TEACHERS COLLEGE
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

THE JOHN L. AND SUE ANN WEINBERG PROFESSORSHIP IN
THE HISTORICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF EDUCATION

To: Darlyne Bailey, Dean, Teachers College
O. Roger Anderson, Chair, Mathematics, Science, and Technology
Colleagues
From: Robbie McClintock
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Subject: Statement of Scholarly Plans

At junctures of promotion and tenure, faculty members describe their scholarly plans as key reference in the process of peer review. When one reaches the rank of full professor, which I reached over twenty years ago, this process formally stops, which, however welcome, may be in the best interest of neither the scholar nor the institution. There is much to gain from periodic self-assessment linked to considered peer review.

At the conclusion of the coming academic year, I shall arrive at what once was the normal, even mandatory, retirement age. I believe it appropriate at that juncture to consider my scholarly plans with care and to solicit collegial assessment of those as part of my judging with care whether or not I should continue in active service at the College. As a promotion or tenure is a choice made by the collective persona of the College with respect to the individual faculty member, so retirement has become a choice the individual faculty member makes with respect to the College. And as peer review is a key input to the former choice, so it should be to the latter. I seek such input. Here are my intentions with respect to scholarship, teaching, and service, as best I can anticipate them. I seek their review, and consequent counsel, with respect to my choosing whether to retire or to commit to an extension of service, health permitting, until the recurrence of such a juncture seven years hence.

Scholarship

My scholarly agenda since I joined the College faculty in 1967 divides into two distinct periods, roughly equal in duration, and I am at the beginning of a third period, I hope of similar duration. Some perspective on the first two will help to explain this third, prospective period.

From 1967 to about 1985, I worked as an historian of Western educational thought, particularly in relation to the heritage of political theory. From the perspective of publication during this period, 1971 was by far my most productive year, as I then published both my book, *Man and His Circumstances: Ortega as Educator*, and my most influential essay, "Towards a Place for Study in a World of Instruction." Subsequently, historical research continued to be my priority and I continued to write a lot, but I developed the habit of leaving much of it unpublished. I have collected my essays and proposals from this period, published and unpublished, in the accompanying volume, *On the Places for Study: Explorations in Education.* Two related themes run through it, as well as *Man and His Circumstances* – first, the historical importance of indirect action, action that is primarily educative and that aggregates into a civic pedagogy, and second, the centrality of study, self-formation, and a concomitant pedagogy, which we would now call constructivist, in the historical actualities of education. An undercurrent in it all this work was a mounting sense of its untimeliness, evident in a frequent resort to a prophetic rhetoric and a growing willingness to leave things unpublished, which belied the feeling that whether the work was published or not, its effects would be nil.

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During the late 1970s, I began to rely on early word-processing equipment, something looking rather like a Starship command console, as an expensive alternative to a typewriter on which to compose my scholarship. So equipped and given a long-standing interest in the cultural effects of communications technologies, I naturally began to reflect on the prospective cultural effects of the underlying digital system enabling such tools. Then in the early 1980s, the microcomputer emerged. I joined the bandwagon and quickly saw in it an interesting answer to my sense of untimeliness. To me, it seemed obvious that digital communications environments would create a vast space for study and powerful agencies of indirect action. Here, in the terminology I developed in my last essay of the first phase of my career, was an "is that ought to be," and I reoriented my work as an effort to develop digital information technologies as a place for study. In 1985, I became chair of the Department of Communication, Computing, and Technology in Education and soon thereafter founding director of the Institute for Learning Technologies. Through essays and proposals, I concentrated on examining the educational potentials of digital communications technologies, paying particular attention to the historical, systemic effects of these technologies. I was an advocate of wide-area networking long before the advent of the World Wide Web and when it emerged, I readily made it my chosen means of publication. I have collected my essays, reports, and proposals from this period in the accompanying volume, *Power and Pedagogy: Digital Technologies as Agents of Educational Change*.

