

PROFESSING THE LIBERAL ARTS

ONE OF THE PREVAILING THEMES of this volume is the presumed tension between the *liberal* and the *pragmatic*. These strains are often associated with a distrust of “the vocational” or “the professional” among liberal arts faculty and administrators, who view these orientations as slippery slopes down which unsuspecting educators might slide into a horrific purgatory. Liberal learning, we are warned, is pursued for its own sake, and cannot be subordinated to the aims of application or vocation. I come to offer a shocking alternative view. I wish to argue that the problem with the liberal arts is not that they are endangered by the corruption of professionalism. Indeed, their problem is that they are not professional enough. If we are to preserve and sustain liberal education, we must make it more professional; we must learn to *profess the liberal arts*.

I offer this heresy as a peculiar hybrid of two ostensibly incompatible traditions. I am a graduate of the College of the University of Chicago, which ought to identify me as a devotee of the purest form of liberal education, the Hutchins orientation toward the great books, the traditional canon itself. And I view my education in the Hutchins College as the most precious gift I have ever received. However, I am also a student of Joseph Schwab, the Chicago biologist and philosopher who was one of John Dewey’s strongest advocates and spokespersons in higher education, even though he was also seen as a protégé of Hutchins. Many educators whom I respect deeply, such as Tom Ehrlich, point out that the Hutchins and Dewey views of liberal education are inherently incompatible. Yet I would claim, without embarrassment, that I define myself as a legitimate offspring of that liaison between Dewey and Hutchins and I feel unusually blessed to be progeny of that unlikely coupling.

I am reminded of David Hume’s clever characterization of abstract ideas such as “cause” or “external existence,” which he claimed were illegitimate

logical constructs because they lacked direct empirical sources. How was it possible that the human knower could be so confident that he could use concepts such as “cause” even though they were not adequately connected to experience? Hume dubbed such concepts “bastards of imagination impregnated by experience.” These abstract ideas were the illegitimate offspring of a liaison between imagination and experience, but could claim no legitimate epistemological standing. In that spirit, I come to you as a bastard of Deweyan progressivism impregnated by the Hutchins College. I am the illegitimate issue of an illicit liaison between two incompatible philosophies. As with most other bastards, I not only insist that I can live my life without being crippled by an ancestry, I claim that this merger of perspectives offers an unusually fruitful perspective.

I am also, I must confess, someone who does not spend most of his time engaged with the liberal education of undergraduates. I’ve actually spent most of my career of more than 30 years actively engaged in the education of two distinct groups of professionals called school teachers and physicians. I have designed new programs for the education of these professionals. I have taught in these programs. I have conducted empirical research on the processes and outcomes of such professional education. I have attempted to develop theories of learning and of action that explain how such professionals learn and how they organize and use their knowledge and skill. I am, in both senses of that ambiguous phrase, a “professional educator.” Education is my profession and the education of professionals is my area of inquiry.

I come to challenge you, therefore, with these questions. What if all those who fear the corruption of liberal education by professionalism and vocationalization have got it wrong? What if the problem of liberal education is that it isn’t professional or vocational enough? If, indeed, we were to professionalize liberal education, might we not only give it an end, a purpose in practice and in application and in human service, and instead of thereby diluting and corrupting it, might we even make it more liberal? I hope you will find that a provocative conjecture.

The Challenges of Professional Learning

Features of a Profession

I am prepared to argue that the idea of a “profession” describes a special and unique set of circumstances for deep understanding, complex practice, ethical conduct, and higher-order learning, circumstances that define the complexity of the enterprise and explain the difficulties of prescribing

both policies and curriculum in this area. What do we mean by a *profession* and what is so hard about preparing people for professions? Let us begin with a recent definition:

As an ideology, professionalism had both a technical and a moral aspect. Technically, it promised competent performance of skilled work involving the application of broad and complex knowledge, the acquisition of which required formal academic study. Morally, it promised to be guided by an appreciation of the important social ends it served. In demanding high levels of self-governance, professionals claimed not only that others were not technically *equipped* to judge them, but that they also could not be *trusted* to judge them. The idea was expressed in classic form by R. H. Tawney: “[Professionals] may, as in the case of the successful doctor, grow rich; but the meaning of their profession, both for themselves and for the public, is not that they make money, but that they make health or safety or knowledge or good government or good law. . . . [Professions uphold] as the criterion of success the end for which the profession, whatever it may be, is carried on, and [subordinate] the inclination, appetites, and ambition of individuals to the rules of an organization which has as its object to promote performance of function.” These functions for Tawney and for many other advocates of the professions, were activities that embodied and expressed the idea of larger social purposes.¹

Steven Brint’s characterization of professions is consistent with many others. From this account, I will claim that there are, at the very least, six characteristics of professional learning that set the terms for the challenge of preparing people to “profess.” These characteristics are 1) service, 2) understanding, 3) practice, 4) judgment, 5) learning, and 6) community.

