



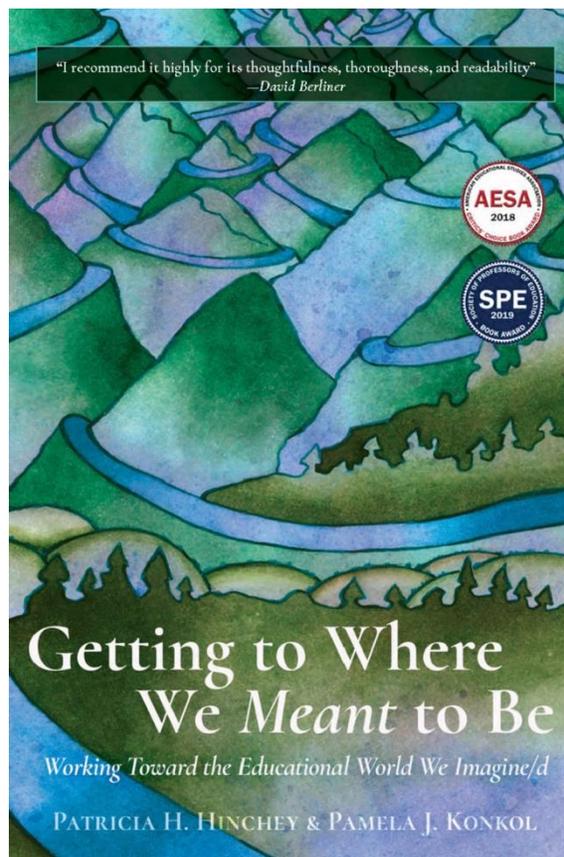
Hinchey, P. H., & Konkol, P. J. (2018). *Getting to where we meant to be: Working toward the educational world we imagine/d*. Myers Educational Press.

Pp. 206

ISBN: 978-1-9755-0001-6

Reviewed by Ryan Korstange  
Middle Tennessee State University  
United States of America

Criticism of American education is increasingly common. In part, we are told that the future of American children and even the American democratic experiment depends on the success of education reform, the effectiveness of which is measured increasingly by performance on one standardized metric or another. No child left behind, common core standards, charter schools, private schools – none are without criticism. Though this collective criticism often identifies some overlapping problems with K-12 education, there is no consensus on the best way forward. Hinchey and Konkol offer *Getting to Where We Meant to Be* in full view of these criticisms. They advocate that local schools and school districts should be empowered to determine proper practice. K-12 education needs experienced educators to be engaged in setting the direction of any reform effort. The mass departure of committed educators is a significant threat to the future vitality of K-12 education, likely to be exacerbated by reform efforts that attempt to de-professionalize teaching and replace the core functions of



education with artificial intelligence in some form or fashion. Hinchey and Konkel suggest that the way forward requires a more localized program where “school personnel... come together and capture their commitments in meaningful language ... [and] specify which knowledge, skills and values are necessary” (p. 197). This is as much a plea for consistency in the student experience as it is a call for local control of education reform. This argument represents a dramatic departure from the top-down, centralized, national efforts at reform that have dominated the recent landscape. The challenge is identifying a productive way for committed educators to move forward. The authors suggest several small but significant steps that educators can take to reassert some of their authority and help students to have a better experience in their schools.

The book is organized around a series of large-scale questions. The authors ask about the purpose of schools and curriculum, the implications of educating for citizenship, student control in school, and the point of previous efforts at reform. Each main chapter takes a consistent format – assumptions are considered, then varied frameworks which educators can use to understand the issue are presented, followed by a list of choices educators should make, and a list of things for them to think about, and a curated list of resources to explore for further information. In this way, the book serves to alert burnt out and disenfranchised K-12 teachers and administrators to the broad implications of larger policy decisions that are out of their control and to suggest actionable means of ensuring that their students receive a quality education.

Hinchey and Konkol offer a broad criticism of current K-12 reforms. They suggest that the purpose of K-12 education is not self-evident, rather there are varied and sometimes overlapping purposes of school which rest on divergent understandings of what constitutes a proper education. For example, to the assumption that the

curriculum should be neutral, the authors use examples of evolution vs. creationism and argue that “there is no such thing as a ‘neutral’ education” (p. 28). The criticism of curriculum extends to the narrow “White, male, and Western” (p. 58) conception of what constitutes material worth knowing.

The authors also are critical of the narrow focus on the development of job skills. At issue is the type of learning that is valuable in formal contexts. In this, they align with other researchers who are deeply critical of curricula determined by corporate interests. As Green (2015) observed, “the corporations and financiers benefit from the ignorance and silence of the population. The less information and understanding people have, the more they can be misled and controlled” (p. 71). Certainly, it is the case that technical skills are valuable, and the acquisition of a set of technical skills is also a central goal of formal education. Yet, broader learning is also important. As Sean Michael Morris has pointed out, “Education shouldn’t be a matter of simple solutions, memorization, passing objective reality from one older mind to dozens of younger minds. Education is an operation of imagination, discovery, and unveiling” (2018, par. 28). This type of learning cannot be readily confined by a narrow curriculum but must be the product of individual interest and effort.

