bush made a bold and historic promise. We pledged in the No Child Left Behind Act that the federal government would do all in its power to guarantee every child in America, regardless of race, economic background, language or disability, the opportunity to get a world-class education. (Edward M. Kennedy 2007)

> The trustees of Columbia University ... to all persons ... be it known that ... has been admitted to that degree with all the rights, privileges and immunities thereunto appertaining (Masters and PhD as of 1989)

The four epigraphs summarize a constitutional solution to a fundamental problem for the democracies that emerged starting in the 18th century: How to grant concrete political privileges? The problem remains since the solution, the public school, reveals itself as perhaps not the solution it was hoped it would be. This solution involved expanding an idea (the absolute right of individuals) into constitutive acts—for example, two centuries into the constitution of schooling, the "No Child Left Behind Act" (aka "NCLB"). The solution also involved sequencing various sub-activities within the overall scheme, including the activities relating to the assessment of all other activities (including assessment, recursively). Understanding such practical expansions and the practical sequencing of sub-activities is essential to understanding what may be going wrong, imagining alternatives to current methods, leveraging what may already be emerging, and controlling it to limit new forms of bias.

This essay proceeds in six parts. After an expansion of the opening paragraph, I start with the sociological evidence for the stance that schooling's failure is systemic because its design, and the design of most reforms, fail to take into account what we have learned about human interaction in history.[1] I continue with a sketch of some fundamental processes that cannot be ignored, particularly as they concern education as an ongoing activity in the everyday life of all, in and out of any institution. This is illustrated with some considerations about the new digital technologies which have proved an occasion for education. Over a quarter century billions of human beings have had to figure out what to do with new machines, new procedures, new requirements, and then again and again new machines, procedures, requirements. This massive educational event has much to teach us. I focus on the aspect of this education that has to do with ongoing and more or less consequential assessments that "I am/you are/they are doing something wrong," that "I/you/they should do something else." And yet these assessments were mostly not marked as either successes or failures for public, political purposes. I conclude with a call to imagine new forms of State sponsored assessments that, similarly, would not be marked in such ways as to close careers. I am calling instead for imagining assessments that leverage what actually happens while preserving the "government's duty" to see to it that the "means of education are provided for all" (paraphrase of Mann 1846/1957: 63). This possible institution might still look like schooling but it would not be in the business of granting rights and privileges.

[1] Hoping to avoid some confusion, I am not using here the word "culture" as I have been using it. Instead I write of "particular moments in history producing particular types of constraints and possibilities for a particular population."

Rights, duties, privileges — an introduction

Horace Mann wrote his tenth report (1846/1957) at a time when schooling was still to be justified and, literally, constructed. His task was transforming statements about the "rights of every human being" into an institution, the Common School. This task involved many very concrete sub-tasks, including taxation. Pages of the report are given to justify why all should pay to school other people's children, and not just one's own. Other reports addressed other subtasks and, over a century, a new fact, the School,[2] appeared in human history. Mann is, of course, but one of many in the United States, Germany, France, England, etc., who, together, were astonishingly successful. Their (speech) acts produced new circumstances for almost all the people of the earth. By the early 20th century, when Dewey wrote *Democracy and education,* he could say that the movement for public schools was "inevitable" (1916/1966: 93). By then one could disagree with this or that "public" (state) method for schooling. One could argue passionately, as Dewey did, for other methods, but one did not have any more to justify the need for an agency of the state. Later in the 20th century, the "right to education" was enshrined by the United Nations for all the people of the world. And so, millions and now billions, were recruited, more or less willingly, into new, and then reformed institutions. These keep producing detailed, ever changing, and often contradictory prescriptions about what to do next about the raising of one's children, as well as one's neighbors' children. Through such expansions, the solution may be becoming a new problem.

I chose the four epigraphs to emphasize how American schooling is can be analyzed as a set of (at least) four propositions with massive practical consequences. In brief, an 1) individual

[2] I keep here a convention I used elsewhere (Varenne & McDermott 1998). The word "School" is capitalized when it refers to the web of institutions, practices, and people who keep it operating.

right that 2) is a state duty 3) to legislate means that 4) will grant the individual some privilege.[3] Mann starts with the individual right and asserts that this entails, "of course," a corollary duty for the democratic State. Dewey argues for a new pedagogy that transformed State schooling. Kennedy, speaking for this State, defends an enormous set of detailed regulations (NCLB) that was the product of the State's duty in 2002. The ensuing massive machine produces, among other things, degrees granted to individuals by schools chartered by the State, with rights, privileges and immunities "thereunto appertaining." While college presidents, deans, and the assembled crowd of graduates and their parents, often laugh at the odd English phrasing, the mention of privilege at graduation time is a reminder of what keeps schooling at the center of political attention. Schools change lives with State backed authority.