- First, the goal of a profession is *service*; the pursuit of important social ends. Professionals are those who are educated to serve others using bodies of knowledge and skill not readily available to the man or woman in the street. This means that, fundamentally, a mature professional or someone learning a profession must develop *moral understanding* to aim and guide their practice. The ultimate rationale for their work is, in Tawney’s words, “that they make health or safety or knowledge or good government or good law.” They must develop both technical and moral understanding.
- Second, a profession is a practice rooted in bodies of knowledge that are created, tested, elaborated, refuted, transformed, and reconstituted in colleges, universities, laboratories, libraries, and museums. To call something a profession is to claim that it has a

knowledge base in the academy broadly construed. It has research and *theories*. Therefore, professions change not only because rules of practice change, or circumstances change, or policies change, but because the process of knowledge growth, criticism, and development in the academy leads to the achievement of new understandings, new perspectives, or new ways of interpreting the world.

- Third, although a significant portion of the knowledge base of a profession is generated by scholars in the academy, it is not professional knowledge unless and until it is enacted in the practice of “the field.” The field of *practice* is the place where professions do their work, and claims for knowledge must pass the ultimate test of value in practice. Thus, the arenas for theory and practice in a profession are quite disparate, and this constitutes one of the defining problems for professional education. There is always a wide and troublesome gap between theory and practice.
- Fourth, professions are nevertheless not simply conduits for taking knowledge from the academy and applying it to the field. If that were all that were necessary, professions would not be as complex, interesting, and respected as they are. What intervenes between knowledge and application is the process of *judgment*. The challenge of understanding the complexities of judgment defines another of the essential puzzles of professional education. Human judgment bridges the universal terms of theory and the gritty particularities of situated practice. And human judgment always incorporates both technical and moral elements.
- Fifth, up to this point my analysis has implied that all of the movement of knowledge is, as it were, from left to right, from the academy to the field. But the most formidable challenge for anyone in a profession is *learning from experience*. While an academic knowledge base is necessary for professional work, it is far from sufficient. Therefore, members of professions have to develop the capacity to learn not only from the academy but, even more importantly, from the experience and contemplation of their own practice. This is true not only for individual professionals, but equally for the entire community of practice. Lessons of practice must have a way of getting back to inform and to render problematic knowledge development in the academy itself.
- Sixth and finally, professions are inherently public and communal. We speak of someone not only *being a professional*, but also being *a member of a profession*. Professional knowledge is somehow

held by a community of professionals who not only know collectively more than any individual member of the community ("distributed expertise" is a distinctive feature of a professional community, even though each member is thought to possess a substantial common core of skill and knowledge), but also have certain public responsibilities and accountabilities with respect to individual practice. Thus, professionals operate within their particular communities under privileges granted by virtue of their recognition by the broader society. Such autonomy and privilege is granted when the profession is viewed as holding specialized knowledge whose warrant only its own members can evaluate, and when its members are trusted to take responsibility for such evaluation.

Elaborating on the Principles: Educating for Profession

What can we say about the challenges of professional education in light of these six principles?

Profession as Service

As Brint observed, the starting point for professional preparation is that the aims of professionalism involve social purposes and responsibilities that are grounded both technically and morally. The core meaning of a profession is the organized practice of complex knowledge and skills in the service of others. The professional educator's challenge is to help future professors develop and shape a robust moral vision that will guide their practice and provide a prism of justice and virtue through which to reflect on their actions.

Theory for Practice

Second, the notion that formal professional knowledge is rooted in academic knowledge bases creates the essential pedagogical problem of professional education. That is, the recurrent challenge of all professional learning is the unavoidable gap between theory and practice. There are at least two versions of the problem. Theory achieves its power through simplification and narrowing of the field of study. In that sense, theories deal with the world in general and, for the most part, making rough places smooth and messy settings neat. A second characteristic of theories is that they generally operate within identifiable disciplines while practical prob-

lems cross disciplinary boundaries with the abandon of rum-runners and meandering streams. Theories are extraordinarily powerful, which is why they are the treasure of the academy and valued by the professions; they are also frequently so remote from the particular conditions of professional practice that the novice professional-in-training rarely appreciates their contributions.

