KEYNOTE ADDRESS

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I started thinking I would talk today about my current frustration — the frustration of trying to start a dozen new small high schools for kids who would otherwise be attending schools neither you nor I would be willing to send our own children to. Most of the time it seems I cannot get anything done. My list of "to do's" remains intolerably similar from week to week. Unlike the days when I was a kindergarten teacher, I am dealing with the school system at its most impossible. No one who works close to the kids in the New York City system — or any other large urban school system — has any real power. The time it takes to get the people with real power to move seems inordinate. This is not because they are bad folks — not at all. Rather it is because it is overwhelming for them, too. They must attend to over one thousand schools with a million students, and only two or three of them are in a position to make a final decision, especially if it is precedent-setting. And they no longer have to deal with a Deborah Meier who does her stuff quietly, on the sly, as she did for so many years, but rather one who tells everyone very loudly and clearly and, thus, sets precedents. Nowadays that is part of my job — to set precedents for others to follow.

As I was preparing for today, I was looking for a larger message behind my frustration: a way I could dress it up as something really worth the attention of powerful people and worth a scholarly paper, perhaps. My frustration is actually full of big policy implications, even of philosophical dilemmas, if I could but explain it right. I thought for a moment about how our reforms are always caught between competing priorities: equity versus quality, impersonalness versus personalness, objectivity versus subjectivity, reliability versus authenticity, universality versus particularity, standardization versus diversity, orderliness versus messiness — that is my favorite — between the claims of justice and those of freedom, between communal ideals and individualistic ones. These are surely topics of importance. They are also connected to our frustrations.

Furthermore, not all the virtues are obviously on the same side of this list of dyads. In fact, each creates uncomfortable tensions between competing goods. In my youth, we argued about these endlessly: efficiency-driven socialism versus compassion-driven socialism, socialism from above versus socialism from below. We endlessly discussed whether one was justified breaking eggs to make an omelette and what ends justified what means. We argued about our utopian visions. The anarchists had their heroes, the

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social democrats had theirs, and the communists had still others. As I look at the landscape today, it is hard to tell which old left-wing friends of mine ended up where. It is the so-called new conservatives these days who seem to think that you have to break eggs to make an omelette, that ruthlessness is the route to compassion. And it is many of my still left-wing friends who seem to have discovered the value of gradualism and who worry about the pace of change and its impact on democratic life and family values. The divisions between right and left seem to have less and less to do with the stereotypes that once divided anarchists, social democrats, and communists, or even left and right, and more to do with our vision of democracy.

Sometimes the effort to balance opposing virtues can cause gridlock or paralysis. And when we break the gridlock, I fear how we have chosen. I think, today, New Yorkers have often opted for the worst of both sides of that list of dyads. We have lost the tension altogether.

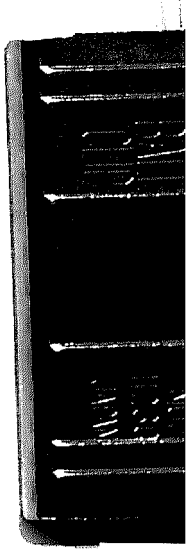
Our schools, for example, are centers of both the most self-centered forms of individualism and the most banal kinds of standardization. They celebrate mindless objectivity and simultaneously offer the grossest inequities. Among the most powerful decision-makers are people who choose private schools for their own children, while they worry about public school choice because it might undermine equity for other people's children. We have managed to define equity as the enemy of creativity, and, thus, given equity a bad name.

There is a long history of terminological couplings that are now bedeviling us, and many battles that helped establish them. They need re-examination. I have come to believe, for example, that equity will remain ever more elusive unless we uncouple the two concepts of standards and standardization. We cannot produce the kinds of schools all children deserve — schools we would want for ourselves and that our most vulnerable children need the most — if we continue to see these as close cousins. The best is always particular, never fixed and uniform. Yet as we in New York debate the viability of small schools, school choice, self-governance and local control, we are challenged by our opponents in the name of equity, fairness, universality, and high standards. How can you claim these values, they argue, if all schools are allowed to be different? It is an unfortunate debate. It may be hard to produce both equity and good schooling, but we will not achieve either goal any quicker if we opt for centralization, standardization, and uniformity.

