

Dear Colleague:

The national debate on education is currently dominated by discussion of tenure, unions, choice, Common Core, teacher evaluation, school size, and safety. There is little discussion of what we teach and why. The overarching goals of the NEH Summer Seminar *Philosophers of Education: Major Thinkers from the Enlightenment to the Present* will be to introduce NEH Summer Scholars to debates among significant philosophers of education, to understand the connections among their ideas, *and* to articulate ways their theories can be made accessible and relevant to K-12 educators today.

Studying the philosophy of education encourages teachers and administrators to reflect on a series of fundamental questions about their craft, questions that come up variously over the course of a career. Some are broad and philosophic:

- *What are the goals of education? Happiness? Wisdom? Wealth? Virtue?*
- *Is a child a blank slate or imprinted with inclinations, temperament and aptitudes?*

Others deal with the appropriate role of the teacher:

- *Should teachers build character? If so, how?*
- *Should teachers in schools try to change society?*
- *Should the teacher be a “guide on the side” or a “sage on the stage”?*

Answers to many of these questions of course evolve gradually over a career, the products of experience, observation, and individual teacher temperament. They can also emerge from—and be enhanced significantly by—the study of past and present philosophers of education.

Starting with the Enlightenment, we will look at John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Thomas Jefferson’s letters, and Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Emile*. Moving on to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we will read Horace Mann’s *Reports on Education*, William James’ *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, and John Dewey’s *The School and Society*. We will study the debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois over African-American education and analyze Maria Montessori’s *The Montessori Method*. We will consider 20<sup>th</sup> century critics of Progressive Education, such as William Bagley and Arthur Bestor.

We will conclude with the works of contemporary educational philosophers: Howard Gardner's *The Disciplined Mind*, and E. D. Hirsch's *The Schools We Need*. Why is Howard Gardner opposed to tracking, testing, and coverage? Why does he extol deep understanding and dismiss cultural literacy? Why is Hirsch opposed to romanticism, formalism, and naturalism? How does Hirsch claim his approach would overcome the achievement gap?

This three-week NEH Seminar at Boston University (July 9 to 28, 2017) will explore the works of major educational thinkers. It will draw on my course at Boston University's School of Education, "The Intellectual Foundations of Education," which I have taught for the last five years; on my two NEH Summer Institutes on Thomas Jefferson, which included in-depth study on "Jefferson's Vision of Education"; and on my four Teaching American History Seminars, during which the history of education was an important theme.

We will, for example, study Locke's radical critique of contemporary British education and link Locke's suggestions to current debates about student health, motivation, temperament; character education, play, and self-discipline. We will look at the connection between Locke's book and contemporary best-sellers, such as Amy Chua's *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*; Susan Cain's *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*; and Paul Tough's *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*.

We will bring our discussion into the decade of "No Child Left Behind" by reading Geoffrey Canada's essay "Redefining Education" and Pedro Noguera's article "The Trouble With Black Boys." Are "no excuse schools," such as the KIPP Charter Schools, an answer? Can better-funded schools overcome poverty, and compensate for fractured families and a changing economy? Is there relevance to Washington's plea for vocational education, or W.E.B. Du Bois' call for a black elite?

During the three-week NEH Seminar, we will hear from guest lecturers:

- Harvard Professor Leo Damrosch whose biography of Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Restless Genius*, was a National Book Award Finalist in 2005.  
<http://leodamrosch.com/>
- Charles Glenn, Professor of Educational Leadership and Development at the Boston University School of Education and author of numerous books and articles, including the influential classic, *The Myth of the Common School*.  
<http://www.bu.edu/sed/about-us/faculty/profiles/charles-glenn/>
- Tim Seldin, President of the Montessori Foundation and author of books and articles on the Montessori Method.  
[http://www.montessori.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=411&Itemid=50](http://www.montessori.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=411&Itemid=50)

Boston, once called the Athens of America, is an ideal city to study the philosophy of education. Horace Mann, Catherine Beecher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and W. E. B. Du Bois all formulated their ideas here. John Adams' home, the John F. Kennedy Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Massachusetts Historical Society and Fenway Park are close by. We will offer tours of Harvard University and the Mount Auburn Cemetery.

### **NEH Summer Seminar Leaders**

**Peter Gibbon.** Over the span of my career as an educator, I have taught English and history at the high school level; served for ten years as the head of a K-12 school; have directed NEH Summer Institutes on George Washington and Thomas Jefferson; and, most recently, have been project director for Teaching American History Seminars in Massachusetts. I am currently teaching *The Intellectual Foundations of Education* at Boston University, where I am a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Education. Prior to my appointment at Boston University, I was for ten years a Research Associate at the Harvard University School of Education. At Teachers College, from which I received a Ph.D., I studied the history and philosophy of education under Lawrence Cremin and Diane Ravitch.