After two centuries, the fundamental principles remain. In the best of all worlds proper rights and privileges are granted by the State through the School and are based on an unassailable assessment of the merits of the person receiving the degree. In this world the privileges of birth count for nothing. There is no "achievement gap." Those who fail have no recourse.

But the principle is more than an idea or a value. As time has passed, and as initial ideas and values were translated into a public responsibility, the principle was concretized into an institution—the School. This School is, concretely, a crowd of people linked in networks so complex and shifting that they cannot be diagramed. These people were given the responsibility of specifying curriculum, pedagogy, etc., and, particularly, the responsibility of assessing all this. These tasks were further divided into a host of further institutions from universities to text book publishers, educational technologists, tutors—not to mention teachers, counselors, coaches,

[3] By looking at schooling in this fashion one will be able to specify more exactly how modern "democratic" schooling differs around the nation-states of the world. While the first two steps may be similar, there is much opening for variation on the matter of the means and the types of privilege granted by the degrees.

principals. It is not surprising that every step in the often tortuous processes that leads to a degrees, or closes pathways to them, should be taken most seriously by the individuals concerned (as well as their guardians), as well by the State. At every step all parties must assess, on an ongoing basis, whether things are proceeding as they should. Parents assess their children's schools. Schools assess their students, teachers, administrators. Politicians assess all they hear from constituents, critics, experts, advocacy groups, etc.

It is not surprising that methods for assessment should be so politically fraught and that major legislative acts like NCLB should mostly be known for its regulation of assessments and its concrete, possibly life-changing, consequences for students, teachers, schools. There is much less debate about the fact that NCLB is also a step towards the constitution of a national curriculum in the United States, or that it has evident pedagogical implications. Curriculum, pedagogy, education in the humanistic sense, are all to the good but the core political issue is one of the assessments that lead to properly produced and publicly proclaimed privilege. And so we must assess the assessments and imagine new ones.

At the beginning of the second decade in the 21st century we—philosophers, researchers, policy makers, activists—know that things are not working out quite as Mann, and many others around the world, dreamed the Common, Public, Free, Compulsory, School would work. Even as this School has spread around the globe, critics from all dimensions of the global polity point out how achievement gaps remain and how birth privilege has been reproducing itself. Most of us hope all that is needed is a further refinement of these processes. Major public figures like Edward Kennedy, George Bush, Barack Obama, Bill Gates, keep proposing new mechanisms and new sub-institutions to refine State control. They are surrounded by crowds proposing reform of this or that aspect of the complex network of people and sub-institutions, settings, etc.

Everyone claims that their reform will do something about achievement gaps. But all keep schooling as the mechanism. And this may precisely be the problem.

Some of us are ready to go further. If two centuries of efforts to reform schooling have failed to eradicate birth privilege,[4] then there may be something in the very constitution of schooling that prevents it from being successful at its basic task. It is now time to imagine a new progression from an idea that remains unimpeachable to a new set of institutions founded on what we have learned over the past centuries about human interaction.

On the School's failures

In the 1970s, historians had a lively debate on whether to assess American schooling, as originally planned, or as reformed through the 'progressive' movement, an overall success, or failure. Some emphasized that American schooling was particularly encompassing with most of the populations of children and adolescents being actually given the opportunity to attend school. This would by itself have been evidence of success even as the breadth of the people caught by schooling would explain why other, less encompassing schools in other nations, might appear to do "better." Others insisted that schooling was actually designed to control the working classes and immigrants and keep them in their place. To simplify very a complex argumentation, if the fundamental mission of schooling is access, then the School has been a success. If it is the equalizing of opportunities, then it has been a failure.[5]

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[4] I use the phrase "birth privilege" as a synonym for many other phrases that index the recognition that schooling has not equalized chances or opportunities. The phrase also indexes issues of class and family that are somewhat muted in phrases such as "achievement gaps."

[5] For a summary of the debate see Diane Ravitch's review (1978). She several of the books of those deemed "revisionists" (Michael Katz, Samule Bowles and Herbert Gintis, etc.) from the opposite point of view. See also Lawrence Cremin's "Bibliographic essay" in the third volume of his *American Education* (1988: 709-717).

