

CHAPTER 3

Urban Education



"An early American urban public school"
Museum of the City of New York, The Jacob A. Riis Collection.

The basic purpose of a liberal arts education is to liberate the human being to exercise his or her potential to the fullest.

Barbara M. White

The mind is a mansion, but most of the time we are content to live in the lobby.

William Michaels

Urban Education

This chapter addresses issues of urban education at the historical, sociological, personal, and global level. The selected readings offer widely divergent perspectives, questions, and possible answers to the central aims of public education. Our main focus in this chapter is to raise both old and new issues so that students can then explore them further on their own. These readings can help students question their own experiences and beliefs about education, and guide them to research and critically evaluate the world around them as they navigate their own educational paths.

According to DeWitt Clinton, a former governor of New York, the government can best help the state by helping citizens gain knowledge. To achieve this aim, Clinton believes that education should be free and accessible to all children, a radical idea 200 years ago. His essay “Free Schools” asserts that free education promotes equality and is essential for a stable and peaceful civil society. Colin Powell’s essay “My American Journey” reinforces the idea that public education is important, especially for those citizens not able to afford expensive private institutions. In his balanced essay, Powell says he will continue to be “a champion of public secondary and higher education,” as long as he has “the good sense to remember where [he] came from.”

The next three essays by Bilal Ramani, Esmeralda Santiago, and Alfred Lubrano are personal narratives written from widely different perspectives. Bilal Ramani, a second-semester biology student at New York City College of Technology, describes his initially skeptical attitude toward education. He then reflects on a moment of illumination in his English class that many students might have experienced, or might soon experience. Esmeralda Santiago’s essay “When I Was Puerto Rican” is taken from her memoir of the same title. In it, she remembers the day when she first entered the eighth grade as a confident immigrant who disagreed with the school’s principal about her language abilities and her educational goals. In Alfred Lubrano’s essay “Bricklayer’s Boy,” we read about the ways that differences in education levels within one family can cause disagreements.

Our last two essays in this chapter highlight the ways that globalization, ethics, and technology will influence education today and tomorrow. Howard Gardner’s “Five Minds for the Future” makes an argument for thinking about education in terms of softer skills like adaptation, creativity, and communication that will push students to engage with the wider world if they wish to succeed. We end this chapter with an overview

of future directions in learning. In “How to Bring Our Schools into the 21st Century,” Claudia Wallis and Sonja Steptoe believe that students must achieve the right balance between subject knowledge and “portable skills,” such as critical thinking. Both of these essays describe changing classroom environments, but they also emphasize the need to develop online skills and global literacy—where students learn about and respect other cultures. The reason is that if there is one thing that the global economy does well and does often, it is to bring many different people into close contact.

Free Schools

DeWitt Clinton

DeWitt Clinton (1769–1828) was the mayor of New York between 1803 and 1815, during which time he spearheaded the founding of the New York Historical Society, the Literary and Philosophical Society, the American Bible Society, the African Free School, the New York Institution for the Deaf and Dumb, and the Orphan Asylum. Clinton's view of the government's role was founded on a belief in education for the entire population. This essay was first published in 1809, with the title of "Address on Monitorial Education," while Clinton was the Governor of New York.

Pre-Reading

What do you think are the goals of public education?

In casting a view over the civilized world, we find universal agreement 1
on the benefits of education; unfortunately, this opinion has not been put
into practice. While magnificent Colleges and Universities are erected, we
behold few liberal appropriations for diffusing the blessings of knowledge
among all descriptions of people. The fundamental error of Europe has
been to confine the light of knowledge to the wealthy, while the humble
and the depressed have been excluded from its participation . . . The con-
sequence of this has been that ignorance, the prolific parent of every crime
and vice, has predominated over the great body of the people, and a corre-
sponding moral debasement has prevailed. "Man differs more from man,
than man from beast," says Montaigne, a once celebrated writer. This re-
mark, however generally false, will certainly apply with great force to a
man in a state of high mental cultivation, and man in a state of extreme
ignorance.

Ignorance is the cause as well as the effect of bad governments, and
without the cultivation of our rational powers, we can entertain no just
ideas of the obligations of morality or the excellencies of religion. Although
England is justly renowned for its cultivation of the arts and sciences, yet
there is no Protestant country where the education of the poor has been
so grossly and infamously neglected. If a fair sum had been applied to the
education of the poor, the blessings of order, knowledge, and innocence
would have been diffused among them, and a total revolution would have

From *The Life and Writing of DeWitt Clinton*, by DeWitt Clinton, 1849.

taken place in the habits and lives of the people, favorable to the cause of industry, good morals, good order, and rational religion.

More just and rational views have been entertained on this subject in the United States. Here, no privileged orders—no distinctions in society—no hereditary nobility—exist, to interpose barriers between the people, and to create distinct classifications in society. All men being considered as enjoying an equality of rights, the propriety and necessity of dispensing, without distinction, the blessings of education, followed of course. In New England the greatest attention has been invariably given to this important object. In Connecticut, particularly, the schools are supported at least three-fourths of the year by the interest of a very large fund created for that purpose, and a small tax on the people. The result of this beneficial arrangement is obvious and striking. Our Eastern brethren are a well-informed and moral people. In those States it is as uncommon to find a poor man who cannot read and write, as it is rare to see one in Europe who can.

New York has proceeded in the same career, but on a different, and perhaps more eligible plan. For a few years back, a fund has been accumulating appropriated to the support of common schools. This fund consists at present of near four hundred thousand dollars in bank stock, mortgages, and bonds. The capital will be increased by the accumulating interest and the sale of three hundred and thirty-six thousand acres of land. It is highly probable that the whole fund will, in a few years, amount to one million two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, a sum more than sufficient to accommodate all our poor with a gratuitous education.

We have every reason to believe, that this great fund, established for sinking vice and ignorance, will never be diverted or destroyed, but that it will remain unimpaired across the years, as an illustrious establishment, erected by the benevolence of the State for the propagation of knowledge, and the diffusion of virtue among the people.

A number of benevolent persons had seen, with concern, the increasing vices of this city, arising in a great degree from the neglected education of the poor. Great cities are at all times the nurseries and hot-beds of crime. Bad men from all quarters repair to them, in order to obtain the benefit of concealment, and to enjoy in a superior degree the advantages of rapine and fraud. And the dreadful examples of vice, which are presented to youth, and the alluring forms in which it is arrayed, cannot fail to increase the mass of moral depravity. "In London," it is reported, "above twenty thousand individuals rise every morning, without knowing how, or by what means they are to be supported through the passing day, and in many instances even where they are to lodge on the ensuing night." There can be no doubt that hundreds are in the same situation in this city, prowling about our streets for prey, the victims of intemperance [alcohol abuse], the slaves of idleness, and ready to fall into any vice, rather than to cultivate industry and good order.

After a full view of the case, those persons of whom I have spoken agreed that the evil must be corrected at its source, and that education was the sovereign prescription.

Discussion Questions

1. According to Clinton, what was Europe's fundamental error in terms of knowledge? How could this error be corrected?
2. What point does Clinton want to make by using this quote from Montaigne: "Man differs more from man, than man from beast"?
3. What is the author's view of New England's educational system?
4. What was the cause for the increased crime rate of New York City during Clinton's time? Do you think Clinton's view still holds true today?
5. Discuss the impact of Clinton's educational reform ideas. Do you think that he would be happy with today's public education? Why or why not?

Writing Task

- DeWitt Clinton believed that free education for the entire population would create equality among people from different classes. Do you agree with him? Write an essay in support of or arguing against the point of view that free education guarantees equal opportunities.

My American Journey

Colin Powell

Colin Powell (b. 1937) was the 65th United States Secretary of State, serving from 2001 to 2005 under President George W. Bush. When appointed, Powell became the highest ranking African American government official in the history of the United States. As a general in the United States Army, Powell also served as National Security Advisor (1987–89) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (1989–93). After retiring from office, Powell joined the Board of Directors on the Council of Foreign Relations.

Pre-Reading

Do you believe that private education is better than public education?

Following my sister's example and Mom and Pop's wishes, I applied to two colleges, the City College of New York and New York University. I must have been better than I thought, since I was accepted at both. Choosing between the two was a matter of simple arithmetic; tuition at NYU, a private school, was \$750 a year; at CCNY, a public school, it was \$10. I chose CCNY. My mother turned out to be my guidance counselor. She had consulted with the family. My two Jamaican cousins, Vernon and Roy, were studying engineering. "That's where the money is," Mom advised. And she was not far wrong. In the boom years of the fifties, demand for consumer goods and for engineers to design the refrigerators, automobiles, and hi-fi sets was strong. And so I was to be an engineering major, despite my allergy to science and math.

The Bronx can be a cold, harsh place in February, and it was frigid the day I set out for college. After two bus rides, I was finally deposited, shivering, at the corner of 156th Street and Convent Avenue in Harlem. I got out and craned my neck like a bumpkin in from the sticks, gazing at handsome brownstones and apartment houses. This was the best of Harlem, where blacks with educations and good jobs lived, the Gold Coast.

I stopped at the corner of Convent and 141st and looked into the campus of the City College of New York. I was about to enter a college established in the previous century "to provide higher education for the children

From *My American Journey* by Colin Powell with Joseph E. Persico, copyright © 1995 by Colin L. Powell. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

of the working class." Ever since then, New York's poorest and brightest have seized that opportunity. Those who preceded me at CCNY include the polio vaccine discoverer, Dr. Jonas Salk, Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, the muckraker novelist Upton Sinclair, the actor Edward G. Robinson, the playwright Paddy Chayefsky, the *New York Times* editor Abe Rosenthal, the novelist Bernard Malamud, the labor leader A. Philip Randolph, New York City mayors Abraham Beam and Edward Koch, U.S. Senator Robert Wagner, and eight Nobel Prize winners. As I took in the grand Gothic structures, a C-average student out of middling Morris High School, I felt overwhelmed. And then I heard a friendly voice: "Hey, kid, you new?"