It is a great thing that we have finally decided that all kids deserve a classy education. But it is a phony thing if we mean they all deserve a second-hand replica of somebody else's definition of classy. Experts, professionals, and bureaucrats fear diversity — schools that are designed to be different — for both the best and worst of reasons. The worst is their fear of "the people" in the raw — often justified, of course, since "the people" do not always make wise choices. In short, they do not always agree with

me. And the best reason is their concern that no one be left out. They know how easy it is to climb into exclusivity. Some go so far as to fear that if we take one step in this direction, we will be abandoning our claims to a common culture and heritage, while also abandoning forever those at the bottom of the ladder. It is a serious accusation. One we cannot ignore. Equity is an idea we are in danger of losing these days. It has few powerful proponents. However, the best response is to note that fairness requires such diversity; the restoration of the democratic community requires both a strong sense of community and a strong defense of individuality.

These are the current imperatives. To keep both sides of that tension alive. We will have no serious intellectual debate in this nation without a renewed commitment to creating more powerful connections between people and between people and their ideas. Only public institutions can ensure, or at least increase, the odds that such connections will cross boundaries of race and class — reach out beyond our narrow interests. We must restore the liveliness of these public institutions. Today, New York City is at a crossroads — in a state of acute schizophrenia with regard to its beloved public institutions. It is the city with perhaps the greatest tradition for tackling such issues. We are the preeminent city in exploiting these old dichotomies, and for exploring how to put them back together again in more fruitful ways. If we are both careful and bold, and yet patient of those who still lag behind, we can lead the way nationally in creating new forms of public life. This is my theme.



But then the other night, just as I was putting this theme into place in my head, I came across an article I wrote nearly ten years ago. It ended with this sentence: "schools should be interesting places for every one of us — children, teachers, and even principals." I paused. Maybe it all boils down to this. I have had ideas that seemed more profound, more complex, and more ("capital-I") Important. But as I reread that sentence and the article that lead up to it, I was not sure. Maybe behind that simple declarative statement was not merely my own story, but something that would help us resolve those interminable dyads, those frustrating dichotomies. Perhaps it is the essential starting place: a good school has to be an interesting place. If and when we create a setting in which all the participants find that what they are doing and thinking is interesting, we may well have created a place fit for a democratic society — one that offers equity and high standards. Maybe this is the definition we are seeking — or at least enough of one for a lifetime's work.

People do ask me sometimes why a child cannot learn even if she is bored. "Must we always have to make school subjects exciting," they complain. "Isn't that coddling the young - won't a bit of plain hard work, even boredom, do them good?" Yes and no, I say. We do not always have to make life exciting. We do not have to coddle. In the end, whether something excites is the student's job, not ours, and surely we cannot guarantee

fun. The first year we started Central Park East Secondary School we posted a slogan all over the school. It said: "It's Not Our Job to Make You Happy, It's Our Job to Make You Strong." Anytime students complained we would point to the sign. The sign was there mostly to remind ourselves, not the kids, that hard work and boredom are not synonyms. Because there is not an animal alive that learns if it is not attentive.

At the very least you have to catch the attention of the learner. That is rock bottom. Whether the work is hard or easy, fun or not, it will not work if it is truly "booorrring." Being interested is just a form of sustained attention. It is more than catching the eye and ear like a good television commercial. Being interested carries a deeper and broader meaning. It is that quality that makes us curious, keeps us awake, and makes dying seem an increasingly irritating idea because it means I will never know how it all turned out — what happened next.

Being interesting suggests sustained, not momentary, attention. It is a state of sustained hopefulness, the drive to survive even in the face of terrible tragedy and sorrow. Boredom — deep, true, sustained boredom — is a killer. I used to try to fantasize what it would be like to survive solitary confinement. I would try to imagine what I could do alone for ten whole years. The fear was not starvation but boredom. When I look at young people I can often pick out the winners. They are so rarely bored (even if they say they are because that is a current requirement for being fifteen). These winners cannot help themselves. They find the world interesting. Their attention is always being caught — held. They are very hard to satisfy with easy answers. They are fun to be with because they make the world, in turn, more interesting to others. (Good teachers are often fun in the same way.) They give off an aura of powerfulness, possibility, and competence.

Yet from top to bottom we have organized schools to be uninteresting places. We have systematically, not incidentally, robbed both kids and the adults who live in schools of the opportunity to show their powerfulness, their sense of the possible, their competence, and above all their eclectic interests and curiosities about this, that, or the other thing, with exceptions.