The most powerful sociologists of the 1960s and 1970s sided with the critics. The Coleman report (1966) is altogether a negative assessment. If families are indeed more powerful predictors of school success than schools themselves, then birth privilege has found ways to co-opt an institution ostensibly justified and designed to combat this privilege. Bourdieu and Passeron (1970/1977) systematized the fundamental mechanisms through which this cooptation might work as the School was granted the unassailable political right to make assessments (grant rights and privileges) with radical consequences on personal lives. Bourdieu and Passeron, as well as Foucault (1975/1978), among others, emphasized the authority of schooling in democratic society and the power of its appointed personnel to use this authority for certain people and against others, for certain ways of life and against others. Much research in sociology and anthropology has shown how this might work. We now have a good sense of the familial activities that make things easier for some and more difficult for others. We know much more about the school mechanisms that may help some families and hinder others.[6] We need to know more though the picture is clear. Families, everywhere, are intimately involved in the analysis of the world of schooling they face. They keep discovering what they might use in favor of their children. Sometimes, school requirements are so vague and contradictory that families may misunderstand what they should do.[7] Other times families do everything in their power and yet fail in a competition with other families better placed whether it is because the latter families have more abundant resources, more determination, if not more ruthlessness.

[6] The literature is vast. The most influential include John Ogbu (1978), Shirley Brice Heath, (1983), Annette Lareau (1989), William Julius Wilson (2009), Frank Furstenberg (1999), Guadalupe Valdes (1996), Angela Valenzuela (1999).

[7] Valdes (1996: 159-160) notes how the inscrutability of school reports about children's literacy. The families she got to know were trying to figure out whether they children good read. They were given instead obscure scores about such matters as "recognizes words," "use phonics skills," knows number facts" which Valdes herself had a hard time explaining.

Many efforts have been made to counter or leverage what we have learned. All reforms to incorporate various versions of multi-lingualism or multi-culturalism can be interpreted as school-based attempts to counter certain types of familial privilege. The ongoing efforts to make schools more "comprehensive" starting with Comer (1996) and continuing with Canada (Tough 2008) and others could also be interpreted as further attempts. As Gordon has said (2005), if some familial privilege stems from the ability of some families to provide extra experiences that will make their children more successful in school (from early reading instruction, to museum visits, to trips, etc.), then the Common School should make it its business also to provide those for the children of all families who do not have the necessary resources. Most of these efforts are unimpeachable in so far as they improve general access to a wide world that even the best resourced families cannot provide. But there is little evidence that they have made a dent in the reproduction of birth privilege. All reformers should ponder the history of *Sesame Street* designed for poor inner city children as adjunct to Head Start programs. As it is now well known, *Sesame Street* became a favorite of privileged parents and was used to gain further advantage. We should also ponder what we now hear about the very prosperous using expensive legal means to manipulate various laws designed to help the disabled. This list of moves in the rational cooptation of the mission of schooling to educate in order to skew results is going to be a long one and it will remain open as reforms take roots. This list includes matters like getting public schools in expensive suburbs to offer instruction in Mandarin Chinese. This list may also include the efforts of prosperous parents, as employers, ever to increase for their employees the "required" school degrees for occupations where success mostly depends on common sense and persistence.[8]

[8] Recent reports on the disconnect between law school education and legal practice (Newton 2010) should give anyone pause about what is the source of value in a higher education degree.

On education, comprehensively

If the mechanisms for cooptation are as powerful as half a century of social scientific research has shown, then most versions of the proposed or legislated school reform programs of the past quarter century will not produce much that is different. School success/failure might be distributed somewhat differently across the population but it is unlikely that, for example, formally assessing teachers or schools as "successes" or "failures" in adding value to the heads of their students will do much to mitigate familial effects. In brief, these efforts all fail to acknowledge practically, in the design of apparently reformed policies that human beings do not behave in Newtonian trajectories where one can specify initial conditions, predict outcomes, and then correct aim until the desired outcomes are reliably reached. To such efforts to control them, human beings respond by moving aside and all Newtonian efforts to calibrate have to be restarted. We have to learn again the lessons various early theoreticians of systems theories have attempted to teach us: homeostasis may be a goal but it cannot be achieved. Conversational or interactional process will not be closed with a final statement that would stop history.

So, we must grant that all human beings, including the unschooled, actively figure out what is happening around them, find out what are their resources and what might stand in their way, and then explain what they found out, attempt to convince others that they are correct and that a particular line of action should be started, work with and against others to act, etc. People, always, learn and teach. In a word they educate themselves, those closest to them (their consociates), and perhaps even people quite distant from themselves (for example through political action). I have summarized the theoretical ground for this elsewhere (Varenne 2007/2008, 2008, 2009, 2010). Much evidence can be marshaled for the position (Varenne & Gordon 2008-2010). This evidence is particularly striking when it involves people in various

kinds of oppression—whether the enslaved in 19th century America (Gundaker 2008), adolescent girls in Islamist schools (Adely 2007), recent immigrants (Verma 2010), grass root activists (Lin 2010), etc. As against critics like Bourdieu or Foucault who emphasize the ways conditions blind consciousness so that it cannot see these very conditions, I side with de Certeau (1980/1984) and Rancière (1987/1999) who emphasize the reverse. Difficult conditions reveal one's ignorance to oneself and regularly trigger educative activities that can transform at least some of the most local of conditions. These philosophical considerations have been shown actually to be most productive for an emerging form of sociological research that investigates social patterns through the often difficult efforts that people make to deal with them (Garfinkel 1967, 2002). In this "ethnomethodological" research, what is striking is the evidence presented that these efforts are not extraordinary but rather completely ordinary. Indeed, it would not be possible to conduct "normal" everyday life without such efforts. To the extent that such efforts require "ethno-methods" to figure out what just happened and "instructions" about what should happen next, then everyday life is an ongoing matter of learning and teaching. Above all, this work is never ended because the very acts that instruction produces transform local conditions so that the whole process must start anew.

