

**COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:  
LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT**

A Report to the Charles S. Mott Foundation

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— ABSTRACT —

“Community Schools: Lessons from the Past and Present” analyses the history of community schooling throughout the 20th century in order to provide insights into contemporary educational reform. The report is divided into three parts: a thematic essay on the history of community schooling, a series of case histories of community schooling at different moments in time, and a set of policy recommendations for the Mott Foundation.

Section One offers a conceptual overview of community schooling. This overview emerges in the course of making sense of the puzzle posed by a movement which seems to be continually rediscovered each generation. Community schooling is defined as a *reform against* the idea that schools should be places set apart for special learning. As such, it is characterized by an impulse to make schools centers of community life by: a) extending the school’s programs to embrace many social functions; b) encouraging a curricular focus on the local community; c) fostering more self-conscious interaction between school personnel and community members. This impulse achieves salience at certain historical moments when the forces of social transformation lead citizens, educators, and policy elites to look to the schools to remake community life. While community schooling achieves strong levels of support in such periods, it always stands as a movement in opposition to the more powerful forces of bureaucratization and centralization which characterize much of 20th century education. It is thus a movement which bubbles up again and again to recapture a certain democratic strain within American education.

Section Two explores community schooling in the context of case studies of three periods. If Section One offers an overview of the (community school) forest, then Section Two provides a pathway through three strands of trees. The first case study examines the social center movement between 1900-1916; the second explores the efforts of social reconstructionists to create community curriculum aimed at building a new social order during the Great Depression; the final case study analyses the arguments for community education and community controlled schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The narrative of Section Two is followed by a brief discussion of policy implications in Section Three. This final section teases out a set of broad 'lessons' from the historical analysis. The Mott Foundation is encouraged to: a) expand public discourse on community schooling; b) promote the development of holistic models of community schooling which integrate social programs with curriculum and new approaches to professional-lay relations; c) support movements which create sophisticated plans for working around and outside bureaucratic structures; d) forge new initiatives across existing geographic lines so that community schooling can foster cross-race and cross-class alliances.

—SECTION ONE—

**TOWARDS A HISTORY OF COMMUNITY SCHOOLING:  
A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW**

“All these steps will help our children get the future they deserve.”  
--Bill Clinton

“This day has been long in coming.”  
--William White

Evoking both the challenge of the future and the force of the past, President Bill Clinton and Mott Foundation President William White announced their joint support for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program at a White House Ceremony on January 26. This program earmarks \$1 billion in federal money and up to \$55 million from the Mott Foundation to provide 500,000 students with quality before-school and after-school programs over the next five years. For President Clinton, the Community Learning Centers offer American families critical resources for coping with emerging social realities of the 21st century. “The hours between 3 and 7 at night are the most vulnerable hours for young people to get in trouble for juvenile justice. ... Most of the kids that get in trouble get in trouble after school closes and before their parents get home from work.” With so many parents now working outside the home, the Centers insure, in the President’s words, that “every child [has] some place to go after school.” While the

Centers reflect the demands of new social conditions, they also resemble a multitude of efforts over the past century to bridge the gulf between school and community. It was precisely this legacy which William White had in mind when he spoke to the President about the Mott Foundation's sixty year commitment to after-school programs and community schools. Initiatives in this spirit, he argued, are not only important today, they "have been proven by the test of time."<sup>1</sup>

What does this long history tell us? William White is surely right to ascribe significance to the very staying power of the community school idea. Many other educational innovations have risen to prominence during this same period, only to be forgotten within a few years of their inception. (Who now remembers the once widely popular 'platoon system' developed by William Wirt in the 1910s?) Yet, community schooling has achieved a peculiar form of longevity. Unlike other long-standing innovations such as standardized testing which have followed a direct pathway from the margins to the educational mainstream, community schooling seems to rise and fall in salience every generation. It is an idea which has been continually 'rediscovered'—by educators, community activists, policy makers, and presidents. At various moments throughout this century, community school advocates have followed the editors of The School Journal who proclaimed in 1900: "*Just at the present time* ... attention is being called so generally to the importance of the relations between school and community."<sup>2</sup>

For this long history to shed light on *our* present times—times when attention is being called to community schools once again—we must come to understand both its

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<sup>1</sup> Mott Foundation Press Release, "Remarks from Monday, January 26, 1998 Roosevelt Room of the White House." See also, Richard Stevenson, "Clinton Proposes \$25 Billion on Education," New York Times, 1/27/98 A16.

<sup>2</sup> The School Journal, April 28, 1900, v 50, n 17, p. 453. Emphasis added.

lasting appeal and its limited capacity to effect systemic change. We will want to ask: What do educators and reformers mean when they speak of community schools? Why do they continually come back to the community school idea? Why does interest in this idea (or set of ideas) grow under certain historical conditions? Why, given all this interest, does there seem to be so little lasting change?

