Lance R. Grahn

An urban-based approach to education at all levels is particularly relevant today because it reflects our societal reality, both nationally and globally. This note describes several factors, each in its own way advancing the study of urban life and culture, that have recently emerged to energize educational interest in the city.

To Live Good Lives Together:

A Note on Collaboration between Urban Studies and Secondary-Higher Education

Most of us are both shaped and linked by our metropolitan habitation. For example, the news media, which culturally connect Americans, surely reflect their urban localization in Washington, Atlanta, New York, and Los Angeles. And cities continue to dominate our cultural development, from civil rights to the fine arts. Similarly, urban experience defines most of us. The state of Wisconsin, long known for its rural dairy farming and still proud of its "cheese heads," is now overwhelming urban. Sixty-six percent of the state's 4.9 million citizens live in urban areas, and 33 percent live in central cities. Metropolitan Milwaukee alone accounts for about 20 percent of the state population. In the United States, more than 77 percent of the population live in a city. For people of color, the percentage of metropolitan residence is even higher. Eighty-four percent of all non-whites live in cities and their suburbs, and so do 98 percent of African Americans in the North and the West.

Globally, urban primacy is much the same. More than 80 percent of northern and western Europeans, for example, live in urban areas, as do 75 percent of Latin Americans. In addition, developing societies are increasingly characterized by the megacity. Mexico City, for example, with its 24 million inhabitants, now houses fully 25 percent of all Mexicans. Even more dramatically, Buenos Aires's population alone—about 12.5 million—represents 37 percent of all Argentines.

Seoul has 10.6 million people, or nearly 24 percent of the South Korean population. Amman's 4 million residents comprise 25 percent of all Jordanians.

Consequently, an urban-based approach to education at all levels is particularly relevant today because it reflects our societal reality, both nationally and globally. Equally important, urban-based learning is societally urgent. The increasingly fierce attack on the quality of urban life from all quarters demonstrates the need for better, stronger urban education that can lead to a more vibrant and robust polity. Increasingly, we tend to overlook the historical urban functions of governmental administration, commercial articulation, spiritual development, intellectual discourse, and artistic presentation. Instead, we perceive the city as a place of concentrated apathy, crime, violence, and poverty (surely in part because those problems fit sound bites and headlines so well).

Such negative forces certainly undercut community life in the urban body politic. But we should not forget that modern urban problems, such as current school crises, have roots in historical urban evolution. Therefore, if we are to comprehend the forces of civil deterioration and so be better able to reverse them, we must first understand their evolution out of earlier patterns of governance, commerce, migration, and settlement. Carolyn Teich Adams stated in this journal that if "our students are to lead 'examined' lives, they must come to terms with" their environment, their cultural ethos, and their historical present; that is, they must grasp the city as an essential and archetypal component of their identity (Fall 1991, p. 45.) If students are to gain psychological control of their urban environment, establishing a mental map of the city that promotes social composure in place of personal fear and they must do so through the educational process. Through their teachers' guidance and inspiration, students can achieve a sense of civic place and memory. Otherwise, they have little chance of knowing themselves, their national context, and their global situation. Several factors, each in its own way advancing the study of urban life and culture, have recently emerged to energize educational interest in the city.

First, teachers are calling for urban-oriented training because they realize its significance. For example, eighteen months ago, Marquette University conducted a comprehensive survey of 300 English and history teachers in Milwaukee-area high schools. One of two history teachers specifically identified urban history and history's applicability to teaching in an urban environment as very important or most important in pursuing additional academic training, making these two facets the most widely selected among *all* history responses. The only other factor that received similar support was multicultural history. Like their history counterparts, 57 percent of all En-

glish respondents indicated that "an emphasis on the application of practical problems in teaching English teaching in an urban environment" was very or most important in their consideration of additional schooling. Again, the urban orientation was by far the most commonly mentioned priority. Judging from the Milwaukee survey, humanities teachers eagerly await the chance to explore urban studies and their classroom benefits.

Second, the teachers' self-energized interest in urban studies correlates with both local mandates and federal legislation that target civic awareness, community alliances, and cultural heritage as key elements of urban educational reform. On a federal level, for example, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act specifically directs schools to involve all students "in activities that promote and demonstrate good citizenship...community service, and personal responsibility" and to make all students "knowledgeable about the diverse cultural heritage of this nation and about the world community." In our urban-dominated world, this national challenge necessarily includes metropolitan outlooks.

Third, overlapping municipal and federal calls for greater citizen involvement in the schools and for systemic educational reform must be matched by curricular change. Political directives must be placed in an appropriate context by means of educational content that embraces the community. Quite simply, content-driven reform is essential to re-formed, re-invigorated urban teaching and learning. Teachers realize that efforts to improve curricula, raise standards, and hone assessment must be placed within a framework of educational reality and social relevance. They know that content drives reform, not the other way around. Quite simply, how are students and teachers alike to respond to their increasingly demanding constituencies if they know little about, and appreciate even less, the urban dynamics and trends that have created this present crisis? As John Rury and Frank Cassell make clear in *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920* (U. Wisconsin Press, 1993), key trends in the modern American urban landscape—segregation and desegregation, migration, suburbanization, and impoverishment, for example—have created the sociopolitical environment of educational distress.

Fourth, metropolitan universities and school districts are uniquely equipped to work together on an urban history and culture program that fulfills the teachers' goal to establish new urban models of secondary curricula that revive civic memory and demonstrate the relevance of the humanities. In fact, school-university collaboration is a critical component of the realization of reformist urban education. The universities have the institutional resources and expertise to meet the teachers' need to learn urban history and to explore its curricular applications. School-university collaboration is a critical com-

ponent of the reformist urban education. Pooling interests and resources, university and secondary school faculty can creatively explore the integration of metropolitan experience with urban knowledge and can design new curricular strategies of interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and experiential education to facilitate students' intellectual progress from local to national to global situations. Content-based educational reform, then, follows through on the Goals 2000 decree that partnerships be "established among local educational agencies, institutions of higher education, parents, and local professional associations to provide and support programs for the professional development" of teachers. Moreover, such an effort renders the goals of the Declaration of Metropolitan Universities concrete.

As an urban studies program fosters intellectual growth, it also models educational reform. For example, the burgeoning historiography of urban history illustrates that the study of cities can bridge traditional, well-respected views that have stood the test of time to new perspectives that convey current concerns about race, ethnicity, gender, diversity, and identity. Similarly, Carol Teich Adams correctly argues that "assignments that take students into the urban field can be excellent integrative mechanisms...which call upon students to forge for themselves some of the interdisciplinary connections that we [too often] ignore when building the curriculum" (op.cit., p.41.). Thus, an urban program can effectively harmonize students' learning and promote an educational cohesiveness that parallels our integrated, unified, personal existence. Properly structured, urban themes easily cross and blend a variety of secondary classes across the disciplines, including American and world history, multicultural literature and other English classes, and foreign languages.

An urban construct also provides a collective perspective derived from an appreciation of the urban body politic that balances the extreme individualism of current American political culture. Metropolitan life demonstrates that we exist in relationship with others, even if that relationship is based on fear, distrust, or self-imposed isolation. At the same time, however, the city also illustrates well the positive promise of community cooperation and interaction.

"To live good lives together"—which is what urban life originally intended —demands that we employ the Aristotelian maxim that "the city teaches." The teacher-professor collaboration on urban curriculum will improve teachers' ability to relate urban realities to students who themselves live in a modern urban setting. Consequently, school faculty can empower their students to understand more concretely the development of urban societies over time and space, and so enable them to comprehend more fully their own social and multicultural reality as well.