Any reader who has been educated for one of the professions, say in the two with which I am most familiar, medical education or teacher preparation, will immediately recognize the problem. My teacher, Joseph Schwab, devoted most of the last 20 years of his life and career to the problems of practical knowledge and its relations to theory. One need only try to connect the Krebs cycle with the intricacies of a particular clinical diagnosis, or the Loop of Henley with some specific aspect of kidney failure, to appreciate the problem. As a teacher educator, I have tried to help students see how one traverses the gap between Piaget's developmental theory and what to teach on Monday morning, or between Vygotsky's zones of proximal development and the pedagogical potential of group work. We who have tried to educate future professionals understand the challenge that is created when your starting point for a learned profession is bodies of academic knowledge. We prepare professionals in universities because we make the strong claim that these are *learned* professions and that academic knowledge is absolutely essential to their performance.

Now, this may be a false claim. It may well be that academic knowledge is essential only as an *entitlement* to practice and is not functionally necessary for practice. My point is that the claim of rootedness in a theoretical, empirical, and/or normative knowledge base is central to all of the professions. This is a crucial issue for the liberal arts, both conceptually and fiscally. The uniquely American view that a liberal education of some sort is a prerequisite for the study of medicine, law, teaching (foundations), and the like sets an interesting problem for the liberal arts at two levels: defining the foundation for understanding and practicing a profession on the one hand, and stipulating the liberal arts and sciences *per se* whose grasp would identify an individual as "educated" or "learned" and therefore entitled to pursue a learned profession. Only the second of these concerns is uniquely American, because the United States is nearly unique in treating most professions as graduate rather than undergraduate domains.

Third, while the theoretical is the foundation, practice is the end to which all the knowledge is directed. Student teaching, medical residencies, architects' apprenticeships, student nursing, all are examples of carefully designed pedagogies to afford eased entry into practice accompanied by

intensive supervision. This is why in all professional preparation we find some conception of a supervised clinical experience. In medicine it seems to go on forever. One of the things that makes law so interesting is that legal educators have somehow managed to avoid the responsibility for introducing a serious clinical component into legal education, expecting the employing law firm to assume that burden.

The apprenticeship, the practice, the application that goes on in the field is not only a nearly universal element of professional learning, but typically, once a professional reaches the field of practice, he or she looks back on the theoretical preparation and begins to devalue it. There are always interesting tensions between the clinical and the theoretical.²

One of the sources of those tensions is that theoretical preparation, in spite of the conservatism of the academy, tends to be more radical and reform-oriented than is practice itself. Indeed, academicians often see themselves as the critical conscience of professional practice, taking upon themselves the responsibility for criticizing current practice and developing a vision for the future. And it is, again, almost universally the case in professional preparation that the students arrive at their clinical experiences only to hear the nursing supervisor, or the veteran teacher in the fifth grade where they're student teaching, or the chief of clinical services in the hospital admonish them to forget all the b.s. they were taught at the university because now they will learn the way it is really done. So, interestingly, the academy is the source of radical ideas. The field is where you encounter the bungee cord that pulls things back to the conservation of habits of practice. This kind of tension is, as I say, generally characteristic of professional education.

The Role of Judgment

Another complication of professional learning is that the academy, to the extent that it addresses problems of practice at all, presents them as *prototypes*—simplified and schematized theoretical representations of the much messier and variable particularities of everyday life. When student-professionals move out to the fields of practice, they find inevitably that nothing quite fits the prototypes. The responsibility of the developing professional is not simply to apply what he or she has learned to practice, but to transform, to adapt, to merge and synthesize, to criticize and to invent in order to move from the theoretical knowledge of the academy to the kind of practical clinical knowledge needed to engage in the professional work. One of the reasons judgment is such an essential component of clinical work is that theoretical knowledge is generally knowledge of what is

true universally. It is true in general and for the most part. It is knowledge of regularities and of patterns. It is an invaluable simplification of a world whose many variations would be far too burdensome to store in memory with all their detail and individuality. Yet the world of practice is beset by just those particularities, born of the workings of chance. To put it in Aristotelian terms, theories are about *essence*, practice is about *accident*, and the only way to get from there to here is via the exercise of *judgment*.

Experience

As Dewey observed in his classic essay on the influence of Darwinism on philosophy, chance, error, and accidents present both the sciences and the fields of practice with their most fascinating puzzles.³ The great challenge for professional learning is that *experience* occurs where design and intention collide with chance. Without the violation of expectations, it is impossible to learn from experience. Learning from experience, therefore, requires both the systematic prototype-centered, theoretical knowledge characteristic of the academy and the more fluid, reactive, prudential reasoning characteristic of practice. The professional must learn how to cope with those unpredictable matters, and how to reflect on his or her own actions. Professionals incorporate the consequences of those actions into their own growing knowledge base, which ultimately includes unique combinations of theoretical and moral principles, practical maxims, and a growing collection of narratives of experience.

