



New York Cultural Center

## Freedom of Education and its Enemies

The new challenges and opportunities faced by independent educational institutions in the United States

**Speakers:**     **Dr. Charles Glenn** — Chairman of Administration, Training, and Policy, School of Education,  
Boston University  
                  **The Honorable Martin J. Golden** — State Senator of New York  
                  **Mr. Christopher Bacich** — National Youth Coordinator for Communion and Liberation

Wednesday, April 26, 2006, 7:00PM  
Main Hall Room 408, at Teachers College, Columbia University  
525 West 120th Street, New York

*\*transcript not reviewed by the speakers*

**Joe Wiener:** Good evening. On behalf of Crossroads New York Cultural Center I would like to welcome you all to tonight's panel discussion on freedom of education. A special thanks to the Columbia Campus Ministry that helped us to organize this event.

Before we start, I would just like to point out that for us education is not merely one of many themes to discuss, but rather the fundamental theme, implicitly or explicitly, of all our activities. As we wrote in our mission statement, "Crossroads aims to be, above all, a place where education takes place, that is, where we may learn to look with openness, curiosity and critical judgment at every aspect of reality." This is not meant to be just a statement of principle but also a judgment on what we regard as the crucial problem of our age, namely that we live in a society that finds it progressively difficult to pass a living tradition on to the next generation, both in terms of method and of content. In the words of the late Msgr. Luigi Giussani, "the fundamental idea in the education of the young is the fact that it is through the younger generations that society successively rebuilds itself; therefore the primary concern of society is to teach the young. *This is the opposite of what currently happens.*" Even if this diagnosis is usually not expressed as clearly, I think that today you can see many intelligent people reach essentially the same conclusion in the form of a deep uneasiness in front of the way the media and academia face the problem of education. While everybody seems to acknowledge that education *is* a problem, it seems that our society does not have a clear sense of what *education is*. The conclusion is that the problem of education is ultimately delegated to the "experts" and to the government, with questionable outcomes.

On the contrary, we think that education is *our task*, as parents, as neighbors, as citizens, as communities. A real education can only spring from the life of a people. It requires a shared tradition, a living community and a passion to free our children from mental slavery to the winds of the age. For this reason, we have chosen *freedom of education* as the topic of tonight's discussion. Ultimately, either education springs from the passion and the desire of each of us, or it will not happen. This statement does not diminish in any way the crucial role of professional educators and of state institutions. But we need to emphasize that if education is the task of society to rebuild itself by *educating the humanity of our children* (again in the words of Fr. Giussani), then the necessary precondition for this process is freedom. To help us assess the status of freedom of education today, we have with us tonight three outstanding panelists. I leave the introductions to Ms. Michelle Riconscente, who is herself a young "expert" on educational issues and has kindly agreed to act as our moderator.

**Glenn:** I'm tempted to abandon what I was planning to say because of the quote by Luigi Giussani. On the train coming down I read a book I've been waiting for for a long time – Philip Rieff's new book after a silence of some 30 years. You know he wrote *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, and a wonderful book, *Debunking Freud*. His new book is called *My Life among the Deaf Works*, and I won't attempt to explain his argument which I only partially understand. But any of you interested in this question, why we have a particularly toxic culture, one in which, in the arts, in education, in a number of realms, a deliberate assault on a whole tradition of moral coherence, a belief in the existence of a truth that one can at least approximate, a systematic negation of the dignity of the human person....All of that Rieff, who is a very distinguished Jewish sociologist addresses those issues in a way which is actually very consistent with the books by Giussani which I've read. So I recommend that strongly.

But I want to talk about schools tonight. I think that's what you want me to address. In addition to what Michelle mentioned, I have much more important experience about schools – I have seven children, and I'm a Protestant, by the way. And among them, those seven children have attended eight different public schools in Boston, and also eight different private schools – a Jesuit high school, several evangelical schools, several non-religious private schools – so altogether I've experienced 16 schools as a parent, both public and private schools.

Ten days ago I was at Princeton University for a conference on School Choice in other countries, and the other American professor speaking was from Teachers College, where we sit tonight, Hank Levin, who I've known for many years – an economist, a distinguished professor of education, a strong opponent of parent choice of schools, and he heads a center here at Teachers College for the Study of Privatization of Education which you should not take to mean a center which is supportive of the privatization of education. In fact, his efforts largely are gathering evidence that tends to argue against the idea that it is appropriate that the parents be able to choose the schools which their children attend.