Externally, this second period seemed to some observers to be an antithesis to the first, to use the quasi-Hegelian cliché of academe. In actuality, it was far more properly Hegelian, preserving and extending it through an *Aufhebung*, heaving it up into a new praxis, working with historical forces rather than talking about controlling principles. There is no need to rehash accomplishments and shortcomings in this second period. I have had some success, but at a price extracted from my essential scholarly purpose. In the course of working with the new technologies, I have come to realize that a person does not act *on* historic forces; instead, one becomes caught up *in* them. And in getting caught up in them, it is not the *telos* of the process in which one becomes entangled, but rather in its initial conditions. As a result, timeliness can deflect one's basic intentions. In my case: I am still convinced that – eventually – digital information technologies will greatly expand the place of study in educational experience and the role of indirect action in public life. But – currently – the arena of action, into which the process of historical change now draws one, is the arena of the past and immediate present, the arena of institutionalized practices, not a prospective place for study, but the given world of instruction. Historic praxis involves one in the effort to integrate new technologies into existing educational practices and to enable teachers to make good use of new tools and techniques within the existing system. These are worthy activities, but not those that I intended, or now intend, to make the primary arena of my scholarship.

As I look back, I have the sense that my achieved scholarship is significantly incomplete and that my work has detoured into realms of practice that are tangential to it. I am far from ready to rest on my laurels, such as they might be, I feel that my potential for excellence is most significant in my potential for productive scholarship, and it is this potential that I feel have so far most clearly failed to develop. This scholarly effort will be my priority in my future work, be it as active professor or as independent scholar. I plan a third period of scholarly work through which I will address three significant concerns that are present but unrealized in what I have accomplished so far.

- I want to study how ideas about complexity, emergence, and self-organizing systems have developed

recently within diverse scientific specialties, exploring how these ideas can provide a rigorous foundation for a student-centered pedagogy of self-formation.

- Understanding cities as the historic locus for self-organizing social action, I want to develop the concept of "the city as educator," showing how digital information technologies are greatly strengthening the culture of cities and their potential effectiveness as locus for the fullest development of humane potentialities.
- I want to explore the concept of historical pedagogy, starting with eighteenth-century *Neuhumanismus*, following it up into twentieth-century pedagogical thought, and assessing its potential for strengthening the place of educational scholarship in the American research university.

These three themes are deeply rooted in scholarly work that I have essayed in the past, but I have not begun to realize them fully in anything that I have so far accomplished.

Self-organizing capacities and their potential educative power are central to the concept of study that has been the leading pedagogical principle throughout my work. By and large, I grounded my case for the importance of study in education on historical reflections as set out in "Towards a Place for Study in a World of Instruction." My sense of the untimeliness of this work, however, arose from a strengthening awareness that in late twentieth-century pedagogical discourse, historical groundings carried little weight in a professional ethos dominated by scientistic orthodoxies.[1] I was aware that much twentieth-century science supported the pedagogical position I wanted to develop, but that conventional belief and its derivative practices, favored the contrary position overwhelmingly. I sparred with the idea of contesting the meaning of science for education, but did not take the challenge on. Very early, I floated a proposal for an impossible dissertation that would address this issue. As a minor outcome, in my first major essay, published in *The American Scholar* in 1966, I wrote about one of the early investigators of the power of self-organization in biological phenomena, Jakob von Uexküll. Some years later, I proposed a major study, *Man and Judgment*, which I based it in part on current inquiries into biological emergence and self-organization, but I tabled the project. That was 1978 and in the ensuing quarter century, the spectrum of scientific inquiry has changed considerably. During the past sabbatical year, I have devoted most of my effort to planning a new course "Emergent Education: A Contemporary History," through which, as a long-term project, I intend to bring this line of inquiry to full fruition.

Throughout my prior work, the importance of cities as a locus of education has been tacitly assumed, becoming progressively more explicit. As someone born and raised in Manhattan, I took for granted the centrality of urban life. My early scholarship centered on the life and thought of José Ortega y Gasset, and he was a spokesperson for urban, European Spain, a federation of Spanish city-regions in a larger Europe, comprising a network of intensely urbanized domains. I began to concentrate effort explicitly on an idea of the city as educator in 1980 when I began work on a project, *Emilia, Or Going to City*. This book was going to comprise letters, composed over a five-year period, from a father to his daughter, as

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[1] I actually see this as a serious double bind, for the prestige of scientistic pedagogies in American educational thought derives, not from the unequivocal success of the relevant science, but from the historical accident that neo-Herbartian assumptions dominated the academic institutionalization of professional education. The neo-Herbartians held historical understanding to be irrelevant in determining pedagogical means, a task appropriate only for scientific psychology.