In recent years, anthropologists like Bruno Latour or Charles Goodwin have shown that such findings do not only operate at the very local interactional levels where they were first systematically documented. They also operate in science laboratories (Latour & Woolgar 1979; Goodwin 1994, 1995), shop floors (Kleifgen 2001), legal institutions (Latour 2002), and, indeed schools. Recent work such as Koyama's on the implementation of NCLB (2010) offers ample evidence of what is gained by following practical linkages and bringing out the activity of all involved to figure out what to do next with the very often contradictory conditions they face.

Such activities certainly operate in families, from the time a child is born (and indeed earlier through courtship, marriage, pregnancy) to the time parents die. Making a life in the midst of a host of others is ongoing educational work triggered again and again by the need to face new institutions, conditions, peoples, as well as the unpredictable consequences of earlier acts. Since the beginning of the 19th century, one of the main institutions a larger and larger percentage of the human population must face is, precisely, schooling. Schooling is also an *object of education,* and not just a privileged setting for education.

There is enough evidence that this is so to start drawing practical consequences. First, of course, we must abandon the idea that may be the foundation of schooling as Mann and all others imagined it. The world must not be divided between the educated and the uneducated. Education is a universal aspect of the human condition. It cannot be controlled precisely because any attempt to control it will lead to education *about* the attempt to control which, in the long run, will defeat, or co-opt this attempt to control. As the philosophers of the 18th century argued, in the long run "the people" are in control of social legitimacy.

But this long run can be long indeed! Acknowledging the ubiquity of education does not mean that the State should not be involved in creating new conditions and settings for education, and possibly even grants special rights and privileges to some people but not to others. How this could be done is the question we must keep asking.

Ongoing assessments and what they might teach us

A few examples might help illustrate what I take to be the fundamental processes we must build upon rather than ignore. The first two are taken from recent work on the manipulation of aspects of the new technologies by the more or less expert as they tell each other

that they are not quite doing it right and that they should do something else. The third is based on preliminary work on families as they discover the world of autism as clinical diagnosis get rendered.[9] In all cases we have much teaching, perhaps some learning. We have much discourse about what people do not know, what they should know, how to teach them, etc. In all cases we have much assessment of skills, disposition, and knowledge. There is much talk of success and failure. But, at the end, no degree is given, no public political privilege granted. Those involved move on. They may have been transformed in more or less transient or profound ways. But these transformations are not recorded for other social uses.

The first case (Andrews 2010; Andrews & Varenne 2011; Varenne et al. forth) starts with responses (P3) to blog responses (P2) to earlier posts (P1) that assess the response P2 as somehow "wrong" and suggest further responses (P4 ... n). For example, someone posts something about difficulties cancelling their AOL account (P1). Then someone posts something asking "Please cancel my AOL" (P2). Then someone posts something of the genre "You (P2), this is not where you can cancel AOL!" (P3). In this process we have several acts of assessment that proceed through requests for action or information, evaluations, etc. Andrews does not have direct evidence for what might have happened to those who posted as P2 but she has some indirect evidence about the work the somewhat ignorant (or perhaps just distracted) did perform to end up, probably following a Google search, on a site that somehow looked like it might help them achieve their goal. P2s rarely posted again on the same blog. They had moved on and, one suspects, eventually succeeded in finding out where and how to cancel AOL. Those who have learned the quirks in visual interfaces, text boxes, url's vs search strings, as well as what to do

[9] One interesting aspect of this research is that it questions when autism starts as a *social* event: when parents decide that something about their child must be investigated? As the parents start the diagnostic process? At the moment of expert diagnosis? At the time when the diagnosis leads to concrete changes in the everyday life of the family?

when programmers change interfaces, easily forget the work it takes to figure all this out, as well as the fact that about everyone does figure it out (though perhaps not in the ways the expert thought it should be done). For my purposes here, such conversations illustrate ongoing assessments during which much failure is noticed but not in any way that will have lasting impact on a person's career. And the eventual success (as assessed by the subject) may be forgotten as, and this is very common when dealing with the new technologies, new forms of ignorance about what to do next are discovered.