In comparing John Dewey and George Herbert Mead with Jane Addams, all of whom were good friends in Chicago in the first five years of this century, Ellen Lagemann observed that for Dewey and Mead, the tools of their trade were the scientific hypothesis and the investigation; for Jane Addams it was the anecdote and the biography. In professional practice, the hypothesis rapidly gives way to the narrative. Jane Addams's Hull House was the setting in which the academic perspectives of Dewey and Mead were brought into collaborative contact with the truly professional practice embodied by Addams and the settlement movement.⁴ The ideals of service clearly dominated the thinking of those who were inventing the professions of social work and community development, but the desire to ground those practices in the academic disciplines of social philosophy, sociology, and a professional school of social service administration were always a serious challenge.⁵

In Jerome Bruner's terms, in these situations the paradigmatic way of knowing shares space with the narrative. To foreshadow the concluding section of this essay, when we seek a pedagogy that can reside between

the universal principles of theory and the narratives of lived practice, we invent something called a *case method* that employs cases as ways of capturing experience for subsequent analysis and review, and then creating a pedagogy of theoretically grounded experience. We render individual experiential learning into community property when we transform those lessons from personal experience into a literature of shared narratives. Connections between theoretical principles and case narratives are established when we not only ask, "what's the case?" but more critically, "what is this a case of?" In developing those connections between the universal and the particular, between the universal and the accidental, we forge professional knowledge. Such knowledge cannot be developed and sustained adequately by individuals experiencing and reflecting in isolation.

Community

The sixth and final term is the notion of a community of practice. Although individual professionals carry the responsibility for practice, the assumption is that they are members of a community that defines and regulates the standards for that practice and that, as a community, knows more than does any individual practitioner. The public can turn to the professional community when questions of the quality of practice are at stake. From the perspective of professional pedagogy, the community of practice plays a critical role. The academic discipline serves the academy as a learning community whose invisible colleges ensure that knowledge gained is vetted for its warrant through peer review and then distributed among members of the community through journals and other forms of scholarly communication. The community of practice for a profession plays a similar role with regard to learning from experience, accumulating and critiquing the lessons gained and subsequently codified, and, in general, helping practitioners overcome the limitations of individual practice and individual experience. Without a community of practice, individual professionals would be trapped in a solipsistic universe in which only their own experiences were potentially educative. When the work of communities of practice is created and fostered, individual experience becomes communal, distributed expertise can be shared, and standards of practice can evolve.⁶

Professing and Liberal Learning

I began by asking what liberal learning would look like if we treated it as a profession. If we said, that is, that liberal learning has as its end professional practice, doing something of service to the community in a manner

that is both technically defensible and morally desirable. If we, therefore, saw the theory/practice problem as an inherent problem, as an inherent challenge in all liberal learning. If we recognized that taking theory and moving it into practice may not only be the challenge for theoretical understanding, but also the crucible in which merely theoretical understanding becomes meaningful, memorable, and internalizable. Indeed, what if we argued that theoretical understanding is inherently incomplete, even unrequited, until it is "practiced"? To address those questions I will begin by asking what are the major impediments in liberal learning now? That is, what challenges do liberal educators currently confront that define some of the perennial problems of that endeavor?

The Challenges of Liberal Learning

What are the challenges of liberal learning? I will rather dogmatically suggest that liberal learning, as all learning for understanding (that endangered species of cognition), confronts three central challenges: the loss of learning, or *amnesia*; the illusion of learning, or *illusory understanding*; and the uselessness of learning, or *inert ideas*. These states can be exemplified by three student exclamations: "I forgot it," "I thought I understood it," and "I understand it but I can't use it." If we were ever to conduct proper evaluations of the long-term benefits of liberal education, I suspect we would encounter all three of these with painful frequency.

The first challenge of liberal learning is the problem of *amnesia*. It is a problem exemplified by the fact that, after having participated in a wide variety of courses and programs in colleges and universities, it is very sobering to discover that students rapidly forget much of what we have taught them or that they have ostensibly learned. Let me suggest a depressing exercise: conduct an exit interview with students at the end of their senior year (or a couple of years beyond) in which you sit them down with the transcript of the four years they have spent with you in the institution and say: "Treat the transcript as a kind of itinerary that you have followed for the last four or five years. Why don't you simply go course by course and just tell me what you remember doing and learning." This is not a test of deep understanding, but if students don't even remember the experience, it's quite hard for them to learn from it. This is one of the reasons that nearly every one of the professions, with the stunning exception of teaching, spends an incredible amount of time and energy teaching future professionals to develop habits of documentation and recording their practice. In medicine, in law, in nursing, in social work, in architecture, there are incredible archives of practice because amnesia is the great enemy of learning from experience. Yet in liberal learning, one

of the ubiquitous problems we face is the fragility of what is learned. It's like dry ice. It just evaporates at room temperature and is gone. Students seldom remember much of what they've read or heard beyond their last high-stakes exam on the material. The first problem, therefore, is how do we address the problem of amnesia?