Before turning to these questions, it is important to acknowledge that the cycle which I have described above—of attention, inattention, and rediscovery—has emerged alongside the Mott Foundation’s steady and significant support for community schooling over the past sixty years. In addition to creating an international example of community schooling in Flint Michigan, the Foundation has sponsored several national networks of community schools and community educators. These networks have played a pivotal role in forging a loose coalition of districts (over 1000 by the mid 1970s) and schools (over 10,000 by one recent count) who embrace the community school concept.<sup>3</sup> While these Mott-inspired community school efforts have grown over the past six decades, they remain but one stream within the larger river of reform—a river characterized by ebbs and flows.<sup>4</sup> The cyclical nature of the broader reform community’s response to community schooling thus takes nothing away from the work of the Mott Foundation. Indeed, the Foundation’s commitment to community schooling in the last sixty years is important both for its direct impact on specific communities and for its role in sustaining the community school idea across the peaks and valleys of the reform cycle.

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<sup>3</sup> Mott Foundation Press release 1998, Donald Weaver, “The Community Education Ethos: Relationship of Principles to Practice,” *Community Education Journal* Winter 1992, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Pat Edwards similarly points to both a) the “extraordinary” accomplishments of the Mott Foundation and the Mott-Manley model and b) the ‘seemingly slow progress’ of efforts to reshape the whole of American education. Pat Edwards, “The Challenge to Community Educators,” *Community Education Journal* Spring, 1996, p. 32.

## What is Community Schooling? Towards a Working Definition

What set of ideas or practices do we have in mind when we speak of community schools? Historians, educational theorists, and policy makers generally have answered this question in one of two ways. One group, made up primarily of practitioners and reformers, have offered a programmatic definition of community schooling. They point to a set of core elements which a school must enact before it can be considered a community school. Examples of such criteria include: after school programs for youth and adults, delivery of social services, or community access to school facilities for public meetings. A second group has argued against this focus on program. They worry that any definition based upon a list of core programmatic elements will be too narrow; such definitions fail to account for initiatives which differ in form, but follow the spirit of community schooling. Other critics in this second group hold that a programmatic definition trivializes community schooling by viewing it as simply “another new program that can be added to the existing curriculum.”<sup>5</sup> These critiques lead the second group to contend that community schooling should be viewed as a process and a philosophy.<sup>6</sup> For example, Vasil Kerensky speaks of community schooling as any attempt to “mobilize all the human and physical resources of a community toward the improvement of individual and community life.”<sup>7</sup> Whereas Kerensky’s description (like many other attempts to construct a process-based definition) is inclusive enough to accommodate a range of

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<sup>5</sup> Vasil Kerensky, “Ten Educational Myths: A Community Educator’s Perspective,” Community Education Journal January 1981, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> This distinction between program and process definitions has been a common theme in the literature since at least the early 1970s. See for example, Jack Minzey, “Community Education: An Amalgam of Many Views,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54 n 3, 1972, pp. 150-3.

community schooling initiatives, it is so broad that it offers little guidance to those who wish to speak of community schooling as a distinctive movement.<sup>8</sup> It should thus come as no surprise that Theodore Kowalski recently wrote: “Even after more than 50 years of existence, there is still no commonly accepted definition of community education.”<sup>9</sup>

This ongoing struggle to define community schooling is more than a methodological problem. It speaks to the character of a movement which is elastic enough to embrace broader or narrower meanings across periods of heightened policy attention and relative obscurity. It also speaks to the fact that different groups of people have imagined different—often contradictory—purposes for community schooling. Two historical cases bring this diversity into stark relief. In 1911 a group of 400 civic leaders converged on Madison Wisconsin for a conference on community schools—what they then termed ‘social centers.’ The group included socialists and industrial relations experts, governors and mayors from rival political parties, and representatives from mainstream churches and spiritual movements. Although “no two people agreed as to just what a social center really is,” the delegates found enough common cause to draft a constitution founding the Social Center Association of America. At the conference’s close, all 400 participants rose to sing about the role of the “little old schoolhouse” in

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<sup>7</sup> Kerensky is very clear on the question of whether community schooling is a program or a process. He writes “community education is not a program!” Kerensky, “Ten Educational Myths,” 1981. p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> It is important to note that my comments are not meant as a criticism of Kerensky (or the many others who have offered process definitions). Kerensky was not trying to capture a distinctive movement, but rather to evoke some general principles which might guide the work of educators.