The second case (Hung 2011) involves the playing of a multiple player game when one of the players is both needed (as the fourth player when only three are available), incompetent (she has never played this game), and an object of personal interest for one of the expert players. And then there was also a linguistic problem.

> Li, the novice, ... spoke mostly Mandarin, while the other players ... spoke mostly Cantonese. ... Jason and Andrew seemed most fluent in Mandarin, and spent most of the time communicating with Li in Mandarin; Kevin spoke less frequently to Li and his Mandarin was also the least fluent. Li spoke only Mandarin, although she seemed to know a few Cantonese words. This linguistic complication meant that there were many times that Jason, Andrew, and Kevin would talk about Li without addressing her directly. (Hung 2011: 94)

Everyone had continually to assess each other's linguistic competence in relationship to the difference (mis-)understandings might make first for the playing of the game, and, second, for the instruction of Li into the mysteries of the game given a parallel assessment that she did not know how to play it. But what is most striking is how little difference all this ignorance seems to have made.[10] At the end of the day a great time had been had by all. The educational

[10] A fuller analysis of these assessments can be found elsewhere (Varenne et al. forth).

work disappeared though, perhaps, one of the participants may have "learned" something that will remain as a memory or habit.

The third case is more consequential.[11] It is well known that, from infancy to adolescence, adulthood and beyond, autism remains a challenge for all involved. Understanding this challenge requires focusing on the details of everyday life with autism, the uncertainties, and the need always to continue figuring out what to do next. We can start with a complaint by the mother of an autistic girl as she shared experiences with members of her support group:

> "I have just finished toilet training her, and now I have to start all over again as she has begun to menstruate"

A statement like this makes sense as a brief moment in a very long educational sequence. During such sequences, mother, child, and many others also involved (father, siblings, other kin, members of support groups, doctors and therapists, contributors to blogs, etc.), together, deliberate about tasks subsequently assessed as some sort of failure or success, and then re-assessed as life conditions change and one discovers, again, the kind of ignorance that triggers further education. Toilet training is a very long and arduous task for the parents of many autistic children. Menstruation is a new one and the experienced parent only knows that the task will be long and arduous. What will have to be done, what will be the challenges, what are the alternatives, are all matters about which the parents soon discover they are ignorant, start seeking knowledge, and then assess whether they are doing it right—at least for intent and purposes grounded in their own family life. In other words, being caught in the world of autism will trigger deliberation, education. In recent years this education involves, minimally, an education

[11] These examples based on preliminary and unpublished research by Juliette de Wolfe as part of the Study Group on Everyday Education led by Hervé Varenne. See also Leonard (1986) and Eyal (2010).

into the many institutions that label autism ("this behavior is/not 'autisticky' [sic]"[12]), the institutions that control State resources for labeled children and determine what kind of help for what kind of autism a person may receive at what kind of age, as well as an education into the resources that the new technologies have produced.

Most interestingly for our purposes, an education in autism, at this moment in history, is mostly under the control of the subjects rather than state certified agents.[13] Parents and their consociates are intimately involved in determining curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment that things are good enough for their concrete intent and purposes at least "for now" until things happen (the child ages, court cases about State resources get won or lost, psychologists change classifications, etc.) that make moot old curricula, pedagogies, and assessments. As some autistic persons[14] have grown into adulthood and organized themselves into activist groups,[15] new teaching voices are now heard as these activities become part of the complex web within which the parents of a newly diagnosed child will find themselves caught and about which they will have to educate themselves. The subjects caught within the web of autism have to deal, of course, with those who are most responsible for weaving the web. Researchers, specialists in diagnosis, therapists, politicians, lawyers, counselors, teachers, all are also involved in determining curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. But their authority is regularly undermined

[12] This is how a teacher explained to an ethnographer how one might distinguish the behaviors that might lead to a request for a diagnosis of, potentially, autism in a still unlabelled child, or might be used to justify the labelling.

[13] Much of the classical literature on this topic (Mehan 1986, 1996; McDermott 1993) traces the moments when agents of the State authoritatively move a child into the world of special education. Only recently has there been research on the activity of parents (Eyal 2010).

[14] "Autistic persons" refers here to person officially labeled by state certified experts at a particular moment in the history of the classification of human beings on the basis of purported behavioral characteristics. As Foucault first taught us, and as the history of these classifications reveal again and again, it is unlikely that there is such an object as "autism" aside from the very classificatory processes. Recent developments in neuro-psychiatry have begun the movement of reclassification. In the mean time all sorts of people are "with autism" besides the persons of focus.

