



Democracy and the Arts of Schooling

Donald Arnstine

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"In the midst of all the noise generated these days over educational reform, one almost despairs of finding any who speak with some understanding of what education is about, namely the full development of human sensibilities and the full exercise of human capacities. This is precisely what Arnstine does.

"I think that parts of this book are brilliant. Arnstine has explicated a set of distinctions (sometimes in ways that are quite original) that enormously clarify the nature of learning and the possibilities and difficulties of promoting it in schools. He has set those distinctions in opposition to certain deep assumptions that ordinarily shape our thinking about such matters. The book is well written, a pleasure to read, engaging, fluent and vivid. The scholarship is creative and shows long experience and even wisdom." -- Thomas F. Green, Syracuse University Emeritus

Arnstine shows how schools have been distracted from education by reformers urging higher standards--the code word for higher test scores. But education is revealed in the dispositions a person has: sensitivity and resourcefulness, amiability and responsibility, taste, wit, and a disciplined intelligence. This book examines the conditions needed to foster dispositions like these, for they are not acquired by having the young spend more time studying standard academic subjects in preparation for competitive tests.

Without recourse to esoteric jargon, *Democracy and the Arts of Schooling* shows why test scores are less significant than the *quality* of the experiences students have in school. When that quality is high--when it has the richness and the absorbing character we associate with the aesthetic--then learning takes place.

"The author has brought scholarship from a wide variety of sources--aesthetic theory, epistemology, pedagogy, politics, psychology--to bear on two questions, why education is so seldom found in schools, and what we might do to make it happen more often. The interplay of ideas from these divergent streams makes the text sparkle. The patient labor that went into many works of specialized, penetrating scholarship pays off handsomely when used in a masterly synthesis such as we have here. It's a powerful case." -- James E. McClellan, Jr., Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi

"The major topics covered by Arnstine have long been mainstream ones, but I can recall no book since Dewey's writings in which they have been handled in as masterful a way. Dewey was never an easy read; Arnstine is, and not because he oversimplifies or talks down to the reader but rather because he is able to put flesh on the bones of abstractions like democracy, productive learning, and aesthetics." -- *American Journal of Education*

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