<sup>9</sup> Theodore Kowalski, “Community Education in the 21st Century: Phoenix or Dinosaur?” Community Education Journal v xx n3, Spring 1993, p. 6. Kowalsky’s quote uses the term ‘community education.’ Many commentators similarly speak of ‘community education’ rather than community schooling in order to make the point that their interest lies in all activity within the community. For purposes of clarity, I use the narrower term, ‘community schooling’ throughout this text.

promoting the “common good.”<sup>10</sup> Sixty years later, community schools advocate Fred Totten brought together a similarly diverse group to sign a public statement of support for community education. Republican and Democratic senators and governors joined leaders of the American Bar Association, the NAACP, the Girl Scouts, and even the Jaycees in hailing community schooling as a strategy for “help[ing] remove the causes of social ills.”<sup>11</sup>

For the purposes of historical analysis, a working definition of community schooling must be broad enough to encompass the social meanings of this concept for groups as varied as the NAACP and the Jaycees. At the same time, a working definition must be substantive enough to allow us to see the Madison conference and Fred Totten’s press release as part of a common historical narrative. It must also be evocative enough to point to historically submerged examples of community schooling which would not have been recognized at a national conference or in a national magazine. This last point turns on two distinct concerns. First, the definition must call to mind stories of working educators who bear no formal ties to official community schooling institutions. For example, Angelo Patri, a principal in East Harlem in 1911, likely was unaware of the Madison conference (or the conference organizers of him) despite his valiant and creative efforts to make his school a community center. His story, like the stories of so many other working educators, needs to be integrated into our history of more visible examples of community schooling.<sup>12</sup> Second, the definition must push us to consider the stories of groups outside the educational and political mainstream who may share common beliefs

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<sup>10</sup> George Forbes, “Buttressing the Foundations of Democracy,” *The Survey* November 18, 1911, vxxvii n7 pp. 1232-5.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Totten, “Community Education: The Feasible Reform,” *Phi Delta Kappan* v 54 n 3, 1972, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> Angelo Patri, *A Schoolmaster of the Great City* Macmillan Company, New York, 1917.

and practices with the broader community school movement even as they are isolated from it. A prime example here is the community control movement initiated by Black Nationalists (among others) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many aspects of this movement's educational agenda echo Totten's 1972 statement, even though neither group viewed itself as part of a common effort. By expanding the narrative of community schooling to include more and diverse actors, we will uncover a history which is bigger, more challenging, and ultimately more useful for contemporary efforts to revitalize the community schools movement.

### Reforming the "Place Set Apart"

What ties this pluralistic history together? This report looks at community schooling as a loose set of beliefs and practices propelled by educators and citizens attempting to create a counterweight to the alienating, isolating, and disempowering forces of modern, mass schooling. As early as the 1890s, proponents of the 'new education' framed a critique of mass schooling which continues to shape the case for community schools today. They argued that despite the revolutionary shift in the purpose and scope of education—from an optional activity for the leisured elite to a compulsory activity for all democratic citizens—schools still held onto the forms and beliefs of centuries past. Modern urban schools, while now larger and more bureaucratic, still followed the pedantic and formalistic style of traditional academic life. They remained, in John Dewey's words, "place[s] set apart in which to learn lessons."<sup>13</sup> Community schooling

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<sup>13</sup> John Dewey, The School and Society (1899), Middle Works 1:10. In this note and throughout the text, I follow conventions for referring to the collected volumes of Dewey's work. Middle Works refers to The

emerges (again and again in the 20th century) as a reform *against* this idea that schools should play a narrow academic role, set apart from local experiences and social life. In contrast, community schooling seeks to: a) extend the domain and the reach of the school; b) infuse local experiences and knowledge into the curriculum; and c) foster fluid roles, responsibilities, and patterns of interchange between school and community. Many forms of community schooling address only one or two of these goals. Nevertheless, they share a common impulse to replace the understanding of schools as narrow and separate institutions with a more vibrant image of schools as centers of community life.

A) *School Extension*. Educators began using the term ‘school extension’ at the turn of the century to evoke a literal and metaphorical expansion of the schools’ scope.<sup>14</sup> These reformers sought to overturn prevailing models of education which confined schooling to traditional academic work within school walls. They imagined schools taking on the role of social centers. As the one institution in many urban communities accessible to a broad cross section of the public, schools could become sites for social gatherings, recreation, social services, and public dialogue for both young people and adults. Subsequent reformers have not always held to all aspects of this broad vision. Yet they continue to make the case for an expanded social role for schools, often pointing to three related claims. First, they argue that educators must concern themselves with the development of the ‘whole child.’ Alongside programs aimed at cognitive development, schools must also provide services to insure the growth of healthy young people capable

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Middle Works of John Dewey, 1899-1924, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976-1983. Later Works refers to The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925-1953, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981-1991.