the daughter "went to city," rather than to college. For a number of reasons, I did not carry this project beyond some partial exploratory drafts, but the idea continues to fascinate me and I stand by the conviction that great cities are educative environments, both powerful and constructive. I think the digital technologies are both intensifying and universalizing the urbanization of life and within the ubiquitous urban space, they are offering people expansive opportunities for self-formation and self-definition. In due course, these developments will occasion the deep reconstruction of pedagogical principles and practices. I have begun exploring these possibilities in essays such as "Cities, Youth, and Technology," "Smart Cities: New York," and "Towards the Global City." If I continue in active service, I intend to offer my course, "The City as Educator," regularly, in order to stimulate practical and theoretic work on the city as educator. I envisage writing occasional essays, and then a major book on the topic, as a capstone to the scholarship that I am planning.

In the mid 1980s, when I started concentrating on the historical effects of digital technologies on education and culture, I left unfinished a significant line of work devoted to "historical pedagogy," in particular, a short book on *Rousseau and American Educational Scholarship* and a substantial essay on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* as work about education. Historical pedagogy was in part an early 19th-century German idea that education is an historical, cultural undertaking and consequently knowledge about how best to conduct education should derive from the reflective, historical interpretation of cultural experience. I planned to argue that present-day educational scholars should adopt such a vision of the proper study of education. I desisted, not because I thought this position was wrong, but because it was futile given the public parsimony that has been wasting educational initiatives away. Instead, I saw digital technologies as, potentially, an unprecedented transformative force, which might reawaken public confidence that there are large-scale civic interests in common to all and potentially effective means to pursue them. Despite intimations of it, this reawakening is not happening. Long-term, I am loathe to give up hope for it, despite the contrary atavisms of the political present, but a part of aging entails recognizing that the long-term definitively stretches beyond one's personal life-expectancy, however optimistically one construes it. Under present circumstances, I can be most useful by laying out the case for historical pedagogy and a vision of educational scholarship based upon it within a cultural context that is heavily reliant on digital information technologies. Thus, I want to complete and extend my work on historical pedagogy, charting paths that educational scholarship has not taken – yet. If I have a contribution to make to high scholarship within my original specialization in the history of education thought, this will be it.

While it is always possible and perhaps desirable to develop further interests, I expect scholarly work in the three areas outlined above to suffice to keep me very busy for the remainder of my productive career. I want to write two books with potentially broad audiences – *Emergent Education* and *The City as Educator*, and health permitting I want to finish the first within the next five to seven years and the second within the subsequent five to seven years. In addition, I expect to publish at least one short book and various essays, long and short, on the topic of historical pedagogy. These will address a narrower academic audience, coming as esoteric subtext to the two, more exoteric books. Throughout this coming period of my career, I plan to make my scholarly endeavors my controlling priority, structuring my commitment of time and energy to ensure that my research and writing receives my fullest feasible effort.

Teaching

During my sabbatical, I have planned a new course repertoire that relates closely to my plans for

scholarly work indicated above. I will be offering a 4000-level course on "Emergent Education: A Contemporary History" and another on "The City as Educator." In addition, I will give a year-long colloquium on social and cultural theory as it bears on communication and education and a year-long doctoral seminar on historical pedagogy, concentrating on major works by major thinkers. I am a bit anxious whether students will find these courses, although I am reasonably confident they will. My primary worry with respect to teaching has to do with doctoral advisement and my role with respect to program development and, a bit more generally, for the predominant rationale for the study of education at Teachers College.

In American higher education, the professional preparation of educators has achieved secure institutionalization, but the academic study of education as a field of inquiry, independent of professional preparation, has not. This situation causes me acute distress. I am interested in reflecting on the phenomena of education, whether or not professional educators deem those reflections helpful. Thus I am far more interested in how students, in both formal and informal settings, acquire their culture under diverse historical settings, serving as effective causal agents of their own education. I want to understand the historical process of education, and the problem is not that one cannot pursue such understanding at Teachers College, but that it is difficult to concentrate on it. Most of our programs offer professional credentials of one sort or another and most of our students expect instruction that will support their professional aspirations. I am situated in a large program, with lots of doctoral candidates who see the doctorate as a professional degree. I can teach as I see fit, and generally do, but it is difficult to expect students, whose intellectual purposes differ from my own, to share my priorities. Students seek my guidance, nevertheless, naturally on matters they consider important. I find that I can be helpful about these things, even though they are not my real interests, and I have felt it my responsibility to do so. Since Teachers College is egregiously dependent on tuition, there are pressures to admit the marginally prepared, along with the potential stars. And since Teachers College has woefully little student support to offer, competing institutions often lure the potential star students more successfully than we can, leaving us with a large proportion of marginal students, who need lots of help, generally about things that are tangential to my prime concerns. Thus I find myself sponsoring too many dissertations that I believe are both mediocre and uninteresting. This situation leaves me prone to feeling both put upon and ineffective in my teaching, particularly in my recent doctoral advising. I shall change the situation or retire.