My publications include *A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002) and numerous articles focused on education in newspapers and journals. Of the philosophers studied in this NEH Seminar, I have published articles on Thomas Jefferson (the *Philadelphia Inquirer*), Horace Mann (*Education Week*) and William James (*Education Week*). I have also published many articles and reviews on the subject of teaching, as I have always been particularly interested in the role and status of teachers in America and in doing what I can to elevate the profession. <http://www.heroesinamerica.org/>

**Peter Wright** will serve as Project Coordinator and Participant Liaison. Originally a participant in a 2005 NEH Summer Institute, Wright went on to become Project Coordinator and Participant Liaison for four more NEH Summer Institutes in 2006, 2008, 2009, and 2013, serving also as Master Teacher in the 2009 Institute.

Wright is an educational consultant, behavioral and school placement specialist. Prior to this, he was Director of Guidance and College Placement at Nazareth Academy in Wakefield, Massachusetts. A long time classroom teacher, Wright taught AP U.S. History, AP American Government, and Psychology at Malden Catholic High School in Malden, Massachusetts for nine years. While teaching in Malden, Wright served as an adjunct professor at Simmons College where he taught the Cultural Foundations of Education (GED 457) to graduate level M.A.T. students. The course covered the purposes and effects of education on U.S. public schools by analyzing historical and contemporary sources such as Plato, Locke, Wollstonecraft, Mann, Dewey, Du Bois and Hutchins.

## **Selection of NEH Summer Scholars**

A committee comprising the Director, the Project Coordinator, and a third educator will select the NEH Summer Scholars. The committee will ask each applicant to write a statement describing why he/she wishes to participate and will require contact information for two references. In assessing the applications, the committee will look for the ability to do the demanding work required, as well as for variety in the following areas: background, years of teaching experience, teaching levels, and geographical locations. The committee will follow NEH procedures in making its selections.

## **Readings**

NEH Summer Scholars will read in advance John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. A book of readings, which includes selections from the philosophers studied, will be provided. Our discussion will be enhanced by PowerPoints on John Locke and Thomas Jefferson and contemporary films, such as *A Touch of Greatness* and *Waiting for Superman*. The Seminar will emphasize scholarship but with practical application. Each NEH Summer Scholar will be asked to write a short paper connecting one or more of the philosophers to contemporary concerns.

## **Professional Development**

Boston University does not give course credits for NEH Summer Seminars; however, each participant will given a letter, signed by the Director, describing the scholarly content of the Seminar, the time spent in class as well on field trips, and the curriculum projects. The purpose of the letter is to encourage Continuing Education Units and In-Service Credits for the three-week long program.

## **Institutional Context**

Our meetings will take place at the Boston University School of Education in a spacious classroom with facilities for breakout sessions. The Boston University School of Education is an ideal setting because the school believes in the importance of studying the philosophy and history of education. NEH Summer Scholars will have full access to the Boston University Library System and the other resources of the University. During the summer, the City of Boston hosts concerts, plays, and special events, and its permanent cultural and historical attractions are plentiful.

## **Logistics**

Most of the sessions will be held between 9 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. with a break for lunch, leaving most late afternoons, evenings and weekends free for study, reflection, and recreation. Ample time will be set aside to meet individually with Peter Gibbon and Peter Wright.

The stipend will be \$2,700, half of which will be given on opening day and the other half at the conclusion of the Institute.

NEH Summer Scholars will be housed in their own rooms in four-bedroom suites with two bathrooms, a common room, and a kitchen in a modern, air-conditioned residence (the 10 Buick Street Residence Hall) for which they will be charged a reasonable university rate for the City of Boston, currently estimated at \$70.00 per night per person. The apartment complex is situated on the Boston University campus. More information about the 10 Buick Street Residence Hall can be found at this link: <http://www.bu.edu/housing/residences/stuv/10buick/>

### **Application**

On this web site you will find the Application Information and Instructions provided by NEH.

Please read the eligibility criteria for participation in NEH Seminars found at this link: [http://www.neh.gov/files/divisions/education/eligibility/school\\_teacher\\_eligibility\\_criteria.pdf](http://www.neh.gov/files/divisions/education/eligibility/school_teacher_eligibility_criteria.pdf)

Perhaps the most important part of the application is the essay of no more than four double-spaced pages that must be submitted as part of the complete application. This essay should include any personal and academic information that is relevant; reasons for applying to this particular Seminar as defined in the Dear Colleague letter; your interests, both intellectual and personal in this topic; qualifications to do the work of the project and make a contribution to it; what you hope to accomplish by participation; and the relation of this study to your teaching. I look forward to reading your application and would be happy to answer any questions you may have about any aspect of the program.

The completed application should be postmarked no later than March 1, 2017 and should be addressed as follows:

Dr. Peter Gibbon  
Boston University School of Education  
Two Silber Way  
Boston, MA 02215

The notification date is March 31, 2017.