The idea that schools should help develop productive members of a civil society raises the question of what is meant by both the term “productive” and “civil society” – terms that resist uniform definition because of the varied stakeholders who have some interest in education. First, though part of the role of public schools is to “cultivate a patriotic citizenry” (p. 92), the question remains what exactly patriotism requires. Options range from unquestioning acceptance of the most favorable versions of American accomplishments to a more critical approach committed to democratic principles rather than any leader or historical interpretation.

Further questions are posed about the role K-12 educators have in educating students about laws and governmental functions. Given our current political situation and the polarized electorate, questions of what constitutes a proper civic education are vital.

The concept of equal opportunity is shown to be challenging, given the unequal distribution of financial support for schools. This unequal financial distribution is more problematic, given the fact that “schools for poor kids tend to be poor, while schools for rich kids tend to be rich” (p. 31). Equal opportunity connects to efforts to control the learning environment through scheduling and classroom management. Zero-tolerance policies are also analyzed, with the conclusion that while these policies present themselves as providing a safer experience for all students by removing the particularly disruptive or dangerous students quickly, the research indicates that these policies are at best ineffective. As Shabnam Javdani (2019) pointed out, zero-tolerance policies and the concern for student safety led to the increase of police officers stationed at schools. These officers arrest and discipline students, which in turn produces a “heightened criminalization of student behavior” (p. 266). This criminalization of student behavior disproportionately affects students of color (Kendi, 2019). Education provides fundamental and important opportunities to all students and ensuring the safety of those students is critical. Yet the mechanisms used to allocate resources, ensure equitable education, and maintain the safety of all students need to be carefully considered.

The call for K-12 school reform is a loud refrain in the current political landscape, as it has been since the 1983 presidential report, *A Nation at Risk*. Hinchey and Konkol suggest that the national rhetoric predisposed educators to reform, and so reform followed in waves. Not all efforts were successful or even necessary. The call for reform even featured in Donald Trump’s 2017 inaugural

address, where he suggested that our education system is “flush with cash, but which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of knowledge; and the crime and gangs and drugs that have stolen too many lives and robbed our country of so much unrealized potential.” This criticism has been operationalized in increased political pressure to privatize K-12 education. In addressing the assumption that the public schools are failing, Hinchey and Konkol suggest that a different interpretation of educational statistics demonstrates that test scores are rising and that comparison countries have a more homogenous population than the US. The authors also address the thorny issue of budgeting, demonstrating that financial investment does impact outcomes. In this regard, the assumption that school choice as an alternative to underfunded and “failing” schools is explored, and the authors assert that choice and competition neither improve school outcomes nor raise school performance more generally. Finally, the authors explore the widespread assumption that business models will help schools produce a better product. Their argument is that business management increases profit and decreases spending but does not correlate with increased educational attainment. Several frameworks for reform are also analyzed, including corporate and democratic reform.

The value of this book lies in its detailed analysis of common assumptions related to the various futures imagined for K-12 education. The authors treat each of the assumptions with an even hand and bring a variety of important research into the conversation. At a minimum, this book is useful for early-career educators looking to understand the complexity of the U.S. system of education. Also, this volume would serve as an invaluable resource to schools, districts, or systems looking to either consider future directions or to understand the implications of some of the broader policy changes. Finally, the volume is useful for professionals working in higher

education, looking to understand more about the education that students receive before they are admitted to college. In each area, the even-

handed and accessible style of Hinchey and Konkel provides exceptional value.

---

## References

- Greene, D. (2015). *Unfit to be a slave: A guide to adult education for liberation*. Sense Publishers.
- Javdani, S. (2019). Policing education: An empirical review of the challenges and impact of the work of school police officers. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 63(3-4), 253-269. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12306>
- Kendi, I. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. Random House.
- Morris, S. M. (2018, Feb. 13). Adventures in unveiling: Critical pedagogy and imagination. *Hybrid Pedagogy*. <http://hybridpedagogy.org/adventures-in-unveiling/>
- National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform: A report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education*. United States Department of Education. The Commission [Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O. distributor].

## About the Reviewer

**Ryan Korstange**, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of University Studies and coordinator of the first-year seminar program at Middle Tennessee State University. His research focuses on understanding student learning in college and building effective programs to prioritize high-level student success.



**Education Review**

**Reseñas Educativas**

**Resenhas Educativas**

 *Education Review/Reseñas Educativas/Resenhas Educativas* is supported by the edXchange initiative's Scholarly Communications Group at the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University. Copyright is retained by the first or sole author, who grants right of first publication to the *Education Review*. Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and ***Education Review***, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or ***Education Review***. ***Education Review*** is published by the Scholarly Communications Group of the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University.

**Disclaimer:** The views or opinions presented in book reviews are solely those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of *Education Review*.

Connect with *Education Review* on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Education-Review/178358222192644>) and on Twitter @EducReview