I personally feel the plight that I have just described, but it is not simply a personal difficulty. It is not even one confined to Teachers College. It is symptomatic of the field of education throughout the American university. Education as a field produces an astounding number of doctorates annually and it has done so through most of the twentieth century. In American higher education, the academic study of education never clearly differentiated from the professional preparation of educational practitioners, and the doctorate has served as the degree of choice for both groups. The number of doctorates awarded in education is roughly the same as the number of doctorates in economics combined with the number of MBA degrees in business, or the number of doctorates in political science combined with the number of LLB degrees awarded by law schools annually. In education, the problem is that the number of candidates for advanced degrees is a function of the demand for practitioners with advanced training, the educational experience they receive is modeled on academic doctoral instruction, culminating in a dissertation designed to advance the state of knowledge in the field. The distinction between the Ed.D. and the Ph.D. might have served to distinguish between the two forms of advanced preparation in

education, but it never clearly did so and the distinction is becoming more and more blurred. In short, it is unrealistic to expect something as insubstantial as a distinction between types of doctorates to separate the two forms of advanced study in education.

Elsewhere in the university, the distinction between the academic study of major human concerns and advanced professional preparation for practitioners within those concerns rests in part on the use of distinctive degrees. But more importantly, that distinction receives essential reinforcement through a clear expression of the difference in the structural organization of the university itself. Departments of economics and schools of business are almost always organizationally distinct. In similar ways, departments of biology are organizationally different from medical schools, as are departments of politics from both law schools and schools of public affairs, or departments of sociology from schools of social work, of religion from theology seminaries, and even departments of literature, music, and art history differ organizationally from schools of the arts and of architecture. The reasons for these organizational differences are fundamental. Structures adapted well to advancing academic scholarship differ from those suited to providing excellent professional preparation. They diverge in their controlling norms of excellence, in the forms of intellectual support required by faculty and students, and in the means by which institutions can generate and allocate the material resources needed by each effort.

American academic organization recognizes the reality of these differences across most sectors of human activity, except for that of education. American higher education has not yet effectively institutionalized the study of education. Poorly organized, the field of education conflates the trappings of academic scholarship with the process of professional preparation and consequently sustains neither excellence in scholarship nor high levels of licensed competence well. The forms of advanced scholarship receive undue emphasis in the processes of professional preparation, with the result that standards weaken in the areas where scholarship should prevail and irrelevant norms exert excessive influence in efforts to develop practical expertise.

Locally, the fate of the Department of Philosophy and the Social Sciences during TC's recent reorganization clearly exemplified the organizational weaknesses of education. Prior to reorganization, the College complemented its predominant professional school ethos with something like an effective academic department of education, organized according to the norms of a graduate school of arts and sciences. Faculty members in other units, however, perceived Philosophy and the Social Sciences to be aloof, unproductive, and privileged. The administration asserted that TC could not afford to emulate a graduate school of arts and sciences, as perhaps indeed it cannot, and did away with Philosophy and the Social Sciences, general consultation having made clear that the rest of the faculty deeply resented its apparent privileges. The resultant situation, with the remnants of that department spread throughout the College, may slightly improve TC's apparent cost-efficiency, but it is a poor organization for the support of disinterested scholarship in education and it contributes to the over-academicization of many professional areas. Specifically, the dispersal makes it more difficult to nurture a student ethos of high scholarship and to concentrate the financial assistance needed to recruit and support an adequate cohort of well-prepared graduate students. Moreover, it diffuses a significant number of faculty members who are committed to the norms of academic scholarship into programs preparing professional practitioners, further academicizing the process precisely at a time when the world of practice is calling for leaders endowed with less academic knowledge and more practical skills.

Service

Let me stress, as a tenured faculty member, the review I seek, unlike the reviews that come earlier in one's career, would be advisory to a decision I have to make, not a decision that the College can make.