A second enemy of liberal learning is *illusory understanding*. It's far more dangerous and insidious than amnesia, because it is the kind of understanding where you think you do remember and understand, but you don't. A great problem of liberal learning is the confidence with which our graduates imagine that they understand many things with which they have only superficial acquaintance and glib verbal familiarity. They thus can throw around phrases like "supply and demand" or "survival of the fittest" with marvelous agility, albeit without substantial comprehension. There is a wonderful video that begins with graduating students at a Harvard commencement being asked two questions by faculty: Why do we have seasons and what accounts for the phases of the moon? In every case the respondent replied with great confidence. With little hesitation, and very few exceptions, respondents offered a similar theory of the seasons. They explained that we had summer when the elliptical orbit of the earth brought it closer to the sun, and winter when we were further away. When asked to explain the phases of the moon, similarly mistaken accounts were put forward. Here were well-educated students, many of whom had taken courses in the sciences, including astronomy and astrophysics, who were confidently expounding quite misconceived theories of how the solar system functioned. The illusion of understanding is as frequently encountered as it is infrequently detected by educators. The study and documentation of these kinds of misconceptions before and after formal education has become one of the most fascinating aspects of research in science and mathematics learning.

Some of the most interesting work in the history of philosophy deals with the philosophers' concern with illusory understanding. Nearly every one of the Socratic dialogues is an example. The Socratic dialogue is a form of pedagogy designed to confront the knower with what he was sure he knew but indeed doesn't understand. Socratic wisdom is said, therefore, to begin with the unveiling of Socratic ignorance. The whole metaphor of the cave in Plato's *Republic* is a metaphor about illusory understanding. And it is no accident that the way Socrates attempts to diagnose and treat illusory understanding is through an active, interactive process of dialogue in a social setting. Similarly, one of Francis Bacon's most memorable essays is about "the idols of the mind," all the ways in which we, as human intelligences, come to believe we know things that, in fact, we just don't understand.

Alfred North Whitehead warned us that "above all we must beware" of "*inert ideas*," thus punning on Plato's reverence for the innate variety. Such ideas, he said, "are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations." Ideas escape inertness by being used, tested, or thrown into fresh combinations. Application is not only the ultimate test, it is the crucible within which ideas come alive and grow. Whitehead observes, "Pedants sneer at an education which is useful. But if education is not useful, what is it? Is it a talent, to be hidden away in a napkin?"⁷

Principles of Professional Learning

If the three horsemen of the liberal learning apocalypse are amnesia, illusion, and inertness, what kinds of pedagogical strategies can we invoke to fend them off? The salvation of understanding is in our grasp. *The key to preserving the liberal arts is to profess the liberal arts.*

The principles through which we overcome amnesia, illusory understanding, and inertness are the same as those that enumerate the conditions of profession: activity, reflection, collaboration, passion, and community. These principles not only derive from current research in cognitive science and social learning, they also map very nicely onto the wisdom of practice in professional education. At the risk that an overly dogmatic rhetoric may give the lie to the very points I am making, I shall briefly explain these principles.

The first is *activity*. Students who are learning in professional settings are remarkably active most of the time in that they are engaged in clinical or practical work. They are designing, diagnosing, and arguing. They are writing; they are investigating; they are in the library or at the computer getting information. They are talking to one another, sharing information, and challenging one another's ideas. At every opportunity, the level of activity of the students is higher than in the average college classroom. The outcome should not surprise anyone. We all know from our practice as well as from theory that active learning results in more enduring learning than does passive learning. It is one of the key principles of all human learning, equally relevant for young adults as for children.

As a first principle, authentic and enduring learning occurs when the learner is an *active* agent in the process. Student learning becomes more active through experimentation and inquiry, as well as through writing, dialogue, and questioning. Thus, the college settings in which the students work must provide them with the opportunities and support for becoming active agents in the process of their own learning.

The second thing we know about effective learners is that they are not merely active, because activity alone is insufficient for learning. As Dewey observed many years ago, we do not learn by doing; we learn by thinking about what we are doing. Successful students spend considerable time, as Bruner calls it, “going meta,” that is, thinking about what they are doing and why. Their teachers give them plenty of opportunities to talk about how they are learning, why they are learning in these ways, why they are getting things wrong when they get them wrong and right when they get them right. A very high level of carefully guided *reflection* is blended with activity.