He was a short, red-faced, weather-beaten man with gnarled hands, and he stood behind a steaming cart of those giant pretzels that New Yorkers are addicted to. I had met a CCNY fixture called, for some unaccountable reason, "Raymond the Bagel Man," though he sold pretzels. I bought a warm, salty pretzel from Raymond, and we shot the breeze for a few minutes. That broke the ice for me. CCNY was somehow less intimidating. I was to become a regular of Raymond's over the next four and a half years. And it either speaks well of his character or poorly of my scholarship that while my memory of most of my professors has faded, the memory of Raymond the Bagel Man remains undimmed.

As I headed toward the main building, Sheppard Hall, towering like a prop out of a horror movie, I passed by an undistinguished old building. I do not remember paying any attention to it at the time. It was, however, to become the focus of my life for the next four years, the ROTC drill hall.

My first semester as an engineering major went surprisingly well, mainly because I had not yet taken any engineering courses. I decided to prepare myself that summer with a course in mechanical drawing. One hot afternoon, the instructor asked us to draw "a cone intersecting a plane in space." The other students went at it; I just sat there. After a while, the instructor came to my desk and looked over my shoulder at a blank page. For the life of me, I could not visualize a cone intersecting a plane in space. If this was engineering, the game was over.

My parents were disappointed when I told them that I was changing my major. There goes Colin again, nice boy, but no direction. When I announced my new major, a hurried family council was held. Phone calls flew between aunts and uncles. Had anybody ever heard of anyone studying geology? What did you do with geology? Where did you go with it? Prospecting for oil? A novel pursuit for a black kid from the South Bronx. And, most critical to these security-haunted people, could geology lead to a pension? That was the magic word in our world. I remember coming home after I had been in the Army for five years and visiting my well-meaning, occasionally meddling Aunt Laurice. What kind of career was

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this Army? she asked, like a cross-examiner. What was I doing with my life? Snatching at the nearest defense, I mentioned that after twenty years I would get a half-pay pension. And I would only be forty-one. Her eyes widened. A pension? At forty-one? The discussion was over. I had made it.

During my first semester at CCNY, something had caught my eye— young guys on campus in uniform. CCNY was a hotbed of liberalism, radicalism, even some leftover communism from the thirties; it was not a place where you would expect much of a military presence. When I returned to school in the fall of 1954, I inquired about the Reserve Officers Training Corps, and I enrolled in ROTC. I am not sure why. Maybe it was growing up in World War II and coming of age during the Korean conflict: the little banners in windows with a blue star, meaning someone from the family was in the service, or a gold star, meaning someone was not coming back. *Back to Bataan*, *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*, *Guadalcanal Diary*, Colin Kelly, Audie Murphy, the five Sullivan brothers who went down with the cruiser U.S.S. *Juneau*, *Pork Chop Hill*, and *The Bridges at Toko-Ri*. All these images were burned into my consciousness during my most impressionable years. Or maybe it was the common refrain of that era—you are going to be drafted anyway, you might as well go in as an officer. I was not alone. CCNY might not have been West Point, but during the fifties it had the largest voluntary ROTC contingent in America, fifteen hundred cadets at the height of the Korean War.

There came a day when I stood in line in the drill hall to be issued olive-drab pants and jacket, brown shirt, brown tie, brown shoes, a belt with a brass buckle, and an overseas cap. As soon as I got home, I put the uniform on and looked in the mirror. I liked what I saw. At this point, not a single Kelly Street friend of mine was going to college. I was seventeen. I felt cut off and lonely. The uniform gave me a sense of belonging, and something I had never experienced all the while I was growing up; I felt distinctive.

In class, I stumbled through math, fumbled through physics, and did reasonably well in, and even enjoyed, geology. All I ever looked forward to was ROTC. Colonel Harold C. Brookhart, Professor of Military Science and Tactics, was our commanding officer. The colonel was a West Pointer and regular Army to his fingertips. He was about fifty years old, with thinning hair, of only medium height, yet he seemed imposing because of his bearing, impeccable dress, and no-nonsense manner. His assignment could not have been a coveted one for a career officer. I am sure he would have preferred commanding a regiment to teaching ROTC to a bunch of smart-aleck city kids on a liberal New York campus. But the Korean War had ended the year before. The Army was overloaded with officers, and Brookhart was probably grateful to land anywhere. Whatever he felt, he never let us sense that what we were doing was anything less than deadly serious.

That fall, I experienced the novel pleasure of being courted by the three military societies on campus, the Webb Patrol, Scabbard and Blade, and the Pershing Rifles, ROTC counterparts of fraternities. Rushing consisted mostly of inviting potential pledges to smokers where we drank beer and watched pornographic movies. The movies, in the sexually repressed fifties, were supposed to be a draw. I hooted and hollered with the rest of the college boys through these grainy 8-millimeter films, in which the male star usually wore socks. But they were not what drew me to the Pershing Rifles. I pledged the PRs because they were the elite of the three groups.

The pledge period involved typical ritualistic bowing and scraping before upperclassmen, and some hazing that aped West Point traditions. A junior would stand you at attention and demand the definition of certain words. To this day I can parrot the response for milk: "She walks, she talks, she's made of chalk, the lactile fluid extracted from the female of the bovine species..." and on and on. I can spout half a dozen similar daffy definitions. When we finished the pledge period, we were allowed crests on our uniforms. I found that I was much attracted by forms and symbols.

One Pershing Rifles member impressed me from the start. Ronald Brooks was a young black man, tall, trim, handsome, the son of a Harlem Baptist preacher and possessed of a maturity beyond most college students. Ronnie was only two years older than I, but something in him commanded deference. And unlike me, Ronnie, a chemistry major, was a brilliant student. He was a cadet leader in the ROTC and an officer in the Pershing Rifles. He could drill men so that they moved like parts of a watch. Ronnie was sharp, quick, disciplined, organized, qualities then invisible in Colin Powell. I had found a model and a mentor. I set out to remake myself in the Ronnie Brooks mold.

My experience in high school, on basketball and track teams, and briefly in Boy Scouting had never produced a sense of belonging or many permanent friends. The Pershing Rifles did. For the first time in my life I was a member of a brotherhood. The PRs were in the CCNY tradition only in that we were ethnically diverse and so many of us were the sons of immigrants. Otherwise, we were out of sync with both the student radicals and the conservative engineering majors, the latter easy to spot by the slide rules hanging from their belts. PRs drilled together. We partied together. We cut classes together. We chased girls together. We had a fraternity office on campus from which we occasionally sortied out to class or, just as often, to the student lounge, where we tried to master the mambo. I served as an unlikely academic advisor, steering other Pershing Rifles into geology as an easy yet respectable route to a degree.

The discipline, the structure, the camaraderie, the sense of belonging were what I craved. I became a leader almost immediately. I found a

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selflessness within our ranks that reminded me of the caring atmosphere within my family. Race, color, background, income meant nothing. The PRs would go the limit for each other and for the group. If this was what soldiering was all about, then maybe I wanted to be a soldier.

I returned to college in the fall of 1955, commuting from Kelly Street. I did not have to be an urbanologist to see that the old neighborhood was deteriorating. The decline was just the latest chapter in the oldest story in New York, people moving up and out as their fortunes improved, and poorer people moving in to take their places. The Jewish families who had escaped Lower East Side tenements for the South Bronx were now moving to the suburbs. Poor Puerto Ricans were moving into their old apartments. Hunts Point had never been verandas and wisteria. And now it was getting worse, from gang fights to gang wars, from jackknives to switchblades, from zip guns to real guns, from marijuana to heroin. One day, I came home from CCNY to find that a kid I knew had been found in a hallway, dead of a heroin overdose. He would not be the last. I had managed to steer clear of the drug scene. I never smoked marijuana, never got high, in fact never experimented with any drugs. And for a simple reason: my folks would have killed me.

As better-off families continued to flee, properties began to decay, even to be abandoned. Landlords cut their losses short and walked away from their buildings. In years to come, my own 952 Kelly Street would be abandoned, then burned out and finally demolished. But that was all in the future. For now, conversation among my relatives typically began, "When you getting out?" Aunt Laurice moved to the northern edge of the Bronx. So did Godmother Brash. Aunt Dot was already in Queens. When were Luther and Arie going to leave?

The secret dream of these tenement dwellers had always been to own their own home. And so the Powell family began heading for the upper Bronx or Queens, Sunday after Sunday, house hunting in desirable black neighborhoods. But the prices were outrageous—\$15,000, \$20,000, with my parents' combined income totaling about \$100 a week. Weekends often ended with the real estate agent sick to death of us and my sister embarrassed to tears.

My father also dreamed about numbers. He bought numbers books at the newsstands to work out winning combinations. And he still went in every day with Aunt Beryl. They usually played quarters. Then, one Saturday night, my father dreamed a number, and the next morning at St. Margaret's the *same* number appeared on the hymn board. This, surely, was God taking Luther Powell by the hand and leading him to the Promised

Land. Somehow, Pop and Aunt Beryl managed to scrape up \$25 to put on the number. And they hit it, straight.

I still remember the atmosphere of joy, disbelief, and anxiety when the numbers runner delivered the brown paper bags to our house. Pop took them to his room and dumped the money on his bed, \$10,000 in tens and twenties, more than three years' pay. He let me help him count it. The money was not going into any bank. This strike was nobody's business. The bills were stashed all over the house, with my mother terrified that the tax man or thieves would be coming through the door any minute.