Now I mentioned that I have seven children. For 30 years straight I had children in the Boston public schools. I had children in the Boston public schools because as a matter of conscience I felt that I should have my children in the schools which poor parents had no choice but to have their children in since I was responsible for urban education in our state. But I had a choice and I was able to use my ability to choose among public schools, to take advantage of school choice arrangement, and then when public schools were not working out, to choose non-public schools as my wife and I thought was best for our children. The French call that *zapping*. They use what they think is an English word to describe the behavior of millions of French parents who, although the country's highly secularized, as you know, make heavy use of Catholic schools, especially when their children are experiencing difficulty in the state schools. And of course the French government, despite being itself highly secular, funds the cost of Catholic schools entirely, as does the government of Ontario, the government of Australia, the government of the Netherlands, Belgium, England....Almost every country in the western world funds the schools that parents choose, whether those be religious schools or non-religious schools. The United States is the great exception. Italy is also, as Michelle knows, largely an exception, although it's changing at this point.

Hank Levin's main point at Princeton was that the evidence seemed to show that parents, particularly poor parents, don't choose schools on the basis of having a lot of evidence about academic outcomes in schools. And he argued that that meant the case for parent choice of schools fell to the ground because parents were not, in fact, using data based on outcomes. I mentioned in my remarks that strolling across the beautiful Princeton campus I saw many bright young undergraduates. I wondered how many of them had chosen Princeton because they had evidence about the test scores of Princeton students. In fact, we choose schools for a whole range of reasons.

It is, I would argue, the responsibility of government to ensure that every school is adequate. Government has a responsibility to protect children. I could put it another way and say society has a responsibility to protect children, and we intervene even at times in individual families if children are at risk. And so we do have a shared responsibility as a society to make sure that every school is adequate. We don't want there to be any bad schools. But having said that, the right of parents to choose among schools which are adequate on the basis of whatever considerations are meaningful to them is a fundamental human right. And I'm not just asserting that. It's a right which is explicitly stated in the International Covenant of Human Rights for 1948, in the more recent international human rights agreements which our nation and others have signed on to, it's a right which the US Supreme Court asserted as long ago as 1925, it's a right beyond question for parents to make decisions about what school they want their children to attend. That doesn't mean that there's a right to have your child attend a harmful school, a school that in some way will harm your child, anymore than you have a right to harm your child in the privacy of your

home. But given the adequacy of schools, parents have an absolute right to make that decision.

Now they make that choice on the basis of different kinds of factors. I've tried to collect the evidence from a number of countries, and any research which has been done in any of the countries which I've studied that surveys parents to try to find out why they choose the schools they choose. Parents, as you might expect, choose on the basis of the religious character of the school. And that's even the case with parents who are not themselves active believers. I mentioned already that in France the rate of children attending Catholic schools is much higher than the rate of people attending Catholic church on Sunday. In the Netherlands, 70% of the children attend non-public schools funded by the state, almost all of them either Protestant or Catholic. The Dutch, like other western Europeans, have largely abandoned church going, and yet they still choose religious schools. The surveys find that they choose religious schools because somehow they have a confidence that those are going to be schools that will care about their children, that there's some sort of a culture in the school which they can entrust their child to. Above all, parents want a school that will be a caring place, where those involved with their children will not simply be processing them which is one reason why the bureaucratic organization of school systems is almost always a mistake as here in New York City. I remember a number of years ago I suppose the toughest audience I've ever had to address was more than 100 New York City high school principals. What a tough crowd! And you'd have to be tough to survive operating schools within a system as highly bureaucratized as this one is.

Now, I'm not here to knock the public schools. As you know, I put my own children through the Boston public schools, (often my children would be the only white child in his or her class) for 30 years straight. I've known wonderful staff and administrators in public schools in cities across Massachusetts and other cities where I've worked across the country like Chicago, San Diego, Albuquerque, Mobile, Philadelphia and Wilmington.

But a bureaucratic form of organization does not lend itself to what parents most want for their children. Now bureaucracy is a very good thing, in its place. When you go to get your drivers license renewed, you want to be dealt with in a bureaucratic manner; that is, you want to be dealt with rationally, fairly, on the basis simply of the facts and not who you know, whose relative you are, or whether the clerk likes your looks. That's what bureaucracy intended to do, that is to operate in a routine, rational and fair way. But what we want for our children is that their teachers be crazy about them. That is, we want for our children that they not just be dealt with routinely, but that they be dealt with somehow personally, dealt with as someone who matters, who matters individually because of who they are. And that's why schools that are freely chosen by parents, and freely chosen by the teachers who work in them, very commonly have a culture which is extremely sustaining to kids.