Activity and reflection are hard work. If you are a typical learner, you often find yourself working alone, intending to read an article or a book. You sit down after dinner with a good reading light on, with good music playing softly in the background, and with no distractions in the room. Ten minutes later, you find yourself in the middle of a chapter with absolutely no recollection of what you have read up to that point. It can be very hard for anyone to engage in active and reflective learning alone. For college students, it is even harder.

One of the most important inventions of Ann Brown (with Annemarie Palinscar) was called “reciprocal teaching”—a process of enhancing young students’ reading comprehension as they work with one another, scaffolding each others’ learning; helping each other focus, attend, and question, actively, critically, and reflectively as they jointly read complicated text.⁸ Active, reflective learning thus proceeds best in the presence of a third principle, which is *collaboration*.

College students can work together in ways that scaffold and support each other’s learning, and in ways that supplement each other’s knowledge. Collaboration is a *marriage of insufficiencies*, not exclusively “cooperation” in a particular form of social interaction. There are difficult intellectual and professional challenges that are nearly impossible to accomplish alone, but are readily addressed in the company of others.

Sandy Astin discusses the educative functions of collaboration—the educational advantages enjoyed through the juxtaposition and confrontation of perspectives for people to rethink, to reflect on what they thought they already knew, and through collaborative exchange *eventually to deepen their understanding of an idea*. So when we say that reflection is important, that collaboration is important, these aren’t just pieties. These are essential elements of a pedagogical theory, a theory of learning and teaching that explains why it is that even if your goal is liberal learning, per se, and if what you want is people to learn ideas and concepts and principles that will be robust, that will be deep, that will be not merely inert ideas, shadows on the wall of the cave—the way you temper those

ideas is through reflection and through interaction and collaboration. Otherwise it may well be just the illusion of understanding. These are some of the things we’re learning about liberal learning.

This kind of learning is not exclusively cognitive or intellectual. Indeed, there is a significant emotional and affective component that inheres in such work. Authentic and enduring learning occurs when students share a *passion* for the material, are emotionally committed to the ideas, processes, and activities, and see the work as connected to present and future goals. Although the language of liberal learning is heavily intellectual, the importance of emotion, enthusiasm, and passion is central to these efforts, for both students and for their teachers. And there is a special quality to those affective responses that develop within individuals who have become interdependent members of well-functioning, cohesive groups. Simply observe the spirit that develops among the members of an athletic team, or the cast of a play, or residents of a cabin at camp, and you can begin to discern the special emotional qualities associated with working collaboratives that function as learning communities.

In that same vein, authentic and enduring learning works best when the processes of activity, reflection, emotion, and collaboration are supported, legitimated, and nurtured within a *community* or *culture* that values such experiences and creates many opportunities for them to occur and to be accomplished with success and pleasure. Such communities create “participant structures” that reduce the labor intensity of the activities needed to engage in the most daunting practices that lead to teaching and learning. Put another way, this kind of learning can rarely succeed one course at a time. The entire institution must be oriented toward these principles, and the principles must be consistently and regularly employed throughout each course and experience in a program. One of the “secrets” of the remarkable impact of the Hutchins College was probably the persistent and all-encompassing effect—course after course—of critical dialogue within small seminars as *the* pedagogical practice of the college.

Consistent with the centrality of teaching and learning, professional education programs that are characterized by activity, reflection, and collaboration in learning communities are inherently uncertain, complex, and demanding places. Both learning and teaching in such settings entails high levels of risk and unpredictability for the participants. Students and faculty both require a school and a community that support and reward those levels of risk taking and invention characteristic of such approaches to learning for understanding and commitment.

If we take these principles seriously as instruments for overcoming the major challenges to liberal learning, then, with Whitehead, I would assert that the kind of pedagogy that we associate with, say, service learning, is

not simply a cocurricular extravagance. It may actually be central to the kind of pedagogy that would make a liberal education more professional, in the case of service learning, a pedagogy that would give the liberal arts a clinical component or the equivalent of an internship experience. Moreover, it may well be one of the ways in which we overcome the triple pathologies of amnesia, illusory understanding, and inert ideas. How might that sort of thing go on?

A Pedagogy for Professing

Cases as Conduits Between Theory and Practice

I shall now discuss a pedagogy of cases as an example of the kind of teaching and learning that begins to address the central problems of academic learning, in general, and professional learning, in particular. I am *not* arguing that all liberal and professional learning should immediately become case based!