And that was how the Powells managed to buy 183-68 Elmira Avenue, in the community of Hollis in the borough of Queens—for \$17,500. The house was a three-bedroom bungalow in a neighborhood in transition; the whites were moving out and the blacks moving in. My folks bought from a Jewish family named Wiener, one of the few white families left. The neighborhood looked beautiful to us, and the Hollis address carried a certain cachet, a cut above Jamaica, Queens, and just below St. Albans, then another gold coast for middle-class blacks. Our new home was ivy-covered, well kept, and comfortable, and had a family room and a bar in the finished basement. Pop was now a property holder, eager to mow his postage-stamp lawn and prune his fruit trees. Luther Powell had joined the gentry...

I now began commuting from Queens to CCNY via the subway, which led to my first serious romance, with a CCNY student. We began riding the A train from the campus downtown, where we would transfer, I out to Queens and the girl out to Brooklyn. I took her to meet my parents. They were perfectly polite to her, but reserved.

My main college interest remained ROTC and the Pershing Rifles. Geology continued to be secondary, though I did enjoy the field trips. We went upstate and clambered over formations of synclines and anticlines. We had to diagram them and figure out their mirror images. If you had an anticline here, you should be able to predict a complementing syncline bulging out somewhere else. Very satisfying when I got it right. Geology allowed me to display my brilliance to my noncollege friends. "You know, the Hudson really isn't a river." "What are you talking about? College kid. Schmuck. Everybody knows the Hudson River's a river." I would then explain that the Hudson was a "drowned" river, up to about Poughkeepsie. The Ice Age had depressed the riverbed to a depth that allowed the Atlantic Ocean to flood inland. Consequently, the lower Hudson was really a saltwater estuary. I proudly pinpointed the farthest advance of the Ice Age. It stopped at Hillside Avenue running through Queens. You can see the ground sloping down along that line into St. Albans and Jamaica. I was startled to earn an A in one of my geology courses and wound up with three A's in my major by graduation.

On June 9, 1958, at 8:00 P.M., I entered CCNY's Aronowitz Auditorium. A few weeks before, my father had come into my room, sat on the edge of the bed, and, with a twinkling eye, handed me an envelope. He had cleaned out a savings account that he and my mother had been keeping for me since I was a child. Six hundred dollars. I was rich! The first thing I did was to head downtown to Morry Luxenberg's, regarded as the best military haberdasher in New York, to be outfitted.

The First Army band was playing and I was wearing Morry's uniform when I strode past my parents onto the Aronowitz Auditorium stage. "I, Colin Luther Powell, do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic," I repeated with my classmates, "and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter, so help me God." We live in a more cynical age today. We are embarrassed by expressions of patriotism. But when I said those words almost four decades ago, they sent a shiver down my spine. They still do.

Because I was a "Distinguished Military Graduate," I was offered a regular rather than a reserve commission, which meant that I would have to serve three rather than two years on active duty. I eagerly accepted.

For me, graduation from college the next day was anticlimactic. The night before, after our commissioning, I had gone out celebrating with the boys. We had resumed the revelry the following noon at a college hangout called the Emerald Bar. My mother, knowing where to find me, had to send a cousin to haul me over to my graduation, which in her mind had been the whole point of the previous four and a half years. I tended to look on my B.S. in geology as an incidental dividend.

For much of our growing up, Marilyn and I had been "latchkey kids," left by ourselves or with neighbors and relatives after school. This situation is supposed to be a prescription for trouble. But that day, Luther and Arie Powell, Jamaican immigrants, garment-district workers, were the parents of two college graduates, with their son now an Army officer as well. Small achievements as the world measures success, but mountain-tops in their lives. Thirty-five years later, I was asked by *Parade* magazine to talk about those two people. "My parents," I said, "did not recognize their own strengths." It was nothing they ever said that taught us, I recalled. "It was the way they lived their lives," I said. "If the values seem correct or relevant, the children will follow the values." I had been shaped not by preaching, but by example, by moral osmosis. Banana Kelly, the embracing warmth of an extended family, St. Margaret's Church, and let's weave in the Jamaican roots and a little calypso—all provided an enviable send-off on life's journey.

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I also owe an unpayable debt to the New York City public education system. I typified the students that CCNY was created to serve, the sons and daughters of the inner city, the poor, the immigrant. Many of my college classmates had the brainpower to attend Harvard, Yale, or Princeton. What they lacked was money and influential connections. Yet they have gone on to compete with and often surpass alumni of the most prestigious private campuses in this country.

I have made clear that I was no great shakes as a scholar. I have joked over the years that the CCNY faculty handed me a diploma, uttering a sigh of relief, and were happy to pass me along to the military. Yet, even this C-average student emerged from CCNY prepared to write, think, and communicate effectively and equipped to compete against students from colleges that I could never have dreamed of attending. If the Statue of Liberty opened the gateway to this country, public education opened the door to attainment here. Schools like my sister's Buffalo State Teachers College and CCNY have served as the Harvards and Princetons of the poor. And they served us well. I am, consequently, a champion of public secondary and higher education. I will speak out for them and support them for as long as I have the good sense to remember where I came from.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Powell ultimately decide to go to CUNY? Do you think he made the wise decision?
2. How does Powell feel upon his arrival at City College? What causes him to feel this way?
3. Why does Powell spend so much time discussing the involvement of his parents and extended family in *his* American journey? Cite specific examples in the text to make your point.
4. According to the author, what specific skills did CUNY provide him that allowed him to compete with anybody from anywhere later in life? Do you agree with his assessment?

Writing Tasks

- Discuss your extracurricular activities and how they help you with the demands of college.
- Research the life of a well-known New Yorker, then write an essay discussing the factors that led to his or her success.
- Write an essay that focuses on the educational process of someone in your family, or someone who has been instrumental to your education.

Chronicles of a Once-Pessimistic College Freshman

Bilal Rahmani

Bilal Rahmani is a student at New York City College of Technology and plans to graduate in 2014. He is passionate about his writing, computer programming, and philosophy. He is pursuing his BS in Biology, with an English minor. He hopes to one day become a surgeon.

Pre-Reading

Can you think of a moment when you had a breakthrough that changed the way you thought about education?

I'm in, and then I'm out. I don't feel like I belong here. Why *am* I here—in¹ this school? I've been pushed around the crucible of the New York City public education system for so long now. Rejected from my middle school of choice and shoved into The High School for Health Professions and Human Services on the Lower East Side, that no one has heard of. I'm one of the smart kids. I always performed well in school: I did all my assignments, was friendly to my teachers, and got an impressive score on my SAT's—the ideal student. Sure I slacked off sometimes. Maybe I cut class a little, maybe I shouldn't have spent so much time with my girlfriend, or with my best friends, but should I really have been punished for the mistakes I made as a naïve teenager? I mean, looking back on it, high school was horrible in the way it sifted and sorted kids so arbitrarily. There was never a rational grading system. I've worked endless hours on certain assignments only to fail, and alternately, I've skipped entire semesters of classes and ended up with an "A." A part of me says "stop making excuses Bilal, get out the golden cage of your fragile ego." The other part refuses to listen, preferring to wallow over what could have been.

In the middle of June 2010, I could no longer push back the need to register for classes at City Tech, so one evening I set off on a two-hour journey on the wonderfully-organized and ever-so-punctual New York City Public Transportation System. After another long wait, I met with a guidance counselor who was supposed to help me select my classes, but who simply dictated to me that I would be taking English, math, biology, and psychology

for my first semester. I wasn't given much of a choice about class selection, but, to tell you the truth, none of the classes really interested me.

My first month of college passed in this depressed state. I was completely indifferent to anything and everything. I didn't join any clubs; I didn't make any friends; I didn't go to any rallies or shows or games. I didn't care. I believed that everyone here was in a general state of apathy. No efforts were made on either side. You went to class, spoke to no one; you left class, spoke to no one; and you went home to do your homework, alone. From my dreary perspective at the time, my lackluster professors seemed to give little effort towards inspiring their students, and the students made no effort to better their classes in any way. I sat through these classes with no ambition, while my instructors taught out of books I had no interest in buying. To me, no one seemed to really *attend* this college; everyone seemed to be in a state of leaving, ears pinned to an invisible evacuation siren.

The following semester in the spring of 2011, English class rolled in once again. Here I was with my classmates discussing the short story, "Cat in the Rain," by Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway! What an amazing author. But, I thought to myself, these simple students will never be able to understand the enigmatic allegories he presents in his writing, so I guess I'll have to answer all the questions. I raised my hand to offer an interpretation that the cat represents a woman trapped in a man's world, when the dumb girl next to me raised her hand. She got called on first and explained that Hemingway was being misogynistic; to her, the author believed all women just wanted to be dominated and to have long hair and children. This was utterly ridiculous; I mean it's Hemingway! How could one ever interpret him in that sort of way? As if the great Hemingway could possibly possess such an immature trait. This was what I thought, before the teacher explained that Hemingway was, in fact, very sexist. Just a minor slip up; I was still sure my interpretation was smarter and more creative than hers anyway. I settled down and listened to the class discuss the piece. Suddenly, they were shooting out ideas that all made so much sense. My prejudices crashed in on me. The classroom became ink, penetrating the water, which was my mind, adding new colors, creating something completely new, something I alone could never hope to create. The discussion dragged me in, and I too began to share my ideas, adding to the excitement of the classroom. To my surprise, my wall of egotism vanished, and a new air of life breathed in me. At that moment, I began to see this class—no, this college—for what it truly was.

When I first entered this college, I had no ambition to pursue anything. I walked through its doors only to find myself counting the hours until I could leave. I expected nothing from this school, but I'm now inculcated

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with the ideas and flashing wisdom of hundreds of peers and instructors. I had completely overlooked the potential greatness that this institution could bring to each student, to each class, and, in particular, to me. Now, my mind has opened to this college and has been flooded with the thoughts of hundreds of students as eager and ambitious to learn as I am. This public institution of learning, so often looked down upon, has come to shape the person I've always wanted to become.