I suppose the issue that I've been most involved with for 30 years or more is the achievement gap between white and black kids in American schools. That was a main part of my job with the state, and just three years ago, I and others began an inner city private school in Boston, an evangelical school, a high school, aimed particularly at trying to provide a culture so powerful, so attractive, so engaging that the young people enrolled in that school would be strengthened to believe in themselves and to resist the great downward suck of the culture, the great downward suck of the streets. And schools that are freely chosen can have that character. It's not about reading scores, although I do think that reading scores are more likely to go up as well. And reading scores, by the way, are very important. It's not about anything you can test, although I'm a strong believer in "No Child Left Behind" once we fix it, and other ways to hold accountability for outcomes. It is, however, about education, education as distinguished from instruction. Education is the formation of the human being.

Friday I'll be giving a talk – we're just inaugurating a new president at Boston University and their symposium I'm involved in on diversity at the university, that is, what the university should be doing about diversity—and I'm going to say that precisely because large American universities are now so incredibly diverse, (and of course Boston University needs to become more diverse in terms of serving under-represented groups, but that's a different issue) in terms of the diversity which we already have which is incredible, with students preparing themselves for hundreds of different careers, students coming from hundreds of different kinds of backgrounds—religious, cultural, ethnic, national, family structure, all the incredible differences which exist within the university—makes it all the more important that we emphasize some things in common, that we not simply be a shopping mall in which you go and choose your particular specialty, that we be a place that stands for something, that we be an institution that is characterized by a concern for character, commitment, loyalty—the good old Aristotelian virtues which we should feel we can talk about without apology. And that's what schools need to be doing. And that's what so many American public schools don't feel they are entitled to do. They engage in what I

call, “the bland leading the bland.” They’re so afraid of anyone being offended by anything that is said.

At Boston University we have a Center for the Promotion of Ethics and Character in Schools because we think it’s not enough to talk about values, we think we need to talk about virtues; we think we need to talk about character. And it is schools for the freely chosen by parents, by teachers, that are free to be distinctive in that way, to stand for something. By the way, because they stand for something, also not to stand for many of the kinds of behaviors and express attitudes that kids often feel free to express at schools. Schools that stand for something are places that develop character.

Well, let me close with a last word about the question which I think I often hear—I certainly heard it down at the Princeton conference—the idea is that religious schools in particular are somehow dangerous, that they will somehow divide the society, that it’s essential that precisely because we are a very diverse society, we have everyone together in school where they can learn to appreciate one another and so forth and so on.... Well, sadly, empirically, bringing kids together in a school that doesn’t stand for something does not lead to their having enhanced respect for one another. In fact, one of the things we found when we desegregated Boston and other school systems is that it actually made racial attitudes worse among the kids because they were not doing it on a voluntary basis. We then changed our strategy and in other Massachusetts cities we desegregated through voluntary measures, through what we called “controlled choice” in which we abolished attendance districts and every pupil attended school based on a process of parent choice, and the results in terms of improved respect in racial climate and achievement was much better than they had been when we did it on a mandatory basis.

Amy Goodman, the now President of the University of Pennsylvania, wrote a book a few years ago called *A Democratic Education* which is very widely used in education schools which argues that even though she concedes private schools may do a better job educating pupils, they even do a better job on reducing the black/white achievement gap, even so, Goodman says, “only the public school can really create citizens.” Now that’s a completely unempirically verified statement. In fact, there’s been a massive amount of research about graduates of Catholic schools in the United States which finds that, if anything, they are more loyal citizens, more inclined to volunteer, so forth and so on, than are the graduates of public high schools. Then what about evangelical and (hold your hat) fundamentalist schools? Aren’t they very dangerous? Well Alan Peshkin, and I’m an evangelical, let me say, Alan Peshkin, the very distinguished Jewish sociologist in education, studied a fundamentalist Christian academy in Illinois for a whole year. He did it because he thought such schools were a terrible idea. He found to his surprise that the kids in that high school were not only completely normal when he surveyed them on various issues, and then surveyed the kids in a local public high school, he found the kids in what he called “Bethany” the fundamentalist school, were more racially tolerant than the kids in the local high school, and were just as willing to accept, for example, an atheist giving a public lecture in that town, or other kinds of things that you would expect they might have had their minds poisoned against. No one has been able to come up with evidence that says that kids who attend religious schools come out weird, that it harms them. James Dwyer, a professor at Cornell, wrote a book that argues that girls, young women, who attend Catholic schools are fated to be sexually frigid all their lives. What research did he base that on? None! Just the fevered imaginings of his own mind. Right? Obviously it isn’t true. And as I say, this is a lie we need to confront every time we hear it.