[15] The public face of one of the most vocal of these groups can be found at neurodiversity.com. Many more local groups are being formed with the aid of technologies like MeetUp.com.

by their disagreements about what to do next, as well as the narrow focus of this authority. Parents are, mostly, on their own—though astute parents learn that they should also get an education into the worlds of State sponsored expertise so that they can manipulate, co-opt, resist, and transform this expertise, particularly when the shortcomings of this expertise become salient. Actually, the closing of the institutional settings within which extraordinary children were often warehoused could also be assessed politically as devolution by the State of a responsibility (duty?) to individual children.[16] By making families the primary locus of the education of children with many kinds of labels, the State has also formally reintroduced birth privilege.[17]

Ongoing assessment and its implications

I spent time on autism as a familial event because it provides a powerful case study of a universal response to the human condition. In the late 1960s, this response might have been called an aspect of "ethno-education" or the education of the people by the people. This ethno-education includes an ethno-curriculum, and an ethno-pedagogy. It also includes ethno-assessments, of an infant's progress, a child's schooling, an "educational system." I suggest that we spend time studying such ethno-assessments of life circumstances. Understanding how they operate may help us imagine alternate routes to the granting of individual privilege that do not necessarily pass through schooling as it has been constituted historically. It may also help us imagine a new place for the Public Common School.

[16] Eyal et al. argue that the "epidemic" is actually a product of this devolution (2010).
[17] Our ongoing research reveals how different the careers of such children can be depending on the resources, financial and otherwise, of their parents. This does not necessarily mean that the children of more prosperous parents have an easier time of it. Such parents seem particularly prone to grasping on faddish therapies and abandoning common sense as they try, and then abandon, this or that therapy promoted by this or that controversial expert.

I start with a basic sociological principle. Human beings are, always, active participants as their life is being produced not only by themselves of course, but always in concert with many others, some alive and many dead, some who have their best interest at heart and many who do not. This activity is always educational in the broad sense that acknowledges the seeking and convincing tasks that participation entails. I write here about "seeking" rather than "learning" to emphasize that we, as analysts or policy makers, should not focus on possible end products. And I write about "convincing" rather than "teaching" to emphasize, again, the uncertain quality of much of the efforts given to transform other people's lives by getting them to do this rather than that. There is every evidence that seeking and convincing proceed from assessments that something is not going as it should, or that someone is not doing what they should.

These principles are not quite new but their implications for the planning and organization of schooling have not really been drawn. From the beginnings of schooling it has probably been the case that the schooled have imagined the unschooled as ignorant and passive, in need of the wisdom of the schooled so that they can be knowledgeable and actively involved. Deficit models of poverty or underdevelopment are not new. The masses are always "unwashed" in need of enlightenment, leadership, conscientization. They need the School to take them into the next century. But, of course, this is not the case. The unschooled are not ignorant or passive and they get themselves into the next century—though, as schooling has become more central, many have to fight established schooling in order to get there.[18] In the long run it is the unschooled (or the long-ago-schooled) that shape what the School can actually do. This is true at the local level of parental involvement in all its forms and modalities. It is

[18] The history of Jews, women, and all the others who, at one time or another, found the doors of schooling closed to them should be instructive, as well the still mostly untold story of all those who could not get into this or that career because they could not get a school degree altogether unrelated to the career, or because they waited too long (while this is changing, France, like many other European nations, forbade access to various levels of schooling after one had reached a certain age).

also true at the national level where politicians and other powerful persons of dubious schooling can recast the regulatory framework within which the schooled must work.

Schoolteachers are famous for complaining about parents over or under involvement. University scholars and policy thinkers will complain about the politicians who concoct laws such as the No Child Left Behind act. My suggestion is that we move beyond complaint to understand more effectively the activity of the unschooled as they educate themselves, and particularly their assessment activities from the most local to the most general. I illustrated earlier what we are learning about ongoing assessments that an interaction (e.g. the playing of a game) is proceeding apace and what might need to be corrected for it to proceed. The autism case was intended to give a sense of much longer interactions, involving many more people, and also requiring assessment of what could be done next given new circumstances. We could also look at longer lasting assessments by crowds. Artists, artisans, managers, engineers, software writers, politicians, etc., benefit from such assessments. People like Bill Gates, Lady Gaga, Sarah Palin, are examples of people who have benefitted from public, though often challenged, assessments of extraordinary performance. We know less about those who have suffered from similar assessments. It can also happen that one performs tasks at such times when one is never noticed as having performed it. At the other extreme we have situations when one must hide a skill and pass as ignorant.

Several features of such assessments are worth noticing. In everyday life the performance of the task is the issue. The "aptitude" to perform the task may be an interesting topic of conversation but, in the here and now, as the task has to be performed, then this (lack of) aptitude may be moot. Similarly, it may be of some passing interest whether the performance might have left traces in the psyche of any of the participants. It may be the case that, through

experience people "learn" and get known as having learned. It is also the case that, as these people age and new generations come forward, this learning is likely to be challenged more and more frequently. Such challenges can be resisted or amplified by calls to various other political resources—including, certainly, the call to "nature" as in "this is the way things have to be." Calls to nature may be religious, rational, or scientific and yet remain fragile as religious sensibilities evolve, argumentation proceeds, new scientific research gets published. In other words, everyday ethno-assessments besides being grounded in the here and now are also profoundly dependent on social transformations that may make them moot. Everyday assessments are not so much time-bound as temporary.