Today, as a functioning member of this vibrant community, I find myself engaged in my classes in a way that I never had before. I take courses which grab my attention, with professors who are just as eager to share their wisdom with me as I am to receive it. With every debate over the meaning of a painting in my Art History course, every question about our country's business laws in Microeconomics, or every question about the thoughts of Sartre, Kierkegaard, or Descartes in my philosophy course, I grow stronger. I, in turn, offer my skills to the community by tutoring my peers. I also participate in literary contests, and I join the many City Tech clubs, giving all I can, and receiving much more in return. My experiences, knowledge, and ambitions have joined together to create who I am: a no-longer-pessimistic student at New York City College of Technology.

Discussion Questions

1. Bilal Rahmani describes an uneven grading system in high school. Discuss your own experiences in high school. Can you think of a time when you felt that you deserved a better grade, or conversely, that you received a high grade that you didn't entirely deserve?
2. What is the source of classroom boredom? Does it come from the subject matter, the way subjects are taught, or from the student?
3. What happened during the discussion of Ernest Hemingway's short story "Cat in the Rain"? What did Rahmani learn?
4. Discuss how Rahmani uses humor and irony in his essay.

Writing Tasks

- Rahmani yearns to dive into the college experience, but approaches school, initially, with a "dreary perspective." Write an essay in which you consider ways that would bring more students together and help them overcome their indifference toward college life.
- Write an essay in which you compare and contrast your own experience with Rahmani's.

When I Was Puerto Rican

Esmeralda Santiago

Esmeralda Santiago (b. 1948) was born in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and she came to the United States when she was thirteen. Santiago attended New York City's Performing Arts High School, where she majored in drama and dance. After eight years of part-time study at community colleges, she transferred to Harvard University with a full scholarship. She graduated magna cum laude in 1976. Since then, Santiago has written for many national publications including *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe* and *Sports Illustrated*. She has published novels, screenplays, and three acclaimed memoirs: *When I was Puerto Rican* (1994), *Almost a Woman* (1999), and *The Turkish Lover* (2004).

Pre-Reading

Think of a time when you took a great risk as a student?

The first day of school Mami walked me to a stone building that loomed 1
over Graham Avenue, its concrete yard enclosed by an iron fence with
spikes at the top. The front steps were wide but shallow and led up to a set
of heavy double doors that slammed shut behind us as we walked down
the shiny corridor. I clutched my eighth-grade report card filled with A's
and B's, and Mami had my birth certificate. At the front office we were
met by Mr. Grant, a droopy gentleman with thick glasses and a kind smile
who spoke no Spanish. He gave Mami a form to fill out. I knew most of
the words in the squares we were to fill in: NAME, ADDRESS (CITY, STATE),
and OCCUPATION. We gave it to Mr. Grant, who reviewed it, looked at my
birth certificate, studied my report card, then wrote on the top of the form
"7-18."

Don Julio had told me that if students didn't speak English, the schools
in Brooklyn would keep them back one grade until they learned it.

"Seven gray?" I asked Mr. Grant, pointing at his big numbers, and he
nodded.

"Ino guan seven gray. I eight gray. I teeneyer."

"You don't speak English," he said. "You have to go to the seventh 5
grade while you're learning."

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"I have A's in school Puerto Rico. I learn good. I no seven gray girl."

Mami stared at me, not understanding but knowing I was being rude to an adult.

"What's going on?" she asked me in Spanish. I told her they wanted to send me back one grade and I would not have it. This was probably the first rebellious act she had seen from me outside my usual mouthiness within the family.

"Negi, leave it alone. Those are the rules," she said, a warning in her voice.

"I don't care what their rules say," I answered. "I'm not going back to seventh grade. I can do the work. I'm not stupid." 10

Mami looked at Mr. Grant, who stared at her as if expecting her to do something about me. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Meester Grant," I said, seizing the moment, "I go eight gray six mons. Eef I no learn inglish, I go seven gray. Okay?"

"That's not the way we do things here," he said hesitating.

"I good studen. I learn queek. You see notes." I pointed to the A's on my report card. "I pass seven gray." 15

So we made a deal.

"You have until Christmas," he said. "I'll be checking on your progress." He scratched out "7-18" and wrote in "8-23." He wrote something on a piece of paper, sealed it inside an envelope, and gave it to me. "Your teacher is Miss Brown. Take this note upstairs to her. Your mother can go," he said and disappeared into his office.

"Wow!" Mami said, "You can speak English!"

I was so proud of myself, I almost burst. In Puerto Rico, if I'd been that pushy, I would have been called *mal educada* by the Mr. Grant equivalent and sent home with a note to my mother. But here it was my teacher who was getting the note, I got what I wanted and my mother was sent home.

"I can find my way after school," I said to Mami. "You don't have to come get me." 20

"Are you sure?"

"Don't worry," I said. "I'll be all right."

I walked down the black-tiled hallway, past many doors that were half glass, each one labeled with a room number in neat black lettering. Other students stared at me, tried to get my attention, or pointedly ignored me. I kept walking as if I knew where I was going, heading for the sign that said STAIRS with an arrow pointing up. When I reached the end of the hall and looked back, Mami was still standing at the front door watching me, a worried expression on her face. I waved and she waved back. I started up the stairs, my stomach churning into tight knots. All of a sudden, I was afraid that I was about to make a fool of myself and end up in seventh

grade in the middle of the school year. Having to fall back would be worse than just accepting my fate now and hopping forward if I proved to be as good a student as I had convinced Mr. Grant I was. "What have I done?" I kicked myself with the back of my right shoe, much to the surprise of the fellow walking behind me, who laughed uproariously, as if I had meant it as a joke.

Miss Brown's was the learning disabled class, where the administration sent kids with all sort of problems, none of which, from what I could see, had anything to do with their ability to learn but more with their willingness to do so. They were an unruly group. Those who came to class, anyway. Half of them never showed up, or, when they did, they slept through the lesson or nodded off in the middle of Miss Brown's carefully parsed sentences.

We were outcasts in a school where the smartest eighth graders were in the 8-1 homeroom, each subsequent drop in number indicating one notch less smart. If your class was in the low double digits (8-10 for instance), you were smart, but not a pinhead. Once you got into the teens, your intelligence was in question, especially as the numbers rose to the high teens. And then there were the twenties. I was in 8-23, where the dumbest most undesirable people were placed. My class was, in some ways, the equivalent of seventh grade, perhaps even sixth or fifth.

Miss Brown, the homeroom teacher, who also taught English composition, was a young black woman who wore sweat pads under her arms. The strings holding them in place sometimes slipped outside the short sleeves of her well-pressed white shirts, and she had to turn her back to us in order to adjust them. She was very pretty, with almond eyes and a hairdo that was flat and straight at the top of her head then dipped into tight curls at the ends. Her fingers were well manicured, the nails painted pale pink with white tips. She taught English composition as if everyone cared about it, which I found appealing. 25

After the first week she moved me from the back of the room to the front seat by her desk, and after that, it felt as if she were teaching me alone. We never spoke except when I went up to the blackboard.

"Esmeralda," she called in a musical voice, "would you please come up and mark the prepositional phrase?"

In her class, I learned to recognize the structure of the English language, and to draft the parts of a sentence by the position of words relative to pronouns and prepositions without knowing exactly what the whole thing meant.

Every day after school I went to the library and took out as many children's books as I was allowed. I figured that if American children learned English through books, so could I, even if I was starting later. I studied the

bright illustrations and learned the words for the unfamiliar objects of our new life in the United States: A for Apple, B for Bear, C for Cabbage. As my vocabulary grew, I moved to large-print chapter books. Mami bought me an English-English dictionary because that way, when I looked up a word I would be learning others.

By my fourth month in Brooklyn, I could read and write English much better than I could speak it, and at midterms I stunned the teachers by scoring high in English, History, and Social Studies. During the January assembly, Mr. Grant announced the names of the kids who had received high marks in each class. My name was called out three times. I became a different person to the other eighth graders. I was still in 8–23, but they knew, and I knew, that I didn't belong there.

Discussion Questions

1. What criteria does Mr. Grant use before he places Esmeralda Santiago in 7–18? Do you think that this decision is reasonable?
2. What is Santiago's reaction to her initial placement? Would you do the same if you were in her situation?
3. Why was her mother worried about her daughter's outspokenness?
4. How could Mr. Grant have handled Santiago's placement differently? Or, what other criteria could Mr. Grant have used?
5. Santiago describes 8–23 as a class of outcasts. What does outcast mean in this context? How does her own status change by the end of the essay?
6. What lesson does Santiago learn when she persuades the principal to put her in the eighth grade?
7. Do you think that Santiago would have done as well if she were placed in, say, 8–1? Why or why not?

Writing Tasks

- Write an essay in which you describe how you overcame somebody's misperception of your ability.
- Write an essay that either defends or criticizes the way schools categorize students on the basis of academic and/or language skills.

Bricklayer's Boy

Alfred Lubrano

New York City native Alfred Lubrano is a reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He is a frequent contributor to national publications, and he was a commentator for *National Public Radio* for sixteen years. He contributes to *Gentlemen's Quarterly*, where this essay originally appeared. His book *Limbo: Blue-Collar Roots, White-Collar Dreams*, was published in 2005.

Pre-Reading

Do you and your parents share the same educational values?

My father and I were college buddies back in the mid 1970s. While I was in class at Columbia, struggling with the *esotérica du jour*, he was on a bricklayer's scaffold not far up the street, working on a campus building. 1

Sometimes we'd hook up on the subway going home, he with his tools, I with my books. We didn't chat much about what went on during the day. My father wasn't interested in Dante, I wasn't up on arches. We'd share a *New York Post* and talk about the Mets.

