

From the Editor

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As this issue of *The Journal of Thought* is going to press, the U.S. Presidential election is heating up, and the rhetoric is enough to make me wonder if we can make democracy function even passably well. Elections are good times to stop and think about the importance of education in democracies. As we are constructed as a democratic republic, the assumption of the founding fathers was that *citizen* was an office that could be widely distributed, but they also understood that citizenship could be a demanding office. Hence the emphasis, from the early days of the republic, on the importance of public education, *public* here meaning education of the public, by the public, for the public, at the public expense, and for the public good. As we go through the coming election campaign, we will have many occasions to recall the importance of an education that prepares us for the demands of citizenship.

Cheu-jey Lee's discussion of literacy education reminds us not only that literacy is much more than literal reading, but is also a set of politically significant analytic skills and necessary for meaningful citizenship. Lee argues that it is not enough (it may not even be possible) to teach children to read *in general*; for them to function in a democratic and consumerist society, children must be taught to read between the lines, analytically. They must learn how to read whose interests are being served by the way the text is constructed if they are to be empowered to exercise agency on behalf of their interests, both in the marketplace and in the polity. Citizens unprepared to do that kind of analysis are unlikely to be able to distinguish between legitimate political discourse and purely self-serving dishonesty.

Scott Ellison's discussion of accountability similarly reminds us that education is more than narrow and technical transmission of knowledge and/or skills. Ellison's point is that we must critique not just educational practice but also educational accountability itself. In order for education to serve its role of preparation for democratic citizenship, it will be necessary to re-think accountability and the standards by which it is managed within a critical understanding of democratic life and the demands of democratic citizenship. While we argue about the standards by which accountability will be measured, we fail to ask the more significant question: "To whom public education is properly accountable?"

Paul Akoury perhaps opens our perspective on educational purpose a bit wider, moving beyond an education for citizenship to one that opens us to a world of "awe and wonder" and vice versa. On Akoury's view, education does even more than connect us with each other and a public for the purposes of self-government and individual agency. More completely, education invites us into full human authenticity. Taking such an educational ideal seriously would render the whole question of evaluation and assessment moot, at least temporarily, since it would require us to suspend our preconceptions about the specific goals and content of education, which limit the enterprise of education before it begins.

Kipton Smilie invites us to revisit this perennial question of the purposes of education by considering the different visions embodied in the disputes between Charles Eliot and Irving Babbitt at the turn of the twentieth century. This debate was one of the hinges between a conception of education as a transcendent enterprise the purpose of which is to connect us to a classical tradition of elevated humanity on the one hand (Babbitt's view), and education as self-fulfillment and existential independence liberated from that very classical tradition, seen as limiting and constricting on individual development and progress to fashioning a life enriched in the here-and-now and in more concrete ways than was the case for Babbitt (Eliot's view). At issue here is Babbitt's commitment to an education resulting in "restraint and balance" on the assumption that the proper elements and amounts of both were both discernable and more or less universally applicable, which was precisely counter to Eliot's idea of education as particular to specific context and purpose.

JanArmstrong's article on "faculty animosity" returns us to the world of schools as themselves contested space—contested not just from the outside but also from the inside. Just as Eliot and Babbitt engaged in long protracted conflict over the meaning of education a century ago, a conflict that happened within academia writ large and the specific institution that was Harvard University, conflict remains part of life within universities today. Not all conflicts, in schools or outside of them, are

civil in nature. Just as conflict is part of the civic life of the broad polity, so too is conflict part of small social life in the university. In all these situations, it can reasonably be argued that civil life runs better when everyone communicates generously in pursuit of the common good. The irony, as Armstrong points out, is that university faculty, committed to and defenders of “reasoned argument,” are no better at civility than any other group.

Finally, we have David Snelgrove’s review of *Teachers, Leaders, and Schools: Essays by John Dewey*, a collection of Dewey’s essays gathered and edited by Douglas Simposon and Sam Stack. Dewey is perhaps the most influential, and arguably the most insightful, theorist of the relationship between democracy and education. As Snelgrove concludes, Dewey’s work evidenced a faith in the potential that citizens, properly educated for citizenship, might actually make democracy work.

I, for one, will need to frequently renew that optimism between now and November 6. Optimism, of course, is one of the requirements of being an educator.