For me, what is so alluring about a case is that it resides in that never-never land between theory and practice, between idea and experience, between the normative ideal and achievable real. One of the interesting things about cases is that they capture pieces of experience that initially existed solely within the life of a single individual and transform that solitary experience into text. You can do all kinds of things when you've rendered something into a text that can be shared by members of a group, all of whom are trying to make sense of the text. The function of the case as a means for preserving and communicating experience is clear given the persistent problems of amnesia.⁹

The great challenge for professionals who wish to learn from experience is the difficulty of holding experiences in memory in forms that can become the objects of disciplined analysis and reflection. Consider the possibility that cases are ways of parsing experience so that practitioners can examine and learn from it. Professionals are typically confronted with a seamless continuum of experience from which they can think about individual episodes or readings as cases, but rarely coordinate the different dimensions into meaningful experiential chunks. Case methods thus become strategies for helping professionals to "chunk" their experience into units that can become the focus for reflective practice. They therefore can become the basis for individual professional learning as well as a forum within which communities of professionals, both local and extended, as members of visible and invisible colleges, can store, exchange, and organize their experiences. How is case learning related to the principles we reviewed above? I will describe a situation—not infrequent in professional

education—where the learners not only study and discuss cases written by others, but are actively participating in some sort of field experience around which they also write cases that document and analyze their own practice.

First, whether as case analyst or as case writer, the case learner becomes an active agent in his or her own understanding. When a student is wrestling with a case, whether as an occasion for analysis or a stimulus to reflect on his or her own experience as a prelude to writing, active agency is engaged. Second, cases are inherently reflective. They begin with an act of cognition, of turning around one's own lived experiences and examining them to find events and episodes worthy of transformation into telling cases. Even when the goal of case learning is not case writing, the discussion of cases eventually stimulates reflection on one's own experiences and reactions. Third, case methods nearly always emphasize the primacy of group discussion, deliberation, and debate. The thought process of cases is dialogic, as members of a group explore different perspectives, the available elective actions, or the import of the consequences. In case-based teaching, the interaction of activity, reflection, and collaboration is apparent. But what of community or culture?

Teaching and learning with cases is not an easy pedagogy. Active learners are much more outspoken and assertive than are passive learners. They are less predictable than their more passive counterparts, as they investigate their options, explore alternative interpretations, and challenge prevailing views. Because cases encourage connections between personal experiences and those vicariously experienced through narratives, the directions in which discussions might develop are rather difficult to anticipate, further complicating the pedagogy. Finally, the collaborative mode of instruction once again reduces the authority of the teacher and vests a growing proportion in the initiatives of students. Taken together, the enhancement of agency, reflection, and collaboration makes teaching more complex and unpredictable, albeit by reducing the authority of teachers and their ability to plan for contingencies. When uncertainty increases and power is distributed, the need for a supportive culture or community becomes paramount for teachers and students alike. A supportive culture helps manage the risk of contemplating one's failures and reduces the vulnerability created when one candidly discusses a path not taken. A supportive culture engages each member of the community in parallel risks. It celebrates the interdependence of learners who rely on one another for both insights and reassurance. A learning environment built on activity, reflection, and collaboration—which is an apt characterization of a well-functioning case-learning and case-writing community—proceeds smoothly only in the presence of a sustaining culture and community.

An Example

How might we envision a clinical component to a liberal education? Consider the possibility that there are forms of service learning that could perform the function. One of the most frequently encountered forms of service learning is tutoring. Although only one among many activities that are quite appropriately classified as legitimate service learning, I want to offer the hypothesis that the tutoring of young children, of adults, or of peers has some uniquely powerful characteristics with regard both to the objectives of offering service and the objectives of making liberal learning more meaningful, more memorable, and more useful, that is, less inert.

In this regard I share the values of the medieval university, which viewed the ability to teach something to someone else as the highest, most rigorous, and final test of whether a scholar understood his discipline or profession deeply. It based this view on Aristotle's observation in the *Metaphysics* that it is the distinctive sign of a man who knows deeply that he can teach what he knows to another. Aristotle recognized that, in order to teach something to someone else, you have to engage in an act of reflection on and transformation of what you know, and then connect those insights to the mind, experience, and motives of somebody else. Teaching is a dual act of intelligence and empathy. It entails both technical and moral reason. By the same token, in order to make your own learning more meaningful and memorable, you have to somehow interconnect the many things you know in an intrapersonal network of associations and implications. Each time you can make a connection, whether in your own mind or with the minds of others, amnesia becomes less likely. Each connection serves as both anchor and springboard. Every time you can figure out a new way to take what you know and apply it, connect it, teach it to someone else, you've not only rendered a service, but you have deepened and enriched your own understanding.