My dad has built lots of places in New York City he can't get into: colleges, condos, office towers. He makes his living on the outside. Once the walls are up, a place takes on a different feel for him, as if he's not welcome anymore. It doesn't bother him, though. For my father, earning the dough that paid for my entrée into a fancy, bricked-in institution was satisfaction enough, a vicarious access.

We didn't know it then, but those days were the start of a branching off, a redefining of what it means to be a workingman in our family. Related by blood, we're separated by class, my father and I. Being the white-collar son of a blue-collar man means being the hinge on the door between two ways of life.

It's not so smooth jumping from Italian old-world style to U.S. yuppie in a single generation. Despite the myth of mobility in America, the true rule, experts say, is rags to rags, riches to riches. According to Bucknell University economist and author Charles Sackrey, maybe 10 percent climb from the working to the professional class. My father has had a 5

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tough time accepting my decision to become a mere newspaper reporter, a field that pays just a little more than construction does. He wonders why I haven't cashed in on that multi-brick education and taken on some lawyer-lucrative job. After bricklaying for thirty years, my father promised himself I'd never pile bricks and blocks into walls for a living. He figured an education—genielike and benevolent—would somehow rocket me into the consecrated trajectory of the upwardly mobile, and load some serious loot into my pockets. What he didn't count on was his eldest son breaking blue-collar rule No. 1: Make as much money as you can, to pay for as good a life as you can get.

He'd tell me about it when I was nineteen, my collar already fading to white. I was the college boy who handed him the wrong wrench on help-around-the-house Saturdays. "You better make a lot of money," my blue-collar handy dad wryly warned me as we huddled in front of a disassembled dishwasher I had neither the inclination nor the aptitude to fix. "You're gonna need to hire someone to hammer a nail into a wall for you."

In 1980, after college and graduate school, I was offered my first job, on a now-dead daily paper in Columbus, Ohio. I broke the news in the kitchen, where all the family business is discussed. My mother wept as if it were Vietnam. My father had a few questions: "Ohio? Where the hell is Ohio?"

I said it's somewhere west of New York City, that it was like Pennsylvania, only more so. I told him I wanted to write, and these were the only people who'd take me.

"Why can't you get a good job that pays something, like in advertising in the city, and write on the side?"

"Advertising is lying," I said, smug and sanctimonious, ever the unctuous undergraduate. "I wanna tell the truth." 10

"The truth?" the old man exploded, his face reddening as it does when he's up twenty stories in high wind. "What's truth?" I said it's real life, and writing about it would make me happy. "You're happy with your family," my father said, spilling blue-collar rule No. 2. "That's what makes you happy. After that, it all comes down to dollars and cents. What gives you comfort besides your family? Money, only money."

During the two weeks before I moved, he reminded me that newspaper journalism is a dying field, and I could do better. Then he pressed advertising again, though neither of us knew anything about it, except that you could work in Manhattan, the borough with the water-beading high gloss, the island polished clean by money. I couldn't explain myself, so I packed, unpopular and confused. No longer was I the good son who studied hard and fumbled endearingly with tools. I was hacking people off.

One night, though, my father brought home some heavy tape and that clear, plastic bubble stuff you pack your mother's second-string dishes in.

"You probably couldn't do this right," my father said to me before he sealed the boxes and helped me take them to UPS. "This is what he wants," my father told my mother the day I left for Columbus in my grandfather's eleven-year-old gray Cadillac. "What are you gonna do?" After I said my good-byes, my father took me aside and pressed five \$100 bills into my hands. "It's okay," he said over my weak protests. "Don't tell your mother."

When I broke the news about what the paper was paying me, my father suggested I get a part-time job to augment the income. "Maybe you could drive a cab." Once, after I was chewed out by the city editor for something trivial, I made the mistake of telling my father during a visit home. "They pay you nothin', and they push you around too much in that business," he told me, the rage building. "Next time, you gotta grab the guy by the throat and tell him he's a big jerk."

"Dad, I can't talk to the boss like that."

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"Tell him. You get results that way. Never take any shit." A few years before, a guy didn't like the retaining wall my father and his partner had built. They tore it down and did it again, but the guy still bitched. My father's partner shoved the guy into the freshly laid bricks. "Pay me off," my father said, and he and his partner took the money and walked. Blue-collar guys have no patience for office politics and corporate bile-swallowing. Just pay me off and I'm gone. Eventually, I moved on to a job in Cleveland, on a paper my father has heard of. I think he looks on it as a sign of progress, because he hasn't mentioned advertising for a while.

When he was my age, my father was already dug in with a trade, a wife, two sons and a house in a neighborhood in Brooklyn not far from where he was born. His workaday, family-centered life has been very much in step with his immigrant father's. I sublet what the real-estate people call a junior one-bedroom in a dormlike condo in a Cleveland suburb. Unmarried and unconnected in an insouciant, perpetual student kind of way, I rent movies during the week and feed single women in restaurants on Saturday nights. My dad asks me about my dates, but he goes crazy over the word "woman." "A girl," he corrects. "You went out with a girl. Don't say 'woman.' It sounds like you're takin' out your grandmother."

I've often believed blue-collaring is the more genuine of lives, in greater proximity to primordial manhood. My father is provider and protector, concerned only with the basics: food and home, love and progeny. He's also a generation closer to the heritage, a warmer spot nearer the fire that forged and defined us. Does heat dissipate and light fade further from the source? I live for my career, and frequently feel lost and codeless, devoid of the blue-collar rules my father grew up with. With no baby-boomer groomer to show me the way, I've been choreographing my own tentative shuffle across the wax-shined dance floor on the edge of the Great Middle Class, a different rhythm in a whole new ballroom.

I'm sure it's tough on my father, too, because I don't know much about bricklaying, either, except that it's hell on the body, a daily sacrifice. I idealized my dad as a kind of dawn-rising priest of labor, engaged in holy ritual. Up at five every day, my father has made a religion of responsibility. My younger brother, a Wall Street white-collar guy with the sense to make a decent salary, says he always felt safe when he heard Dad stir before him, as if Pop were taming the day for us. My father, fifty-five years old, but expected to put out as if he were three decades stronger, slips on machine-washable vestments of khaki cotton without waking my mother. He goes into the kitchen and turns on the radio to catch the temperature. Bricklayers have an occupational need to know the weather. And because I am my father's son, I can recite the five-day forecast at any given moment.

My father isn't crazy about this life. He wanted to be a singer and actor when he was young, but that was frivolous doodling to his Italian family, who expected money to be coming in, stoking the stove that kept hearth fires ablaze. Dreams simply were not energy-efficient. My dad learned a trade, as he was supposed to, and settled into a life of pre-scripted routing. He says he can't find the black-and-white publicity glossies he once had made. 20

Although I see my dad infrequently, my brother, who lives at home, is with the old man every day. Chris has a lot more blue-collar in him than I do, despite his management-level career; for a short time, he wanted to be a construction worker, but my parents persuaded him to go to Columbia. Once in a while he'll bag a lunch and, in a nice wool suit, meet my father at a construction site and share sandwiches of egg salad on semolina bread.

It was Chris who helped my dad most when my father tried to change his life several months ago. My dad wanted a civil-service bricklayer foreman's job that wouldn't be so physically demanding. There was a written test that included essay questions about construction work. My father hadn't done anything like it in forty years. Why the hell they needed bricklayers to write essays I have no idea, but my father sweated it out. Every morning before sunrise, Chris would be ironing a shirt, bleary-eyed, and my father would sit at the kitchen table and read aloud his practice essays on how to wash down a wall, or how to build a tricky corner. Chris would suggest words and approaches.

It was so hard for my dad. He had to take a Stanley Kaplan-like prep course in a junior high school three nights a week after work for six weeks. At class time, the outside men would come in, twenty-five construction workers squeezing themselves into little desks. Tough blue-collar guys armed with No. 2 pencils leaning over and scratching out their practice

essays, cement in their hair, tar on their pants, their work boots too big and clumsy to fit under the desks.

“Is this what finals felt like?” my father would ask me on the phone when I pitched in to help long-distance. “Were you always this nervous?” I told him yes. I told him writing’s always difficult. He thanked Chris and me for the coaching, for putting him through school this time. My father thinks he did okay, but he’s still awaiting the test results. In the meantime, he takes life the blue-collar way, one brick at a time.

When we see each other these days, my father still asks how the money is. Sometimes he reads my stories; usually he likes them, although he recently criticized one piece as being a bit sentimental: “Too schmaltzy,” he said. Some psychologists say that the blue-white-collar gap between fathers and sons leads to alienation, but I tend to agree with Dr. Al Baraff, a clinical psychologist and director of the Men-Center in Washington, D.C. “The core of the relationship is based on emotional and hereditary traits,” Baraff says. “Class [distinctions] just get added on. If it’s a healthful relationship from when you’re a kid, there’s a respect back and forth that’ll continue.”

Nice of the doctor to explain, but I suppose I already knew that. Whatever is between my father and me, whatever keeps us talking and keeps us close, has nothing to do with work and economic class.

During one of my visits to Brooklyn not long ago, he and I were in the car, on our way to buy toiletries, one of my father’s weekly routines. “You know, you’re not as successful as you could be,” he began, blue-collar blunt as usual. “You paid your dues in school. You deserve better restaurants, better clothes.” Here we go, I thought, the same old stuff. I’m sure every family has five or six similar big issues that are replayed like well-worn videotapes. I wanted to fast-forward this thing when we stopped at a red light.

Just then my father turned to me, solemn and intense. His knees were aching and his back muscles were throbbing in dockable intervals that registered in his eyes. It was the end of a week of lifting fifty-pound blocks. “I envy you,” he said quietly. “For a man to do something he likes and get paid for it—that’s fantastic.” He smiled at me before the light changed, and we drove on. To thank him for the understanding, I sprang for the deodorant and shampoo. For once, my father let me pay.