I happened to come into teaching from one of those exceptions and went directly into the other. The two exceptions are a good doctoral program and a good kindergarten. At these two ends of the school spectrum we have organized things to be interesting. The ratios between experts and novices are more nearly right; the students are freer to follow their own interests; teachers are given wider latitude to follow their own intuition; depth is preferred to breadth, and the teachers function more like mentors and coaches rather than deliverers of instruction — lecturers. At the two ends, the students are doing the hard work, and the teachers are mostly observing, commenting, and prodding. In between it is the reverse. There may be some elite schools that come close to these ideals at times, but the

standard academic first-to-twelfth grade education is unquestionably organized to be the most boring institution ever invented by human beings.

As someone once said, schools are like badly organized professional conferences, except that attendance is taken, breaks monitored, and it lasts for 180 days. Would anyone sign up? Mind you, I am not discussing whether it is tough, rigorous, demanding: the "in" words these days. There are bad conferences with easy sessions or tough sessions, entertaining ones and flubs. But two days is still my limit for a conference. We are as likely to be bored because the work is too hard as too easy. Entertainment can hold our attention for only so long, but it does not sustain our interest. When the entertainment stops, so do we. We attend such conferences often without making intellectual connections — just interpersonal ones.

I push this question about "interest" because it helps explain why I get a panic in my stomach when I read reports that define rigor as mastery of hundreds of objectives in a score of different disciplines — with hundreds of goals and outcomes flowing from each. I am looking for a simpler definition of what is important, of how to define a good school on practical grounds as well as on theoretical ones.

Not only do I take all these new endless standards with a grain of salt, but it gets worse when I look at them in detail and try to apply them in the real world. I have my doubts whether any of the adults in our school, including myself, could meet any of them, at least outside of our own field of specialty. And I doubt whether such an inability has anything to do with our being, or not being, well-educated. Do I understand, much less have I mastered, the idea of gravity, evolution, the balance of nature, cause and effect, the Scientific Method, the causes of the American Revolution, not to mention the industrial revolution and World War II, or the connection between land masses and culture, the influence of language on human creations — just to mention a bare few from the list of concepts every eighteen year-old is expected to have under his or her belt. I will admit I have forgotten most of the facts I knew even about American history, my Master's field, not to mention most of what I studied since. I have even forgotten the plots of my favorite novels, and I get mixed up about which authors, titles and centuries go together. However, I can conjure up quite a bit under pressure, given the proper stimulus of a crossword puzzle. Is that okay?

Given this personal inadequacy, long lists of what eighteen year-olds should know leave me particularly numb. I can remember the acronyms I once invented to study for exams in these fields better than the fields of study themselves! Was it, therefore, all a waste? I do not think so, not at all. It is just harder to figure out what it was that was so important about it, what mattered and why. Because one of the requirements of a good school ought to be that we invent no graduation requirement for an eighteen year-old that every faculty member of our school could not pass with ease. Now

that may seem obvious, but in fact, I do not think we have come near to achieving it even at CPESS.[1] It means that teachers of literature should *also* be masters of math, and vice versa. Can they do that at your school?

In fact, I would be very pleased if our kids turned out to be as good as our faculty. Not because it is a perfect faculty, but because they possess, on the whole, those qualities of mind and habits of work that are the hallmarks of the best we have to pass on to our young. They have high standards for reasoning, a good sense of humor, can be counted on to look at issues squarely and fairly, they demand a lot of themselves, and can persevere at a task. Are these, then, the stuff of the lists we should be inventing? Do they suggest a different kind of standard?

We tried when we started our school nine years ago to look at it in this way. We looked at ourselves, our children, our friends and our society and asked what were the habits of mind that a strong democratic society rests upon? What must we be able to expect of each other if we are to be members of the same ruling class? At Central Park East Secondary School we got it down to five habits of mind, exhibited in a range of ways that we thus see as habits of work. We try to see that these habits of mind make their way into everything that happens in our school, from a playground fight to literary or scientific studies.

Finally, we decided that while you could not make it through our school without exhibiting such habits of mind and habits of work, habits of heart were important too. We decided these were best learned if we modeled them, and then crossed our fingers about these hard to spell out and assess qualities. Maybe only a longitudinal study of our students will see if these moral habits held up.