Rights, duties, privileges — in conclusion

Where does that leave us who have been given the State sponsored responsibility to "to provide for all the *means* of the education" (to paraphrase Horace Mann again)? What other means can we imagine?

The puzzle is how to leverage what we are learning about everyday assessment in order to reorganize school-based assessments. We who advise policy makers must keep wondering who may assess what performance, when, and with what effect. We must seek not simply to reform current answers to the question, but to come up with other ways to arrange who may assess, what is assessed, when this is done. We must keep in mind that we are talking with assessments that change people's lives. At this moment many if not most of these high-stake assessments are conducted in State certified institutions that report results officially to the

administrators who have been granted by the State the authority to grant degrees.[19] Other ways to produce such assessment are possible. In many nooks and crannies of modernity employers or clients do not delegate assessment or depend on school certification. They do it themselves.[20] We should pay attention.

The political need for a re-imagination of assessment for career or citizenship purposes is all the more pressing now that the School may be losing much of its educational function. With all the attention given to multi-billionaire captains of industry, it is surprising that few have noted that they and their network are not particularly interested in education as the disinterested pursuit of enlightenment. They appear mostly concerned with ensuring that school certification through degrees and the like only be given to people with the skills they imagine industry requires (thus the emphasis on the STEM topics). As the School centralizes around this narrowing of its historical mission, degrees become more valuable in term of future earnings. But the specific contribution of schooling to the education of people may be narrowing with the consequence that much that a child should experience ("learn") on the route to adulthood is getting to proceed through other means than state curricula. On many matters of personal significance, from art and music to health and, say, global warming or evolution, peers, the media, politicians, are becoming stronger and stronger voices. The new technologies only multiply these trends. The School is becoming less and less Common even as education may be getting even more "public" in the sense that it takes place in the "commons" where people meet as subjects and, together, deliberate about their future.

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[19] This is a paraphrase of what the President of Columbia University says after the deans of each of its Schools have reported. As the Columbia faculty is regularly reminded, one should not address as "Doctor" students who have defended their dissertation successfully until the President of the University has spoken the words.

[20] I am thinking here of the many who have made careers in the world of the new technologies without getting university degrees in computer engineering or software design.

There are reasons to bemoan this state of affairs. School people may be right to attempt to get the State, through national legislation and the like, to tighten the compulsory nature of controlled and centralized curricula, pedagogies, and degrees.[21] I take an alternate route starting with a challenge. I can agree with Horace Mann that the right of a child to an education implies "of course" a duty of the State without agreeing that this duty must include multiple choice tests, value-added teaching, credit-hours, or degrees with privileges thereunto attached. I can agree that a democratic polity may ask for special assessments of performance to distribute privileges (access to plausibly more satisfying or remunerative careers) so that this distribution is made "fairly" on the basis of individual merit. But this assessment does not have to proceed through the School.

This essay is certainly not an occasion for answering the fundamental political questions about means that seemed settled by Mann and his peers. I mostly wish to move the conversation. Many, from Dewey to Lawrence Cremin and a host of others have acknowledged the reality of everyday education. Cremin is particularly noteworthy in his critique of the collapse of everything educational into the problematics of schooling (1975). At Teachers College he attempted to constitute new routes to professional educational expertise that would not necessarily progress through teacher certification or school teaching.[22] None of his attempts were particularly successful. I discussed elsewhere (2008) my sense that the theoretical developments Cremin needed to establish his argument had not yet been fully formulated. In his

[21] There is something fascinating in the government of Qatar making all state schooling be conducted in English—in the name of modernizing its people and preserving its culture. Euro-Americans experts, think tanks and corporations, have flocked to participate in building what is presented in glossy press releases a "model" School. Not many point that the current wealth of Qatar, besides being grounded in oil, is the product of immigrants from many parts of Asia who are figuring out, through their own channels and educational endeavors, how to survive in often very difficult if not hostile conditions (with thanks to Rehenuma Asmi ongoing research).

[22] Two programs were created in the 1960s and 1970s, the program in Family and Community Education that actually was made into a department, and the Program for Entry into the Educating Professions.

writings, he did not face either the practical difficulties of weaving educational functions in professions organized for other formal functions. Nurses, social workers, family therapists, etc. were willing to think of their work as educational but they had no support for formalizing this willingness into the concrete organization of their actual profession.