Discussion Questions

1. According to what you have read, describe the author’s relationship with his father.

2. What are the blue-collar rules mentioned in the story? What do they imply? Do you think they represent the values of only one particular class?
3. What does the writer's father mean when he says that his son's collar is "fading into white"? What typifies a white-collar lifestyle?
4. What differences can you see between the writer's and his father's values? How do they resolve the differences?
5. What insight did the writer's father gain when he was preparing for his test? How does it affect his relationship with his sons?
6. What is the significance of the essay's conclusion in which Lubrano's father lets him pay for the first time?
7. Lubrano is not a bricklayer, but he does labor over words. Discuss the writing strategies he uses to build his essay.

Writing Tasks

- Write an essay in which you discuss the differences and similarities between your values and beliefs and those of your parents'.
- What is the most important factor to you when choosing a career: money, satisfaction, helping others, prestige, or something else? Write an essay explaining your answer.

Five Minds for the Future

Howard Gardner

Howard Gardner is currently the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He is the author of twenty-four books including *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (1983) and *The Development and Education of the Mind* (2005). In 1981, Gardner was awarded the prestigious MacArthur Prize Fellowship. His work continues to focus on the theory of multiple intelligences and on the idea of social responsibility at work and at play.

Pre-Reading

What kind of intelligence do you think is most relevant for your area of study?

FOR SEVERAL DECADES, as a researcher in psychology, I have been pondering the human mind. I've studied how the mind develops, how it is organized, what it's like in its fullest expanse. I've studied how people learn, how they create, how they lead, how they change the minds of other persons or their own minds. For the most part, I've been content to describe the typical operations of the mind—a daunting task in itself. But on occasion, I've also offered views about how we *should* use our minds. ¹

In *Five Minds for the Future* I venture further. While making no claims to have a crystal ball, I concern myself here with the kinds of minds that people will need if they—if *we*—are to thrive in the world during the eras to come. The larger part of my enterprise remains descriptive—I specify the operations of the minds that we will need. But I cannot hide the fact that I am engaged as well in a “values enterprise”: the minds that I describe are also the ones that I believe we *should* develop in the future.

Why the shift from description to prescription? In the interconnected world in which the vast majority of human beings now live, it is not enough to state what each individual or group needs to survive on its own turf. In the long run, it is not possible for parts of the world to thrive while others remain desperately poor and deeply frustrated. Recalling the words of Benjamin Franklin, “We must indeed all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.” Further, the world of the future—with its ubiquitous search engines, robots, and other computational devices—will

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demand capacities that until now have been mere options. To meet this new world on its own terms, we should begin to cultivate these capacities now.

As your guide, I will be wearing a number of hats. As a trained psychologist, with a background in cognitive science and neuroscience, I will draw repeatedly on what we know from a scientific perspective about the operation of the human mind and the human brain. But humans differ from other species in that we possess history as well as prehistory, hundreds and hundreds of diverse cultures and subcultures, and the possibility of informed, conscious choice; and so I will be drawing equally on history, anthropology, and other humanistic disciplines. Because I am speculating about the directions in which our society and our planet are headed, political and economic considerations loom large. And, to repeat, I balance these scholarly perspectives with a constant reminder that a description of minds cannot escape a consideration of human values.

Enough throat clearing. Time to bring onstage the five *dramatis personae* of this literary presentation. Each has been important historically; each figures to be even more crucial in the future. With these “minds,” as I refer to them, a person will be well equipped to deal with what is expected, as well as what cannot be anticipated; without these minds, a person will be at the mercy of forces that he or she can’t understand, let alone control. 5

The disciplined mind has mastered at least one way of thinking—a distinctive mode of cognition that characterizes a specific scholarly discipline, craft, or profession. Much research confirms that it takes up to ten years to master a discipline. The disciplined mind also knows how to work steadily over time to improve skill and understanding—in the vernacular, it is highly disciplined. Without at least one discipline under his belt, the individual is destined to march to someone else’s tune.

The synthesizing mind takes information from disparate sources, understands and evaluates that information objectively, and puts it together in ways that make sense to the synthesizer and also to other persons. Valuable in the past, the capacity to synthesize becomes ever more crucial as information continues to mount at dizzying rates.

Building on discipline and synthesis, *the creating mind* breaks new ground. It puts forth new ideas, poses unfamiliar questions, conjures up fresh ways of thinking, arrives at unexpected answers. Ultimately, these creations must find acceptance among knowledgeable consumers. By virtue of its anchoring in territory that is not yet rule-governed, the creating mind seeks to remain at least one step ahead of even the most sophisticated computers and robots.

Recognizing that nowadays one can no longer remain within one’s shell or on one’s home territory, *the respectful mind* notes and welcomes differences between human individuals and between human groups, tries

to understand these “others,” and seeks to work effectively with them. In a world where we are all interlinked, intolerance or disrespect is no longer a viable option.

Proceeding on a level more abstract than the respectful mind, *the ethical mind* ponders the nature of one’s work and the needs and desires of the society in which one lives. This mind conceptualizes how workers can serve purposes beyond self-interest and how citizens can work unselfishly to improve the lot of all. The ethical mind then acts on the basis of these analyses. 10

Disciplined

Even as a young child, I loved putting words on paper, and I have continued to do so throughout my life. As a result, I have honed skills of planning, executing, critiquing, and teaching writing. I also work steadily to improve my writing, thus embodying the second meaning of the word *discipline*: training to perfect a skill.

My formal discipline is psychology, and it took me a decade to think like a psychologist. When I encounter a controversy about the human mind or human behavior, I think immediately about how to study the issue empirically, what control groups to marshal, how to analyze the data and revise my hypotheses when necessary.

Turning to management, I have many years of experience supervising teams of research assistants of various sizes, scopes, and missions—and I have the lessons and battle scars to show for it. My understanding has been enriched by observing successful and not-so-successful presidents, deans, and department chairs around the university; addressing and consulting with corporations; and studying leadership and ethics across the professions over the past fifteen years. Beyond question, both management and leadership are disciplines—though they can be informed by scientific studies, they are better thought of as crafts. By the same token, any professional—whether she’s a lawyer, an architect, an engineer—has to master the bodies of knowledge and the key procedures that entitle her to membership in the relevant guild. And all of us—scholars, corporate leaders, professionals—must continually hone our skills.

Synthesizing

As a student I enjoyed reading disparate texts and learning from distinguished and distinctive lecturers, I then attempted to make sense of these sources of information, putting them together in ways that were generative, at least for me. In writing papers and preparing for tests that would be evaluated by others, I drew on this increasingly well-honed skill of

synthesizing. When I began to write articles and books, the initial ones were chiefly works of synthesis: textbooks in social psychology and developmental psychology, and, perhaps more innovatively, the first book-length examination of cognitive science.

Whether one is working at a university, a law firm, or a corporation, the job of the manager calls for synthesis. The manager must consider the job to be done, the various workers on hand, their current assignments and skills, and how best to execute the current priority and move on to the next one. A good manager also looks back over what has been done in the past months and tries to anticipate how best to carry out future missions. As she begins to develop new visions, communicate them to associates, and contemplate how to realize these innovations, she invades the realms of strategic leadership and creativity within the business or profession. And of course, synthesizing the current state of knowledge, incorporating new findings, and delineating new dilemmas is part and parcel of the work of any professional who wishes to remain current with her craft.

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Creating

In my scholarly career, a turning point was my publication in 1983 of *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. At the time, I thought of this work as a synthesis of cognition from many disciplinary perspectives. In retrospect, I have come to understand that *Frames of Mind* differed from my earlier books. I was directly challenging the consensual view of intelligence and putting forth my own iconoclastic notions, which were ripe, in turn, for vigorous critiques. Since then, my scholarly work is better described as a series of attempts to break new ground—efforts at forging knowledge about creativity, leadership, and ethics—than as syntheses of existing work. Parenthetically, I might point out that this sequence is unusual. In the sciences, younger workers are more likely to achieve creative breakthroughs, while older ones typically pen syntheses.

In general, we look to leaders, rather than to managers, for examples of creativity. The transformational leader creates a compelling narrative about the missions of her organization or polity; embodies that narrative in her own life; and is able, through persuasion and personal example, to change the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of those whom she seeks to lead.

And what of the role of creativity in the workaday life of the professional? Major creative breakthroughs are relatively rare in accounting or engineering, in law or medicine. Indeed, one does well to be suspicious of claims that a radically new method of accounting, bridge building, surgery, prosecution, or generating energy has just been devised. Increasingly, however, rewards accrue to those who fashion small but significant changes in professional practice. I would readily apply the descriptor *creative* to the

individual who figures out how to audit books in a country whose laws have been changed and whose currency has been revalued three times in a year, or to the attorney who ascertains how to protect intellectual property under conditions of monetary (or political or social or technological) volatility.

Respectful and Ethical

As I shift focus to the last two kinds of minds, a different set of analyses becomes appropriate. The first three kinds of minds deal primarily with cognitive forms; the last two deal with our relations to other human beings. One of the last two (respectful) is more concrete; the other (ethical) is more abstract. Also, the differences across career specializations become less important: we are dealing with how human beings—be they scientists, artists, managers, leaders, craftspeople, or professionals—think and act throughout their lives. And so, here I shall try to speak to and for all of us.

Turning to respect, whether I am (or you are) writing, researching, or managing, it is important to avoid stereotyping or caricaturing. I must try to understand other persons on their own terms, make an imaginative leap when necessary, seek to convey my trust in them, and try so far as possible to make common cause with them and to be worthy of their trust. This stance does not mean that I ignore my own beliefs, nor that I necessarily accept or pardon all that I encounter. (Respect does not entail a “pass” for terrorists.) But I am obliged to make the effort, and not merely to assume that what I had once believed on the basis of scattered impressions is necessarily true. Such humility may in turn engender positive responses in others.