Subsequently I have tried rewriting my educational criteria to see if I could get it down to an even more manageable size, just in case I got a chance to start still another school. The last time I tried, I got it down to four. Two habits of mind — informed skepticism and informed empathy — and two habits of work — reliability and resourcefulness. It is fun to do this kind of exercise. I rather liked my new list, for example, but I was not sure it would work — try to explain skepticism to a fourteen year-old. So when I figured the other night that maybe that one sentence about making school an interesting place might do — well, that was a really heady moment. Of course, remember I said interesting for everyone. And the more I play with it, the more I like it, although I am not likely to win converts in either Washington or Albany.

The advantage of getting down to just one, grand, unified criteria is that it takes a while to recreate the complexity that pushes the number up again to at least five. But it is an antidote to the temptation to invent hundreds. In short, the search for simplicity is more than just an okay exercise.

1. Central Park East Secondary School.

It is a much needed one in the field of education, so long as we do not pretend that any of the simple solutions at which we have temporarily arrived should be imposed on everyone else. Given the nature of the species, every simplification is a temporary reduction or a provocative game, not a final solution. It is not in our nature to reach certainty. At best "pretty sure" will have to do. But it is no less valuable to push a good idea as far as it will take us. The idea of the school as an interesting place is such a starting point.

Let's see how far it might take us in resolving some of the tensions I described at the start. For example, if schools must be interesting places, if they must capture the attention and enthusiasm of all its members — teachers, students, parents — would it help us see how equity and diversity coincide? At the very least, such a definition would remind us that schools have to be places where important decisions are being made.

Ted Sizer[2] tells a wonderful story about a time when he was being considered for principal of Stuyvesant High School in New York City. He took a trip there with a city official. "Tell me," he said, "what kind of powers do New York principals have. For example would I have a say in the hiring of the school's staff?" The wooing officials said, "Oh, no. You don't have anything to do with staffing - that's done centrally." "Well, what about selecting my administrative team?" "No, that's done centrally too," he was told. "Well, what about the curriculum?" "It's decided by the State," was the answer. "Well, what about the ways we grade and assess our students?" "Never. That's decided by the State and City of New York." "Maybe the schedule?" "No, there's a master City-wide schedule." Finally, he said, "I'm not exactly clear why you're looking for a principal." It is hard for principals, in short, to wax enthusiastic about shared decision-making, given their nonexisting powers. So, to start with, to make schools interesting places, schools must have power over all these essentials that Ted Sizer was inquiring about.

Furthermore, once they have such powers, teachers and students need to be in a position to choose *between* schools, so that they end up in a place whose style and substance matches at least some of their interests some of the time. But it is more than that. They also need the power to be choosers in the school itself, not only between schools. Because boredom is, in part, the product of powerlessness. In interesting schools, what captures our imagination is do-able in terms of time and resources — these are places where we can follow our strong inclinations, where sustained attention is valued. We think of distractibility and the lack of a long attention span as qualities of immaturity, although in fact the very young are easily engrossed in their chosen pursuits.

2. Theodore R. Sizer, Professor of Education, Brown University.

Little babies, like my toddler grandchildren are, in fact, maddeningly hard to distract. Try to get them to go out with you when they are in the middle of playing with their toy horse collection. They have amazing tenacity when they get into something that interests them. We have created immaturity in school, the habit of inattention, through our intentional intervention. We have substituted irritable busyness for sustained interest and commitment. Interesting settings are places where diversity naturally exists, where newness mixes with oldness, where novices and experts of varying degrees can and do observe and learn from each other, where we can see enacted activities that engage us with their beauty and skill long before we can imitate them — like sitting at a dinner table where the conversation is carried on above our heads and precisely for that reason is exciting and challenging as it might not be in a school setting. No one is requiring us to pretend we have mastered it. Interesting settings enable potential lifetime passions to blossom, because they allow us to imagine the otherwise unimaginable, long before we are expected to produce or compete we can join as attentive observers. It is the way we learned our first language: by imagining ourselves as speakers. And it is why I loved, to my surprise, being a kindergarten teacher. It is a place where imagination and passion are not divorced from competence.