I propose that one of the ways in which we can combine the notion of service and the notion of liberal learning is with the expectation that every one of our undergraduates who is engaged in liberal learning undertake the service of teaching something they know to somebody else. They also undertake writing about the experience as a case, describing both teaching and student learning. For me this isn't hypothetical. It's the way I prepare people to teach. They write cases of their own practice. But they don't write them for me. They write them for the other members of their community, because our argument is that experience is too precious to be limited in its benefits solely to the person who experienced it. We need to move from individual experiential learning to a scholarly community of practice.

Then we form small case conferences where groups of students come together and exchange their cases. Case discussions are very interesting. When the discussions are well managed, participants can move the case discussion in two directions. One is exploring the facts of the case. Here, participants are pressed to describe the context more richly and in greater detail. They are urged to elaborate on their accounts of what actually happened, what was said and done, how all that occurred made them feel. They are pressed to dig deeply into the particularity of the context, because it is in the devilish details that practice dramatically differs from theory.

Yet, at the same time that the participants are being sucked into depths of the particular, the skillful pedagogue (and eventually the students themselves) begins to build in a second-order genre of question which is, "what is the case an exemplar of?" What are some other principles, concepts, or ideas that link these two or three cases together or that make you think about your case in relation to some more general principle?¹⁰

Sitting astride theory and practice, the case both enriches the grasp of practice and at the same time links back to the world of theory and the world of principle. I already do that kind of work with prospective and veteran teachers, and can readily imagine being able to do something similar with undergraduates. Such a strategy would be an example of professing the liberal arts, in having students teach others what they know, in providing service in conjunction with our academic learning which was then captured in written cases. Those cases would then become the curriculum for seminars whose purpose was to link the experiences of application back to the theoretical understanding.

There is a powerful strategic value in writing and analyzing cases that have been written by the members of a case forum, and in systematically exploring the tough question "what is this a case of?" When I write a case describing my own practice, I am the protagonist in the plot. This means that I'm writing not only *what* I did, but I am writing about *why* I did it. I am writing not just about my strategies and actions, but about my intentions, goals, and values. I write, in Martin Buber's terms, not only about "I" and "thou," but reflexively about "I." In that sense, by injecting the self as protagonist into the deliberations around one's academic learning, we bring the moral dimensions of liberal learning back to center stage. This is only proper; the ultimate rationale for treating liberal learning as a worthy end in itself is a moral argument, not an instrumental one.

If we were to professionalize in these terms, if we were actively to connect learning with service, with practice, with application, and were further to capture that practice in a kind of pedagogy that uses cases and case methods in ways analogous to some of the ways we use them for professional

preparation, we would not only achieve the moral ends of service, we would very likely do better at overcoming the challenges to liberal understanding. Through service, through application, through rendering their learning far more active, reflective, and collaborative, students would actually learn more liberally, understand what they have learned more deeply, and develop the capacity to use what they have learned in the service of their communities.

NOTES

1. Steven Brint, *In an Age of Experts: The Changing Role of Professionals in Politics and Public Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 7.
2. It is also quite interesting when the supervised clinical experience affords such opportunities in only part of a future role, as when the future university professor is heavily mentored in the scholarship of discovery but receives little or no supervised clinical experience in the scholarship of teaching.
3. John Dewey, "The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy," in Martin Gardner, editor, *Great Essays in Science* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1994).
4. Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, "The Plural Worlds of Educational Research," *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (1988), 184–214.
5. William Rainey Harper, first president of the University of Chicago, wrestled with questions of how the professional school could fit into the new research university. Chicago had schools of theology, pedagogy, and social service. Dewey wrote a short paper on the topic of how the university-based school of pedagogy must be distinct from the traditional normal school, most particularly in its relationships with academic disciplines and research.
6. At least that's the theory. Professions are not equally successful in creating communities of practice that effectively play this role. Thus, medicine and engineering probably do it rather well. Law does it well for court cases but badly for the daily practice of law. Teaching, both K–12 and postsecondary, has barely scratched the surface of transforming the experiences of pedagogy into scholarship and community property.
7. Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1929).
8. A. S. Palinscar and A. L. Brown, "Reciprocal Teaching of Comprehension—Fostering and Monitoring Activities," *Cognition and Instruction* 1 (1984), 117–75.

9. Sibling to amnesia is the challenge of *nostalgia*, in which forgetting is replaced by mis-remembering, usually in the service of reinforcing the mnemonist's interests, needs, or preferences. Nostalgia is not identical to illusory understanding, but it is likely to be a significant contributing condition.
10. Although I am using the example of tutoring, it should be apparent that this strategy for case-based liberal learning could be applied to a variety of other clinical experiences as well, both those that entail service and others that are more traditional—applied research and the like.