Freedom is supported by institutional pluralism. In a free society, individuals have a free association to create institutions that reflect their own convictions. In the common square, they’re obligated to behave as citizens according to common rules, but they have every right to create institutions that are separate, and, as Mary Ann Glendon of Harvard Law School has pointed out, it is those institutions, commonly, within which character and other traits which make a good citizenship, are developed. Those civil society institutions freely chosen are where we become good citizens.

**Golden:** Good evening. I apologize for being late. We were in the process of overriding vetoes in Albany today against our governor, and unfortunately one of those vetoes was a tax credit for education. And we overrode the governor’s veto on that, and we didn’t get exactly what we were looking to get. I started out with a 400 million dollar education tax credit, and because of bureaucracies and unions and others, we wound up with a 600 million dollar child care tax credit. So I got 200 million dollars more than I started with, so I should be very happy about that, but would you imagine that here in 2006 that we as a state would not want to ear-mark 600 million dollars to education? We could’ve done that. We failed in our responsibility. 600 million dollars is good. People will be able to buy basketball tickets with it, kids, ipods, you name it, but the money will not have to be dedicated to education,

so in that part of it, I believe we've failed. But I'm happy to have 600 million dollars, because if we left it in the hands of government, they would've spent it some other way. So at least you as the parents of children, those that are the parents of children, and those of you who are attending school and parents are paying, (the tax credit goes from 4 to 17 years of age), so even the bulk of the audience here, their parents will not get the opportunity for that tax credit. So I apologize for that as well. First, why I was late.

Who am I? Senator Marty Golden, grew up in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, the oldest of eight children. My parents came from Ireland. They came here and we were extremely poor. We worked hard. My father was the superintendent of many apartment buildings. We all chipped in. We all worked at different jobs to be able to make it happen here in the city of New York. Being the oldest of eight, I understood that if you wanted to be the best fed, you were the first to the dinner table, and if you wanted to be the best dressed, you were the first one up, because there were eight of us in ten years, and if you can fathom that, Mom was quite busy. We had two sets of Irish twins—those are two kids born the same year, not the same time. So it was very difficult, and we had a great, great upbringing. I attended Catholic schools. I went to St. Patrick's and Our Lady of Angel's in Bay Ridge. Believe it or not I went to William E. Grady as a high school and a New York school of printing. In those years, growing up in the 1960s and 70s, what you would do was look to find a trade. This was a great trade town and a great town for unions. And our parents bred in us to become involved in unions and to become involved in a trade. Well, the printing trade left New York in 1974, and I went on to Staten Island Community College, and to a Catholic College, I went on to St. John's, and went on to become a New York City police officer, was hurt in the line of duty in 1983, was run down in a drug sale, broke my arm and my legs—the ligaments were removed from my legs—I was forced to retire and I opened up a business, a catering hall in Bay Ridge, and a restaurant, and our family still owns the catering hall. And I got the privilege to run for the city council in 1997, became a city councilman in 1998, and in 2002 had a second privilege of going on to the New York State Senate to represent the City of New York in the New York State Senate. I have two little guys, believe it or not. I'm 26 years married and I got two little guys. One is seven years of age and goes to a Lutheran school, and I have a 14 year old who goes to Xaverian High School, and what a headache he's becoming to them. No, hopefully not.

Education was very important growing up, and it's very important for the City of New York. I can go into budgets, and I can go on for a very long period of time, but I don't want to do that. So I'm going to try to be specific in education. And I'm going to try to be specific to the time I entered—there was an 8 billion dollar budget for the Board of Education in 1998 in this city. We got 8 billion dollars for education. When Rudy Giuliani was mayor, within a four year period, it went up almost a billion dollars a year. To this date, up to now, we are up to around 14 billion dollars, from eight to 14. This year alone, the highest money ever delivered to education was delivered this year, in this budget that we just adopted, that we just overrode the governor's vetoes on today, will be the highest amount of money going into education into this city and into this state, into any city or state in the nation or in the world; nobody has put this type of money into education. They guys who get credit for that? Mayor Bloomberg, Mayor Michael Bloomberg gets a credit for taking the lead and trying to address the concerns here in the City of New York. Mayor Giuliani before him, the same, gets credit. The governor of the State of New York, he too gets credit because he has seen the need to put money into education.