Good schools are kindergartens — places in which the myriad of interests that powerful and interesting adults pursue during their long lifetimes are made accessible to the young (who in turn can fail without fear of failure), who are inducted into the many possible, worthy lifetime roles through imitation and invention. Kindergartens are places where both the routine and the novel are expected; where sufficient predictabilities free us to attend to more important things and sufficient novelties keep us from becoming complacent. They are places where conversations occur naturally and span different generations, where it is safe to take intellectual chances, where there is a mixture of what my colleague Joe MacDonald calls the warmly subjective and the coolly objective — the show-and-tell of kindergarten. Kindergartens are places where the familiar and the exotic, the obvious and the surprising are juxtaposed over and over again. They are places structured not to squash strong convictions and strong commitments. Nothing is undiscussable. If all members of such a classroom do not have an equal vote, all have an equal voice. Unequal power is not a sign that the younger members are lesser people, but only that they are temporarily less experienced people.

In fact, in each and every respect, most of the schools we know were designed to exclude every one of the qualities I have just described. Once children leave kindergarten, and until they reach graduate school, they experience, however benignly, the diametrical opposite of all the above, sometimes to the most shocking degree. I went yesterday to James Monroe High School — the high school we are hoping to replace with smaller and

more interesting schools next year. It was a stunning experience. In order to get in I had to make my way through about fifty youngsters who were being purposely excluded from going to school because they did not have the proper pass with them. When I got through I was then frisked. It was the most thorough frisking I had experienced since I was held by the police in Chicago during the civil rights' protests of the '60s. Not brutal, but not pro forma either.

But even in our gentler schools, we systematically dishonor our students. Time is not organized for their sustained interest, but chopped up into small and arbitrary slots, whose sequence and order have no external logic or personal meaning. Every thirty-five to fifty minutes the entire workplace is reorganized — the worktask, the supervisor, and one's coworkers all change. Students see this as a symbol of their finally being treated like grown-ups. This merry-go-round world of constant interruptions is, in fact, a valued rite of passage for the young. It is defended as one of the realities of life, versus the kind of coddling done in schools like ours, where kids move at most once, twice or three times a day, and where they work largely with the same small cohort of teammates and supervisors. But do you know a real-life workplace organized like the traditional high school? There is not even an old-fashioned factory that treated its workers as anonymously and as mindlessly.

We bemoan parental apathy and lack of involvement in schools, but only political duty makes it reasonable for a parent to bother to come to school. With whom are they expected to confer? Who is it in the average high school who knows their child?

All the learning in school is *intended* to come from a single source — the teacher. But what the teacher imparts is not her expertise. In fact, no teacher has an opportunity to display expertise. Art teachers do not do art; mathematicians do not do math — rather they teach *about* it. And the course is organized to be as sure as possible that no peer can lend assistance either. No one is there to model for the novice what expertise looks like. All are in an equal state of ignorance in a well-tracked school. In most schools you better already know from somewhere else, because you are not likely to find out what it is all about in school. It would be like learning to play tennis or the piano without being exposed to a tennis game or a pianist at work — only reading and hearing about it. How many kids would practice basketball so long and hard if they had never seen the game played? The chances of "making it" are no greater in sports than in academia, but they have tasted the pleasure of the real thing in one and never come close to tasting it in the other. Do you think they believe in "the academic" life the way they believe in basketball? We know language is learned through immersion. Physics, chemistry, math, and history — these too are languages for describing the world, and they must be experienced as such if they are to be learned.

What we have created, in short, is a machine that breaks down all the time because it is a machine composed of very un-machine-like parts, messy human beings. It is a machine designed to drain us of precisely those qualities that might prove to be interesting. Then we try to think of clever and diabolical ways to catch the student's attention (surprise quizzes, high stakes tests, expulsion) and to motivate her. Or we complain about their hormones and their devilish peer culture. What other culture have we offered them? We build schools so huge and organize them so anonymously that thank god kids create some subculture! How often in such settings do teachers bump into another teacher who teaches the same kid? How often can they sit and talk about their mutual interests in mutual students? And when might a kid and a teacher talk together, person to person? And what would they talk about? If schools have working libraries, when would kids get to use them given the way we have organized their time? And given that several hundred different students have a teacher in any given year, no matter how devoted the teacher how many students can teachers know well? A few dozen? Moreover, would not these few dozen likely be the ones who are easiest to know, not the ones most in need of being known?

