

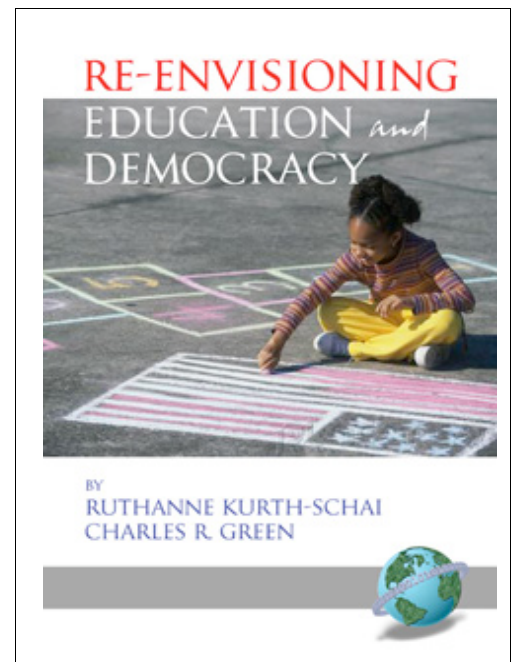
Re-Envisioning Education and Democracy

by

Ruthanne Kurth-Schai and Charles R. Green

Macalester College

The fate of public education and therefore the future of our democracy is at risk. Powerful forces are eroding commitment to public schools and weakening democratic resolve. Yet even in deeply troubling times, it is possible to broaden social imagination and empower efforts toward systemic progressive reform. This book is an invitation for widespread participation in a complex process—*re-envisioning education and democracy*. To *re-envision*—to envision and then envision again—is to join with others in imagining new possibilities and bringing these into existence. Re-envisioning is a radically *social* process. Although distinct and varied individual contributions are required, transformative visions cannot be advanced through the agency of one charismatic person, or bound by one influential perspective. The process of re-envisioning, like all forms of democratic living and learning, draws energy and insight when connection and communion are sustained across dimensions of difference. Re-envisioning is an intensely *creative* and *exploratory* process. It is not accomplished through careful construction of “best laid plans” aimed at attaining certainty and control. Re-envisioning is instead experienced and evolved by preparing for, and then acting on, informed and strategic glimpses. These brief and fleeting impressions—multi-modal and multi-sensory, incomplete and ambiguous, always in motion—offer potentials, but no definitive answers. Re-envisioning is a profoundly *ethical* and *aesthetic* process, centered in prospects for social justice, compassion, reform, and renewal. Social movements are rarely motivated by commitments to narrow objectives aimed at solving specific problems. Across time and cultures we are drawn to persons and processes, to ideas and images, that call us back to remember our highest principles, and move us forward to respond with acts of integrity and grace. Recurrent themes of beauty and power—here mirrored in chapter titles—inspire, guide, and liberate collective vision and principled action. Re-envisioning, although accessible to all, remains largely undeveloped and underutilized. Our collective ability to realize progressive aspirations for education and democracy can be significantly enhanced by integrating the process of re-envisioning with other, more familiar, educational and political reform strategies.



2006

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-59311-562-3 \$34.95

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-59311-563-0- \$69.95

Published by:

**Information Age Publishing Inc., PO Box 4967, Greenwich, CT 06831
Tel: 203-661-7602 Fax: 203-661-7952 URL: www.infoagepubl.com**

Table of Contents

Prelude

Chapter 1 Reform

Given the importance afforded throughout our history to foundational concepts of ‘education’ and ‘democracy’, why does the gap between our aspirations and our achievements persist?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Conversational Reading

Chapter 2 Crisis

Given the exploratory nature of learning and democratic living, why do we focus our reform efforts on acquiring greater certainty and control?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Anticipatory Thank You Notes

Chapter 3 Reflection

Given the daunting challenges of change, how can we draw from, yet move beyond pivotal setbacks?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Ethnographic Futures Interviews

Chapter 4 Intuition

Given the dimensions and dynamics of contemporary social and educational concerns, what, beyond rational problem solving, is necessary?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Visualization

Chapter 5 Inquiry

Given prevailing philosophic and pragmatic commitments to individualism, what is the meaning and purpose of social learning?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Cultural Futures Delphi

Chapter 6 Advocacy

Given long standing commitments to equity and participation, what does it mean to share power?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Interactive Website

Chapter 7 Imagination

Given commitments to deeper democracy in schools and society, how can we develop feasible collective visions?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Strategic Narratives

Chapter 8 Risk

Given the costs and consequences of failure, how can we responsibly risk innovation in an increasingly dangerous world?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Public Intellectual Essays

Chapter 9 Inspiration

Given the relentless demands of democratic learning and life, where can we find sources of renewal?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Social Poetry

Chapter 10 Courage

Given intensive and inevitable resistance to systemic, democratic reform, how can we persist in the face of pressures to diminish aspirations or concede defeat?

Exploratory Democratic Practice: Oracles

Coda