As I use the term, *ethics* also relates to other persons, but in a more abstract way. In taking ethical stances, an individual tries to understand his or her role as a worker and his or her role as a citizen of a region, a nation, and the planet. In my own case, I ask: What are my obligations as a scientific researcher, a writer, a manager, a leader? If I were sitting on the other side of the table, if I occupied a different niche in society, what would I have the right to expect from those “others” who research, write, manage, lead? And, to take an even wider perspective, what kind of a world would I like to live in, if, to use John Rawls’s phrase, I were cloaked in a “veil of ignorance” with respect to my ultimate position in the world? What is my responsibility in bringing such a world into being? Every reader should be able to pose, if not answer, the same set of questions with respect to his or her occupational and civic niche.

For more than a decade, I have been engaged in a large-scale study of “good work”—work that is excellent, ethical, and engaging for the participants. In the latter part of the book I draw on those studies in my accounts of the respectful and the ethical minds.

Education in the Large

When one speaks of cultivating certain kinds of minds, the most immediate frame of reference is that of education. In many ways, this frame is appropriate: after all, designated educators and licensed educational institutions bear the most evident burden in the identification and training of young minds. But we must immediately expand our vision beyond standard educational institutions. In our cultures of today—and of tomorrow—parents, peers, and media play roles at least as significant as do authorized teachers and formal schools. More and more parents “homeschool” or rely on various extra-scholastic mentors or tutors. Moreover, if any cliché of recent years rings true, it is the acknowledgment that education must be lifelong. Those at the workplace are charged with selecting individuals who appear to possess the right kinds of knowledge, skills, minds—in my terms, they should be searching for individuals who possess disciplined, synthesizing, creating, respectful, and ethical minds. But, equally, managers and leaders, directors and deans and presidents, must continue perennially to develop all five kinds of minds in themselves and—equally—in those for whom they bear responsibility.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the five minds that Gardner discusses? Why does Gardner use the term “minds” instead of “intelligences”?
2. Gardner recalls the words of Benjamin Franklin, who says, “We must indeed all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately.” What does this mean, and why does Gardner use it?
3. Which of the five minds do you think that you already possess? Which ones would you like to improve?
4. Why is respect and ethical consideration so important to Gardner? Can you think of situations in college when both of these ideas concerning social relations become important?
5. Gardner believes that schools are an important place where one develops the five minds. In what other institutions or places does this sort of development need to take place?

Writing Task

- Write an essay in which you give your own example of each of the five minds.

How to Bring Our Schools into the 21st Century

Claudia Wallis and Sonja Steptoe

Claudia Wallis graduated from Yale University in 1976 with a degree in philosophy. She began at *Time Magazine* as a writer in 1979, and served as its medical writer from 1982 through 1987. In 1987, she became the third woman in the magazine's history to be named a senior editor. Wallis is especially concerned with women's and children's issues, and she has written more than 20 cover stories for *Time*. Sonja Steptoe studied economics and journalism at the University of Missouri, and she earned a law degree from Duke University. She has written and served as editor at *Sports Illustrated*, *Time Magazine*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Steptoe has won numerous awards for her journalism including two National Magazine Awards.

Pre-Reading

Can you think of ways new technologies could be used to improve your current educational experience?

There's a dark little joke exchanged by educators with a dissident streak: Rip Van Winkle awakens in the 21st century after a hundred-year snooze and is, of course, utterly bewildered by what he sees. Men and women dash about, talking to small metal devices pinned to their ears. Young people sit at home on sofas, moving miniature athletes around on electronic screens. Older folk defy death and disability with metronomes in their chests and with hips made of metal and plastic. Airports, hospitals, shopping malls—every place Rip goes just baffles him. But when he finally walks into a schoolroom, the old man knows exactly where he is. "This is a school," he declares. "We used to have these back in 1906. Only now the blackboards are green."¹

American schools aren't exactly frozen in time, but considering the pace of change in other areas of life, our public schools tend to feel like throwbacks. Kids spend much of the day as their great-grandparents once did: sitting in rows, listening to teachers lecture, scribbling notes by hand,

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reading from textbooks that are out of date by the time they are printed. A yawning chasm (with an emphasis on yawning) separates the world inside the schoolhouse from the world outside.

For the past five years, the national conversation on education has focused on reading scores, math tests and closing the “achievement gap” between social classes. This is not a story about that conversation. This is a story about the big public conversation the nation is *not* having about education, the one that will ultimately determine not merely whether some fraction of our children get “left behind” but also whether an entire generation of kids will fail to make the grade in the global economy because they can’t think their way through abstract problems, work in teams, distinguish good information from bad or speak a language other than English.

This week the conversation will burst onto the front page, when the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, a high-powered, bipartisan assembly of Education Secretaries and business, government and other education leaders releases a blueprint for rethinking American education from pre-K to 12 and beyond to better prepare students to thrive in the global economy. While that report includes some controversial proposals, there is nonetheless a remarkable consensus among educators and business and policy leaders on one key conclusion: we need to bring what we teach and how we teach into the 21st century.

Right now we’re aiming too low. Competency in reading and math—the focus of so much No Child Left Behind (NCLB) testing—is the meager minimum. Scientific and technical skills are, likewise, utterly necessary but insufficient. Today’s economy demands not only a high-level competence in the traditional academic disciplines but also what might be called 21st century skills. Here’s what they are:

Knowing More About the World

Kids are global citizens now, even in small-town America, and they must learn to act that way. Mike Eskew, CEO of UPS, talks about needing workers who are “global trade literate, sensitive to foreign cultures, conversant in different languages”—not exactly strong points in the U.S., where fewer than half of high school students are enrolled in a foreign-language class and where the social-studies curriculum tends to fixate on U.S. history.

Thinking Outside the Box

Jobs in the new economy—the ones that won’t get outsourced or automated—“put an enormous premium on creative and innovative skills,

seeing patterns where other people see only chaos,” says Marc Tucker, an author of the skills-commission report and president of the National Center on Education and the Economy. Traditionally that’s been an American strength, but schools have become less daring in the back-to-basics climate of NCLB. Kids also must learn to think across disciplines, since that’s where most new breakthroughs are made. It’s interdisciplinary combinations—design and technology, mathematics and art—that produce YouTube and Google,” says Thomas Friedman, the best-selling author of *The World Is Flat*.

Becoming Smarter About New Sources of Information

In an age of overflowing information and proliferating media, kids need to rapidly process what’s coming at them and distinguish between what’s reliable and what isn’t. “It’s important that students know how to manage it, interpret it, validate it, and how to act on it,” says Dell executive Karen Bruett, who serves on the board of the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, a group of corporate and education leaders focused on upgrading American education.

Developing Good People Skills

EQ, or emotional intelligence, is as important as IQ for success in today’s workplace. “Most innovations today involve large teams of people,” says former Lockheed Martin CEO Norman Augustine. “We have to emphasize communication skills, the ability to work in teams and with people from different cultures.”

Can our public schools, originally designed to educate workers for agrarian life and industrial-age factories, make the necessary shifts? The skills commission will argue that it’s possible only if we add new depth and rigor to our curriculum and standardized exams, redeploy the dollars we spend on education, reshape the teaching force and reorganize who runs the schools. But without waiting for such a revolution, enterprising administrators around the country have begun to update their schools, often with ideas and support from local businesses. The state of Michigan, conceding that it can no longer count on the ailing auto industry to absorb its poorly educated and low-skilled workers, is retooling its high schools, instituting what are among the most rigorous graduation requirements in the nation. Elsewhere, organizations like the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Asia Society are pouring money and expertise into model programs to show the way.

What It Means to Be a Global Student

Quick! How many ways can you combine nickels, dimes and pennies to get \$2.04? That's the challenge for students in a second-grade math class at Seattle's John Stanford International School, and hands are flying up with answers. The students sit at tables of four manipulating play money. One boy shouts "10 plus 10"; a girl offers "10 plus 5 plus 5," only it sounds like this: "*Ju, tasu, go, tasu, go.*" Down the hall, third-graders are learning to interpret charts and graphs showing how many hours of sleep people need at different ages. "*¿ Cuantas horas duerme un bebé?*" asks the teacher Sabrina Storile. 10

This public elementary school has taken the idea of global education and run with it. All students take some classes in either Japanese or Spanish. Other subjects are taught in English, but the content has an international flavor. The school pulls its 393 students from the surrounding highly diverse neighborhood and by lottery from other parts of the city. Generally, its scores on state tests are at or above average, although those exams barely scratch the surface of what Stanford students learn.

Before opening the school seven years ago, principal Karen Kodama surveyed 1,500 business leaders on which languages to teach (plans for Mandarin were dropped for lack of classroom space) and which skills and disciplines. "No. 1 was technology," she recalls. Even first-graders at Stanford begin to use PowerPoint and Internet tools. "Exposure to world cultures was also an important trait cited by the executives," says Kodama, so that instead of circling back to the Pilgrims and Indians every autumn, children at Stanford do social-studies units on Asia, Africa, Australia, Mexico and South America. Students actively apply the lessons in foreign language and culture by videoconferencing with sister schools in Japan, Africa and Mexico, by exchanging messages, gifts and joining in charity projects.

Stanford International shows what's possible for a public elementary school, although it has the rare advantage of support from corporations like Nintendo and Starbucks, which contribute to its \$1.7 million-a-year budget. Still, dozens of U.S. school districts have found ways to orient some of their students toward the global economy. Many have opened schools that offer the international baccalaureate (LB.) program, a rigorous, off-the-shelf curriculum recognized by universities around the world and first introduced in 1968—well before globalization became a buzzword.