But the political issues may have been the most serious in limiting Cremin's influence.[23] It did not help him that the Great Society debates of the 1960s were, also, a moment for the re-centering of schooling as the means to greater equality. The disputes on deficits and the cultures of poverty kept using school performance as the yardstick for policy debates. The Coleman report was probably an encouragement to Cremin but its interpretations, to this day, return our attention to what schools might do to mitigate family effects. It did not help either that the most strident voice for "de-schooling society" came from a revolutionary Mexican Jesuit (Illich 1970). Above all, it did not help that schooling had become an enormous industry on which millions depend for their livelihood.

We are now on stronger theoretical grounds to re-open the debate. It may also be the case that more professions are open to recalibrating their own organization to incorporate formally an educational function. Health professionals, for example, have learned again and again that they cannot rely on schooling to educate their patients and clients. Willy nilly they must rely on the new and old media to pass messages about what to do or not do to remain healthy. But health professionals also know that the media can be dangerous. And so can the new technologies as they allow for direct challenges to accepted expert practices.[24] But the new technologies also provide new opportunities as long as one understands that the kind of social relationships media like blogging or social softwares are quite different in the way they allow for

[23] McClintock gives a somewhat different account of Cremin's limitations (2009).
[24] The most famous case in recent years can be found in the media amplified challenges against vaccination.

claims to authority. The same can be said about the scientists concerned with global warming, as well as the politicians seeking to act on the scientific evidence (or resisting it).[25] All those who sell new technologies may be in a similar position, though their claim to be heard must proceed through other means than, say, the disputes between scientific authority vs. common sense that characterize public discussion about global warming. As Steve Jobs discovered, appeals to emotion and esthetics can be powerful indeed in changing behavior.

Professional educators, "we," must pay attention. Health, the environment, technology are not trivial aspects of our education, particularly as common sense, or half-remembered factoids learned in school half-a-century ago, become less reliable as sources for political action. We can go back to Mann's statement. To paraphrase, "human beings" do have an absolute right to an education and there is a corollary duty for the government to provide means, particularly since so much of this education must be about public matters as there arise, in the real time of everyday life. Note that Mann wrote about "human beings," not children.[26] The political responsibility of the State is not only to guarantee that "no child is left behind." It is also to educate parents[27] about the means at their disposal to educate themselves, including a duty to help with an assessment of these means. But these educational efforts must face the reality I discussed when reviewing research on educations into autism. Educating parents cannot proceed

[25] As some of the scientists discovered, internal conversations about the evidence can be used against it when moved into other settings. In some media the defense of these scientists has involved renewed education about the scientific process that may or may not have been addressed in high school science classes.

[26] Dewey, in his "Pedagogical Creed" ([1897] 1959) also starts with "in the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race" but then moves to narrow this as he develops it and moves to say "I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself." Had Dewey stayed with an age-less individual, then, perhaps, he would not have fallen into the schooling trap.

[27] Actually, and following Mann as he justified taxing all for the schooling of some, the duty of the State goes beyond educating the parents of children. The State also has a study to educate the parents' neighbors, as well as all other also involved, about the education of children, parents, etc., recursively.

on the models provided by the compulsory education of children. Parent educators cannot quite be "teachers" and parents cannot quite be assessed as having more or less learned some curriculum. Parents cannot "fail" parent education. They do not get degrees in "baby handling." It may actually be the reverse with parents assessing the usefulness of "parent education" and practically "failing" these programs by not attending them. We know that adults will seek educations into all the matters which they discover they are getting caught. Some will even develop such programs whether through "old" technologies (e.g. church groups reading and discussing books), or through the new ones as they blog, comment, tweet, etc. State sponsored educators will have to take all this into account, particularly as they may provide new means and thus produce new conditions for education. Another example could be found in the multiplication of charter schools in places like Harlem. This is very much a state sponsored matter which should also involve guidance on how to evaluate the claims of various schools. Who, for example, will help parents sort out the claims of the various charter schools available to their children?

Note that mine is not a radical critique of schooling but a call to distinguish and separate the various functions that the School has accreted in the light of, first, its failure to accomplish some of its missions and, second, what we have learned about educative processes. There is no reason to delegate to the school the granting of career privileges. A prudent state, fully conscious of its democratic responsibility to all "human beings," might constitute a completely separate institution. There is one glorious precedent to the separation of such previously conjoined responsibilities as legislative, judicial and executive functions were granted to different and independent bodies.

The separation of Church and State may be the better model for the separation of the School and the State. It is one of the glories of the American Revolution that it took the State out of the business of telling people how to conduct their religious life. It may now be time to figure out how to help free individuals educate themselves. We must learn what the People have been trying to teach us and incorporate it into our practices. And we must leave the task of assessing whether someone is ready for a task to those who are closest to the task.

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