What is our problem here in the City of New York? The problem is that we have 1.1 million children attending schools—the highest number student body in the world attending schools in an 8 and a half million body city, 1.1 million, and we speak 140 languages in this city. In the community I represent, we have 66 languages spoken in our schools and in our hospitals. I represent Bay Ridge, Dyker, Bensonhurst, Sheepshead Bay, Gravesend, Borough Park, Midwood, Garretson Beach, Marine Park, a little bit of Flatbush—so I've got the southwest side of Brooklyn. Some pretty big numbers—66 languages. There's a big dynamic in education. How do you educate, and how do you deliver education when you have that number of languages, and I didn't even get into special ed, which is about 25% of the student population—20 to 25% of the student population in Region 7, Districts 20 and 21 in the Borough of Brooklyn. So there's another dynamic that we have to try to deal with. So this mayor and the one after said we have to try to get more money delivered to schools. And we all agreed more money should be delivered to schools and the education level has to rise.

I represent the best schools in the City of New York. I represent, like I said, schools in Bay Ridge and Marine Park. Do you recognize that these schools here are the top in the city? They're like 3, 4, 5 is the ranking in the entire City of New York. Those are the best school districts. Four years ago, 50% of my children in 20 and 21 and 22, could not read and do math at grade level. 50% of my children in 20 and 21 and 22, could not read and do math at grade

level, and we are the best in the City of New York. What does that say about education? It says, we have some serious issues and some serious problems. So that's why I fought to deliver more dollars to education.

Again, in the areas I represent, we're probably number 3 in the City of New York as to overcrowded. I have one school, Fort Hamilton High School, that has 5,000 kids in it. The C of O is 2,800. So we have 5,000 kids attending a school that should have 2,800 kids. The only school, the only building in the City of New York that took trailers, you know those trailers that they have outside, they actually made them permanent. They went in, they built brick around them, and they made them permanent to the building. They became part of the C of O. I've never seen that done, cause you don't need architectural plans here in the City of New York, the Department of Building does not regulate the construction going on in the New York school system. That's just one. My other high school is New Utrecht. 1,600 is the C of O; they've got 3,000. The list goes on.

So I have an overcrowded school system. I have a school system that can't educate—50% of its students can't read and do math at grade level. The Mayor of the City of New York says we've got to change that. And by God, he did. We've done that. We've added money. And right now we're going to build a school in Sunset Park to alleviate some of the over-crowding; it's going to take years, though—it's going to take at least 2 to 3 years to do that. We'll build smaller schools to also deal with the over-crowding. We'll do grades 6 through 12, not 6, 7 and 8. We'll take our middle schools and go 6, 7 and 8 right through 12, through our high schools and try and get them together, which is a very good idea. We would also love to take our high schools—9, 10, 11 and 12—and when you get out after 4 years of high school, that you have a 2-year degree in college. That is something I'm working on right now with our CUNY system. So there are different approaches that I'm taking to help the public education system here in New York. Grade levels have risen about 4 to 5 percentage points which means that my kids now are up to about 55% in reading and math at grade level, and 45% cannot. That's pretty sad, right? In 2006.

So, along comes opportunities which I believe we should take advantage of, and among them is charter schools. We did not get charter schools passed in this budget. We are at the maximum that you can have here in the City of New York and the State of New York. So we are fighting to make sure that charter schools have the opportunity to increase their numbers to 250 charter schools from the number that we have right now, which is 100. We've reached our cap. We can't open up any more charter schools in the city or state of New York. We're at 100; we want to be able to go to 250. We're going to try to raise that. We're going to fight to get that to happen. Charter schools is no longer a pilot project or a test. Pilot projects are gone, tests are gone. These charter schools are about 4,500 of them across the country, and some will say, "This one doesn't work," or "That one doesn't work." What happens to a charter school when it doesn't work? It closes. So I believe we have opportunities with charter schools and we should look to create more charter schools. It alleviates the over-crowding, it gives a balance of education, and it gives opportunity and hope to families across the city and state of New York—more so in the City of New York.