We pretend that once — in some "good old days" — it was different. Possibly, because in the good old days many schools were smaller, and many of our fellow citizens lived in smaller communities. But in fact, it is only since World War II that the vast majority of healthy and able-bodied Americans came close to completing high school, much less being exposed to a four-year academic program. It is only in the last hundred years that we invented this thing called the high school, and in 1900 less than nine percent of Americans even started high school. And the prestigious colleges of 1900 were denouncing the quality of those elite graduates then as they do now. It was in the post-World War II period that we first began to graduate a majority of our youth, and it was only then that the full-blown, huge, American, comprehensive high school became the norm — the great achievement soon to be copied around the world. We opened up new and richly designed school buildings, particularly in our suburbs, offering every enticement we could to keep our teens in school: teen palaces, country clubs, nascent shopping malls. Prior generations of ethnic drop-outs — Poles, Italians, Slavs — celebrated the achievements of their offspring, as they joined the great American dream. We were not yet feeling so mean toward our young, even as our aspirations were often far from intellectually serious. We were indulgent, if not yet focused.

The dream came to a sputtering halt a short ten years after the Civil Rights movement succeeded in opening the dream up to black Americans. By 1970, over a decade after the *Brown* decision,[3] we declared war on permissiveness and frills. Standardization and back to basics, the flowering of

3. Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

testing and more testing was and has been the slogan ever since. The sputtering halt visited first, of course, the least advantaged city kids. For the more advantaged, *Horace's Compromise*,[4] a ground-breaking book by Brown University's Ted Sizer published in the early 1970s, described the dismal situation well. For kids in our city's schools, the situation was far worse.

New York City, for example, compares well to other urban centers. It is full of smart educators. It means well. It has produced some of the most successful students found anywhere in America, and some of the most interesting curricula. Its Centeral Offices are busy monitoring and guiding. But the wonderful ideas of those at Central headquarters rarely connect with what kids and teachers are really struggling with. Out there in the schools, adults and kids are working out their own compromises — wrestling, in their own Horace-like fashion, over power where none officially exists.

Were the system working right, which fortunately it never is, there is not a single decision of any importance that field hands would be entitled to make. Yet of course, the field hands make decisions every second of the day, wise as well as unwise ones. They do it behind closed doors, with little collegiality and little accountability. And this is the arrangement some say must be preserved — only with better monitoring and *more* compliance — in the name of equity.

Even the reformers who most desire change get nervous at the idea of putting real power in the hands of practitioners — me, too. The bureaucratic villains attacked by intellectuals and reformers have lots of counterparts in the same university and foundation-based think tanks that lead the attack. People who gather regularly at conferences see themselves as setting the course of reform, making decisions for teachers too mired in routine and too resistant to change to lead the way forward themselves. They all worry about what those teachers would do, or not do, if they had more power. They think my schemes are generally too romantic.

Many young people I meet of late, often the children of my fellow think-tankers, are becoming interested in school careers. It seems to them important and interesting work. But they, too, distrust. They ask me whether I think it would be wise, or necessary, for them to teach for a few years before going into policy or curriculum development. They assume, at best, that they need to teach, so they will understand the job better, but still they think the important work is telling teachers what to do. Bless them for the thought that they should try to live it before they direct it. But, alas, it takes only a few short years before they, too, will speak of teachers in the same condescending tone that teachers in turn often use about parents and kids — too stupid and too dull to make important decisions about their

4. THEODORE R. SIZER, HORACE'S COMPROMISE: THE DILEMMA OF THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL (1992).

world. This division of labor between those who work with their minds and those who work with their hands is ancient; it may have produced the Model T and transformed the old craft world into the modern industrial one, but it was not such a hot idea then, either. It may not even have been a necessary trade-off; democracy may be paying a big price for it.