To earn an LB. diploma, students must prove written and spoken proficiency in a second language, write a 4,000-word college-level research paper, complete a real-world service project and pass rigorous oral and written subject exams. Courses offer an international perspective, so even

a lesson on the American Revolution will interweave sources from Britain and France with views from the Founding Fathers. “We try to build something we call international mindedness,” says Jeffrey Beard, director general of the International Baccalaureate Organization in Geneva, Switzerland. “These are students who can grasp issues across national borders. They have an understanding of nuances and complexity and a balanced approach to problem solving.” Despite stringent certification requirements, LB. schools are growing in the U.S.—from about 350 in 2000 to 682 today. The U.S. Department of Education has a pilot effort to bring the program to more low-income students.

Real Knowledge in the Google Era

Learn the names of all the rivers in South America. That was the assignment given to Deborah Stipek’s daughter Meredith in school, and her mom, who’s dean of the Stanford University School of Education, was not impressed. “That’s silly,” Stipek told her daughter. “Tell your teacher that if you need to know anything besides the Amazon, you can look it up on Google.” Any number of old-school assignments—memorizing the battles of the Civil War or the periodic table of the elements—now seem faintly absurd. That kind of information, which is poorly retained unless you routinely use it, is available at a keystroke. Still, few would argue that an American child shouldn’t learn the causes of the Civil War or understand how the periodic table reflects the atomic structure and properties of the elements. As school critic E.D. Hirsch Jr. points out in his book, *The Knowledge Deficit*, kids need a substantial fund of information just to make sense of reading materials beyond the grade-school level. Without mastering the fundamental building blocks of math, science or history, complex concepts are impossible.

Many analysts believe that to achieve the right balance between such core knowledge and what educators call “portable skills”—critical thinking, making connections between ideas and knowing how to keep on learning—the U.S. curriculum needs to become more like that of Singapore, Belgium and Sweden, whose students outperform American students on math and science tests. Classes in these countries dwell on key concepts that are taught in depth and in careful sequence, as opposed to a succession of forgettable details so often served in U.S. classrooms. Textbooks and tests support this approach. “Countries from Germany to Singapore have extremely small textbooks that focus on the most powerful and generative ideas,” says Roy Pea, co-director of the Stanford Center for Innovations in Learning. These might be the key theorems in math, the laws of thermodynamics in science or the relationship between supply and

demand in economics. America's bloated textbooks, by contrast, tend to gallop through a mind-numbing stream of topics and subtopics in an attempt to address a vast range of state standards.

Depth over breadth and the ability to leap across disciplines are exactly what teachers aim for at the Henry Ford Academy, a public charter school in Dearborn, Mich. This fall, 10th-graders in Charles Dershimer's science class began a project that combines concepts from earth science, chemistry, business and design. After reading about Nike's efforts to develop a more environmentally friendly sneaker, students had to choose a consumer product, analyze and explain its environmental impact and then develop a plan for re-engineering it to reduce pollution costs without sacrificing its commercial appeal. Says Dershimer: "It's a challenge for them and for me."

A New Kind of Literacy

The juniors in Bill Stroud's class are riveted by a documentary called *Loose Change* unspooling on a small TV screen at the Baccalaureate School for Global Education, in urban Astoria, N.Y. The film uses 9/11 footage and interviews with building engineers and Twin Towers survivors to make an oddly compelling if paranoid case that interior explosions unrelated to the impact of the airplanes brought down the World Trade Center on that fateful day. Afterward, the students—an ethnic mix of New Yorkers with their own 9/11 memories—dive into a discussion about the elusive nature of truth.

Raya Harris finds the video more convincing than the official version of the facts. Marisa Reichel objects. "Because of a movie, you are going to change your beliefs?" she demands. "Just because people heard explosions doesn't mean there were explosions. You can say you feel the room spinning, but it isn't." This kind of discussion about what we know and how we know it is typical of a theory of knowledge class, a required element for an international-baccalaureate diploma. Stroud has posed this question to his class on the blackboard: "If truth is difficult to prove in history, does it follow that all versions are equally acceptable?"

Throughout the year, the class will examine news reports, websites, propaganda, history books, blogs, even pop songs. The goal is to teach kids to be discerning consumers of information and to research, formulate and defend their own views, says Stroud, who is founder and principal of the four-year-old public school, which is located in a repurposed handbag factory.

Classes like this, which teach key aspects of information literacy, remain rare in public education, but more and more universities and employers

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say they are needed as the world grows ever more deluged with information of variable quality. Last year, in response to demand from colleges, the Educational Testing Service unveiled a new, computer-based exam designed to measure information-and-communication-technology literacy. A pilot study of the test with 6,200 high school seniors and college freshmen found that only half could correctly judge the objectivity of a website. “Kids tend to go to Google and cut and paste a research report together,” says Terry Egan, who led the team that developed the new test. “We kind of assumed this generation was so comfortable with technology that they know how to use it for research and deeper thinking,” says Egan. “But if they’re not taught these skills, they don’t necessarily pick them up.”

Learning 2.0

The chairman of Sun Microsystems was up against one of the most vexing challenges of modern life: a third-grade science project. Scott McNealy had spent hours searching the Web for a lively explanation of electricity that his son could understand. “Finally I found a very nice, animated, educational website showing electrons zooming around and tests after each section. We did this for about an hour and a half and had a ball—a great father-son moment of learning. All of a sudden we ran out of runway because it was a site to help welders, and it then got into welding.” For McNealy the experience, three years ago, provided one of life’s *aha!* moments: “It made me wonder why there isn’t a website where I can just go and have anything I want to learn, K to 12, online, browser based and free.”

His solution: draw on the Wikipedia model to create a collection of online courses that can be updated, improved, vetted and built upon by innovative teachers, who, he notes, “are always developing new materials and methods of instruction because they aren’t happy with what they have.” And who better to create such a site than McNealy, whose company has led the way in designing open-source computer software? He quickly raised some money, created a nonprofit and—*voilà!*—Curriki.org made its debut January 2006, and has been growing fast. Some 450 courses are in the works, and about 3,000 people have joined as members. McNealy reports that a teenager in Kuwait has already completed the introductory physics and calculus classes in 18 days.

Curriki, however, isn’t meant to replace going to school but to supplement it and offer courses that may not be available locally. It aims to give teachers classroom-tested content materials and assessments that are livelier and more current and multimedia-based than printed textbooks. Ultimately, it could take the Web 2.0 revolution to school, closing that yawning gap between how kids learn at school and how they do everything else.

Educators around the country and overseas are already discussing ways to certify Curriki's online course work for credit.

Some states are creating their own online courses. "In the 21st century, the ability to be a lifelong learner will, for many people, be dependent on their ability to access and benefit from online learning," says Michael Flanagan, Michigan's superintendent of public instruction, which is why Michigan's new high school graduation requirements, which roll out next year, include completing at least one course online. 25

A Dose of Reality

Teachers need not fear that they will be made obsolete. They will, however, feel increasing pressure to bring their methods—along with the curriculum—into line with the way the modern world works. That means putting a greater emphasis on teaching kids to collaborate and solve problems in small groups and apply what they've learned in the real world. Besides, research shows that kids learn better that way than with the old chalk-and-talk approach.

At suburban Farmington High in Michigan, the engineering-technology department functions like an engineering firm, with teachers as project managers, a Ford Motor Co. engineer as a consultant and students working in teams. The principles of calculus, physics, chemistry and engineering are taught through activities that fill the hallways with a cacophony of nailing, sawing and chattering. The result the kids learn helps them to apply academic principles to the real world, think strategically and solve problems.

Such lessons also teach students to show respect for others as well as to be punctual, responsible and work well in teams. Those skills were badly missing in recently hired high school graduates, according to a survey of over 400 human-resource professionals conducted by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. "Kids don't know how to shake your hand at graduation," says Rudolph Crew, superintendent of the Miami-Dade school system. Department, he notes, used to be on the report card. Some of the nation's more forward-thinking schools are bringing it back. It's one part of 21st-century education that sleepy old Rip would recognize.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the reference to Rip Van Winkle. In what ways do you see school as "frozen in time"?
2. What skills do the authors believe American students need to learn to excel in the modern world? Can you give examples where these skills are taught?

3. What do the authors mean by “thinking outside the box”? Can you give examples where education is behind technology?
4. Why is it increasingly important for today’s students to know more about the world? Can you give specific examples where such knowledge would be particularly helpful?
5. Why is it more important than ever to be able to distinguish the quality and credibility of new sources of information?
6. Define what Jeffrey Beard means by “international mindedness.”
7. Discuss the difference between “core” knowledge and “portable skills.” How should they work together?
8. In your view, what is a better method of learning: amassing a large supply of details about lots of topic or concentrating on key ideas and events?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of online learning?

Writing Tasks

- Discuss the advantages or disadvantages of on-line education as compared to the traditional model.
- Write an essay that takes on an issue debated on a web log or blog. Be sure to incorporate and evaluate the diverse opinions expressed in the blog discussion.

Making Connections

1. Consider the points that Howard Gardner raises in “Five Minds for the Future.” Do you think that Claudia Wallis’s and Sonja Steptoe’s discussion of the evolution of education in a global context in “How to build a Student for the 21st Century” addresses his concerns? Explain in detail.
2. Drawing from the ideas in your readings, especially Bilal Rahmani’s “Chronicles of a Once Pessimistic College Freshmen,” discuss the ways that the educational system does not meet the needs of students who are going to college.
3. Write an argumentative essay in which you offer your own reflections on what makes a high performance school and a successful student. Be sure to address some of the issues raised in at least two of the articles in this chapter. Feel free to offer your own experiences to support and develop your positions.