Tax Credits. There is no reason that we as a city or state cannot allow for an education tax credit that should be able to go to the parents of children so that they can make the decision where they best could spend that dollar to educate their child—whether it be for SAT, whether it be for after-school tutorial, whether it be for weekend programs—whatever that parent decides that money could be used for to educate their child, that's where that money should be spent, and it should be up to the parent to spend that money. I have a \$3,000.00 tax credit that we started off with, \$1,500.00 per child, a maximum of 2 children per family, a maximum of \$3,000.00 per family. The governor took a look at our proposal and he came in with a 400 million dollar tax credit instead of the \$1,500.00 or maximum \$3,000.00 per family. My tax credit would have cost the tax payer 1.2 billion dollars. So the governor cut it back to 400 million, and the assembly and my colleagues turned that 400 million around and made it 600 million, but would not allow it to go to education. They'd get it as a child care tax credit which allows parents to make the decisions where they want to spend it, but it doesn't have to go to education. It should've had to go to education.

This year we will put in and have 11.2 billion dollars to build schools. 11.2 billion dollars. 1.8 this year which will rebuild and build 21 schools over the 5 year period that 11.2 billion dollars will rebuild, refurbish and build 68 new schools here in the City of New York. They will have tens of thousands of classrooms' additional seats that will reduce the over-crowding in our schools and reduce the over-crowding in our classrooms, but it will take years to do that, years. Generations of children will be passed. We have an opportunity. We further that opportunity. I believe we can go back at it again, and we can try again next year to dedicate the money to an education tax credit, to go out and get charter schools to allow the competition to allow the system to breed, to see our families with the

opportunities to make the best decisions for their children, for their futures, by allowing them to have both charter schools and an education tax credit.

I know I came in late, and I know I was all over the lot, but I wanted to try to give you a focus of what we were doing and make sure [I allow] the opportunity for the other speakers to have their say as well. I will tell you that according to the CFE funding, I'm sure everybody knows what the CFE funding lawsuit is all about; I'm not going to go into that, but we did put towards operating here in the City of New York over 1 billion dollars of which we, the City of New York will get close to 600 million dollars in operating, the highest number ever, for our public schools. But yet we couldn't allow for that 600 million dollar education tax credit. We could've done so much better had we done that.

So ladies and gentlemen, thank you. I will close in saying that opportunity and hope is alive here in the city and state of New York, and as I started in my opening statement, there is no city or state in the nation or in the world that is taking on this task of educating their children as well as this city and state. They have put their money where their mouth is, and they're out there on a day-to-day basis trying to improve this system, and I believe that they will at the end of the day, but we need education tax credits, and we need charter schools to enhance this system, and to make the system better. Thank you.

**Bacich:** I want to talk to you this evening about why education, freedom of education, is important, not so much from the point of view of policy or from the point of view of freedom of choice. I would rather speak to you about why freedom of education is important for education in order to do what we set out to do when we say we want to educate somebody. And as Prof. Glenn alluded to earlier, not just train somebody or pass on certain skills to somebody. What I'm going to say is taken from my experience as a teacher for many years, and somebody who's been interested in education since he was an undergraduate, and also from the thought, in particular, of Luigi Giussani, whose books are also here.

The first thing I want to start out with is: What is the goal of education? When we talk about education, so many things are thrown at us as possible goals—numbers, social skills, the need to make sure that our pluralistic society operates in a fashion that is respectful of human persons of different beliefs and different races, etc... But what, if we had to say what is the ultimate goal of education. The ultimate goal of education is reality. It is an introduction to reality. In fact, in one of Msgr. Giussani's books he quotes Josef Jungmann who speaks of education as being an introduction to total reality, to the entirety of reality. I wanted to start here because in the world of education, (and I feel as though I may be shot here any time being at Teachers College) philosophers and educational experts often times doubt the existence of the real, and argue that we can never know it. In fact, I was reading Jerome Bruner's book *The Culture of Education*, and one of his tenets is constructivism. He quotes Nelson Goodman who says, "Reality is made, not found." These kinds of affirmations can be made by educational experts as we can try to set up systems that encourage education to a kind of system of thought, but in fact these affirmations are always contradicted in the lives of the people who profess them. In fact, from this point of view, those who refuse to admit the existence of the real, or the possibility of knowing it, and to say that we construct the real is to say that we never know the real. They represent the first core group of enemies because the topic was *Freedom of Education and its Enemies*. This represents, if you ask me, the first core group of enemies to freedom of education—people who deny the real, and people who deny the possibility to know the real, the people who say that we construct the real, that the real is a mental imposition upon whatever is outside of us. In fact, we shouldn't even really talk about it because we talk about something which in the end we never know because what we know is our own minds. What we know is the meaning which we construct and the impressions that we receive from outside. For this reason then, education gets reduced to mean the construction of the perfect lens through which to see, again, what we can't even really call reality, or education becomes the perfect tool by means of which to order what is outside of ourselves. Instead, I claim that education has as its goal reality, and that entry into it, capacity to evaluate it, and establish relationships with it that are appropriate to its nature and my own—this is the goal of education. In fact, everything about our origins as a person shows us that we depend upon reality. No one can have claimed to have planned or arranged or set as a goal her own existence, neither at her bodily level, nor at the level of her consciousness, no matter how one defines the word consciousness. No one can claim to have brought herself into existence. Therefore, our own existences as individuals come from a dependence upon reality. So no position that denies the existence of the real or our possibility of knowing it can adequately explain the relationship between our consciousness and our origins.