But thank goodness, we are in a new age. Suddenly, so we have been told, this kind of alienation is not good for General Motors either. Its faults are beginning to seem obvious to one and all, even if the alternatives are less clear. Maybe we should not be treating people like interchangeable parts; maybe we cannot expect guarantees or your money back when we are talking about humans, and maybe you cannot leap from past to future without going through the present — maybe we need to spend time and money retraining the workers. If this is true, then we are in a golden moment. We can take our time trying to see what it would be like to make schools productive and interesting places for those who work and study there. We can create deliberate, self-chosen communities — communities small enough so that each individual can reasonably know and see both her colleagues' and students' work first hand, as well as meet to make decisions on a face-to-face basis, in a setting open and available to the closest kind of public scrutiny and criticism. Such schools can be stimulated by critics who have access to useful data, but still be answerable to their own best judgements. It will not be Plato's Utopia. It will inevitably be quarrelsome. In fact, that is what I hope. Alas, it may take a while until it is quarrelsome. Teachers and school kids are actually not used to quarreling about matters of substance. It will be full of crises; it will be messy, and it will fall apart on occasion. Some schools will fail and have to start over again. In fact, it will take a while to convince teachers, parents, and kids that what goes on in school is a topic worth arguing about. It will not always be a discussion that lives up to our highest expectations.

It is only when you have the power to say no that the power to say yes matters. When school people have such power it will be worth arguing over the merits of CPESS' five habits of mind and work versus some other schema. It is only worth it if those involved can act on what they are persuaded of. The discussion will not ever end; being persuaded is not forever. It is the debate that also makes the data worth examining.

Imagine a society engaged in trying to teach the young to be capable of dealing with deep and important controversies — the stuff of democratic life — in respectful and reasonable ways. Imagine a society that insists that they need to see such controversy taking place at close hand, and to learn to practice it themselves. Imagine a society determined to teach the young the stuff needed for carrying on such a conversation — the kind of evidence, logic, knowledge and skill. Of course, *what* decisions are made in such settings matter. it is not a question to be left solely to school folks to argue about. I am not indifferent to the particulars, nor the outcomes.

Other citizens and legislators will not be indifferent, either. We will not all reach the same conclusion about what to teach, we will not develop the same system for reaching conclusions, and we will not agree on the best way to measure our success. But neither will we settle these dilemmas by trivializing subjects we honor in the interest of creating a false consensus, so that every discipline ever invented can live happily alongside of all others.

Americans have not learned to love Shakespeare just because nearly all of them were exposed to it. If we are after love of good language and amazement at the capacity of good art to survive, if we want our kids to feel the profundity of certain ideas and not simply recount the triviality of the plots, then just getting kids *through* their Shakespeare is not a triumph at all, but a crying shame. It is like turning Mozart into pop music or rap, so that kids will remember major motifs and titles. That is really what we have too often done to great art. What we teach must be taught honestly, with conviction and passion, by people who have such convictions and passions, in a climate in which alternate passions and convictions are also made accessible.

The kids we fail at the Central Park East schools — and they do exist — are those for whom we never managed to pull this off. They have been on my mind a lot this past month, as school winds down for the year. They are often the kids, sometimes dutiful and sometimes rebellious, who have not the faintest idea what it means to care about something, maybe even about *someone*. They still suspect all this "caring" stuff is just "a con." Or maybe they hope it is. They have invested a lot in not believing us — in not getting interested. They are the kids who often fight off strong human relationships as well, whether intellectual or personal; they are the kids who like to see themselves as passive consumers, cynical observers, but not involved members. They look genuinely puzzled, or angrily envious, at what might lie on the other side of passivity. Sometimes they proclaim an interest in basketball, but even this is often more of a pastime than a passion — a place to network. Maybe we could not have done anything about them, but if we had stretched the boundaries of schooling still further and taken more risks, maybe we could have reached them.

The problem I am describing is not specifically American — it is worldwide. If we do not watch out, we will find out that the only truly committed and passionate adolescents are those who scare us most: fundamentalists of one sort or another, fanatical teens ready to die in furious collective solidarity as the solution to their profound boredom. Maybe they are the youngsters driven by venal material passions, but without ties to others at all, acknowledging no membership in any human club. We need a democratic alternative to both the fanatical and the passionless. We need to reinvent the American school as one step in the process of creating

a network of democratic institutions that offer more to all our fellow citizens than democratic life now does. We cannot wait for the next generation, or hope computers will solve it for us. The generation we are educating now will be with us for a long time.

I am not always optimistic about the future, especially not the one in my own lifetime. But I have never lost my interest in its possibilities. This may be the one and only thing that adults and school people can pass on for sure to the next generation: our attestation that this world is, in the end, at least an *interesting* place to spend a lifetime — a long one, I hope.