This is the other thing. We experience ourselves as a reality. We experience our very selves as a reality. And also the reality of ourselves must be part of the educational process, must be looked at. And this young person must be introduced to the reality of herself because the reality of herself is also the subject of a discovery.

Now the importance of this affirmation becomes clear when we reflect upon what we mean when we use the word “I” because as I said before, the I too makes up part of this reality. If now, off the cuff, I were to attempt a very rough and tumble definition of what this word “I” indicates, I would use the word “emptiness.” This I is empty, and it seeks fullness. It seeks completion. It seeks satisfaction from the Latin which means “be made full.” So if we’re to be truthful about this emptiness in search of fulfillment, we indicate when we use the word “I”, we must admit that I seek a fulfillment outside myself. It is the very nature of this thing that I call “I”, the motor of this thing that I call “I”; the energy of this thing that I call “I”, is something that thrusts me into reality. It doesn’t thrust me into my head. It thrusts me into reality. From this point of view, education can’t be separated from this dynamic because it’s always the human person who seeks to indicate part of a road to fulfillment. Even if I want to teach you English because you’re an immigrant, it’s because I want to teach you something that I think is valuable to you; i.e., will help you on the road to your personal fulfillment. We cannot separate education from the fact that whenever one person seeks to educate another person, he seeks to help the other person on her road to fulfillment. And so much ado is made in our society about proof playing, and I think that we should talk more about fulfillment playing when it comes to education because really what education is about is about fulfillment playing, and about the fact that without, for example, success in certain areas of life, fulfillment is made impossible or very difficult. Indeed, a true education must address as its primary concern the need for fulfillment. What makes up this need? What characteristics does this need possess? What are the demands of this need for fulfillment? What responsibility does the person have toward this need for fulfillment? These are all aspects of a truly human education. To avoid talking about this need for fulfillment is to avoid talking about what the human person is. It is to avoid education. It is to skirt the real problem that the human person faces when she comes into contact with reality—not the speculative question, what is the nature of reality? But, how does this make me happy? But how do I find fulfillment in that mysterious land I call reality?

Given this situation, we see that the I must depend on reality because the I finds itself at the mercy of reality. In fact, in all ancient civilizations you see in one way or another, the idea of fortune, chance, luck. And yes, the person may be very talented, may have a great drive, a great will. The person may have tremendous abilities, but without fortune, without being in the right place at the right time, it’s all for naught. In ancient civilizations you have this sense that even the most talented person in front of reality without the “chance,” is nothing. This sense of dependence upon reality, a sense that, far from being the measure, far from being the administrator of reality, the person is instead dependent upon reality for his or her satisfaction.

From this point of view, a real education demands an authority. The first level of dependence for the young person is a human authority. A young person needs an authority. To train teachers to basically not exist in a classroom is to frustrate....

...with which the student can measure reality and begin to establish a relationship for herself. Constructivism in education does not lead to the spontaneous generation of new and provocative meanings to reality. What constructivism does is it leads to the enslavement of the student, to those who hold power at any given historical moment because it’s very difficult if everybody in the room is building towers with the red leggos, it’s very difficult to imagine building a car with the red leggos. Why? Because the meaning that you are exposed to for that element of reality influences you. And so, living in a society which has become so incredibly acute in its ability to communicate information—the young person does not grow up in a vacuum, but to pretend that the classroom is going to be a vacuum where the student can generate meaning, is to engage in a fantasy, because when the kid leaves the classroom, he has the TV, he has the Internet, he has the PSP, he has his friends, he has the world—a world which is constantly presenting to him possibilities for meaning in ever more violent fashions, I would say.

So if the first point is that a real education has to introduce me to reality, the second point is then the authority in this process, the educator. An education that introduces a young person to reality according to a working hypothesis given by tradition demands an educator who has worked in his own life at the verification of that tradition. An educator must be able to give the reasons for a hypothesis given by tradition; otherwise the hypothesis will appear arbitrary and incapable of meeting the challenge of the entirety of reality. I see this very much working in a Catholic school where there are, think about it, what’s all over the buses of New York City? *The Di Vinci Code*. If



you don't have an educator there to say what the Di Vinci Code is, what Gnosticism is, what Gnostic gospels are, what the difference is between a Gnostic gospel and a gospel approved by the early Christians, and then explain how all of that is not an objection to his faith, if you don't have an educator like that, forget it. The working hypothesis of, in this case we could say any version of Christianity which has anything to do with the four canonical gospels, it's overridden automatically. Hence a true educator must possess a real conviction about reality, a real conviction about reality's meaning, and a real conviction about the link with reality, the hypothesis as to its meaning, and his or her drive for fulfillment. Only an educator who possesses a deep conviction about reality can truly become authoritative for the student.

Here I just want to note that I'm using the word authority so as to avoid that which might connote blind obedience or submission. Authority means the experience of finding someone who incarnates a value that I value better than myself. Authority means wanting to be a great baseball player and discovering you live next to Hank Aaron. That's what authority is. Authority means discovering somebody who incarnates something you want, better than you do. Without this kind of authority, there is no education.

A true education demands that the student finds coherence in the educator with tradition. Now, given all of this, the educator's task then is not very easy because it's not only to introduce the student to a coherent description of tradition's view of reality. Her task will also be to help the student develop a capacity to critique that tradition's claim. A real educator will always have in mind that the goal of the educational process is reality, not even the hypothesis as to its meaning, but reality itself, and the students have to enter into it. Hence the true educator must open the student up to an ever greater awareness of all the factors in play in reality, and the student must critique the tradition, not according to the tradition itself, but according to the drive for fulfillment that was mentioned earlier.

Seen in this light, we see that real education demands a risk, a risk on the part of the educator who tries to communicate the hypothesis as to the meaning of the entire reality, and a risk on the part of the student who has to trust the authority and who has to make the verification on his own so that the relationship between a teacher and student can never be reduced to that of a master and slave. Rather, the educator proposes the best he has to offer from his process of verification and his conviction, and seeks to guide the student into reality with adequate reasons.

Having said all this, I think it's very clear why a public schooling system which is, to use Prof. Glenn's phrase which I like very much, "the bland leading the bland," is completely afraid of making any kind of claim whatsoever as to the meaning of reality, actually forbidding the possibility of any educator to make a claim as to the meaning of the entirety of reality, I believe we can see why education in these kinds of institutions is very difficult. It's very difficult for real education to happen. From this point of view, it becomes critical that we have more freedom in education.

**Wiener:** We again want to thank our speakers for their deep insights, and all of you for your participation. At the registration desk you can find complimentary copies of *Traces*, the monthly magazine of the international Roman Catholic movement founded by Monsignor Giussani in whose life and spirituality *Crossroads* finds its inspiration. Please note that included in the complimentary *Traces* issue is a video of a conference given by Monsignor Giussani on the theme of education, that constitutes, in our opinion, a perfect synthesis of today's event and a fundamental point of departure for any serious discussion about education. The transcript of that conference is also available at the desk.

If you are interested in *Crossroads'* activities, please register your name at the *Crossroads* desk where you will find information about our next events. I remind you that you can concretely support *Crossroads'* mission and activities with tax deductible donations. We are in middle of our 2006 fund raising campaign, and you will find a table outside the room where you can make your tax deductible contributions.

Our next events, open to the public and free of charge, are:

On Wednesday, May 31, 2006 at 7:00 PM, again at Columbia University, "**Evolution: Science, Ideology, Reason and Faith.**" Dr. Michael Behe, biochemist and one of the founders of the Intelligent Design theory, Monsignor

Lorenzo Albacete, theologian, author, and columnist, and Dr. Michael Hamby, philosophy professor, will discuss one of the hottest topics in today's public arena

On Friday, June 17, 2006, at 7:00pm at the Theater of the School of Visual Arts "**The Crossroads of Music and Movies**". A film historian, Gene Stavis, a professor of visual arts, Sal Petrosino, and a musicologist, Kristi Brown, will introduce and accompany us into the fascinating world of the relationship, and their reciprocal enhancement, of two of the highest forms of art: music and cinematography.

Thank you and good night.