<sup>14</sup> These early efforts, much like the model of the ‘lighted schoolhouse’ which emerged out of the Mott Foundation’s work in the 1930s, expanded the temporal as well as physical boundaries of the school. The

of participating in the cultural, economical, and political life of the broader community. Second, this broadened view of child development means that schools can no longer cloister themselves as institutions with discrete social roles. Community educator Elsie Clapp offered a particularly bold form of this claim in 1939: “Where does school end and life outside begin? There is no distinction between them.”<sup>15</sup> Third, this focus on the educative role of the broader community leads educators to attend to the education of adults as well as young people. “Child education,” wrote Samuel Everett in 1938, “is inextricably bound up with adult education.”<sup>16</sup>

*B) Community Curriculum.* In addition to broadening the definition and scope of education, advocates for community schooling seek to reconceptualize prevailing understandings of school knowledge. Edward Olsen’s influential 1954 textbook *School and Community* offers a telling summary of how educators have traditionally conceived of school curriculum.

The school was like a castle surrounded by a moat and usually the community beyond was ignored. At the close of the day the drawbridge was let down again and the child went back into the community, generally failing to notice the relation of the discipline and the school subject studied to the actual process and problems of living there.<sup>17</sup>

Alternatively, Olsen and other community school advocates propose that schools integrate local folk knowledge, experiences, and problems into classroom studies. This effort to ground curriculum in community life emerges from a belief that knowledge is dynamic and contextual. In a rapidly changing social world, students cannot rely upon the lessons of the past to solve the problems of the here and now. Rather than seeking to

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reformers imagined schools as institutions which could serve the community throughout the day and evening, rather than simply from the hours of 8 to 3.

<sup>15</sup> Elsie Clapp, *Community Schools in Action* New York: Viking, 1939p. 39.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Everett (ed) *The Community School* New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938.

transmit a standard body of static knowledge, schools should thus encourage students to draw upon increasingly complex thinking within what William Kilpatrick termed “actual situations.”<sup>18</sup> Hence community educators envision project-oriented community curriculum as critical to the development of intelligence. In addition, they reason that it offers students—particularly working class youth with little connection to the traditional academic world—a greater sense of why knowledge and intellectual activity matter. “There is scarcely a subject in the curriculum,” reasoned Edward Ward in 1913, “that would not be the gainer by being made to strike fire on the flint of the world.”<sup>19</sup>

*C. Recasting School-Community Roles.* Finally, community school proponents encourage school personnel and community members to reinvent their respective roles and their strategies for relating to one another. While advocates of community schooling offer widely different understandings of what these new roles might be, they share a common vision of what they are reforming against. They stand in opposition to the functionalist view, first championed by sociologist Talcot Parsons at the turn of the century, that schools and families are discrete institutions which operate most efficiently when they pursue their goals and activities separately.<sup>20</sup> This ideal is captured wonderfully by Roland Meighan who quotes a British headmaster proclaiming: “All I ask parents is that they should bring it to school clean and well-dressed.”<sup>21</sup> Reformers

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Olsen, *School and Community* New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954/1945, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> William Kilpatrick, “Principles of Community Learning,” in *The Community School* edited by Samuel Everett, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938, p. 12. It is worth noting that Kilpatrick and other progressive educators use the term ‘actual’ in a way which parallels contemporary uses of the term ‘authentic.’

<sup>19</sup> Edward Ward, *The Social Center* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1913) p. 334.

<sup>20</sup> Joyce Epstein speaks of this understanding as the ‘separate influences’ model. Joyce Epstein, “School and Family Partnerships,” *Encyclopedia of Educational Research, 6th Edition*, p. 1140. I speak alternatively of a ‘separate spheres’ model to emphasize the idea of two discrete realms.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Meighan, “The Parents and The Schools—Alternative Role Definitions,” *Educational Review* v41 n2, 1989, p. 106.

have responded to this ‘separate spheres’ approach in two ways. Some point out that it fails to take advantage of the symbiotic effect of teachers and parents working together towards common goals. They generally argue for more extensive lines of communication and interchange between school personnel and community members. Others, take the ‘separate spheres’ approach to task for its failure to address the different (and often conflicting) belief systems which prevail in schools and in many communities. When teachers and parents differ about why education matters, what it means to be well educated, or how best this goal is achieved, then each side frequently reacts with what Sara Lawrence Lightfoot terms strategies of “territorial protection.”<sup>22</sup> Community school reformers offer two very different and more or less contradictory responses to such value conflicts. One set of reformers have sought to use the school to change parents’ beliefs and behaviors—particularly around child-rearing—so as to bring them into line with the culture of the school or the dominant society. A second set have noted the discontinuity between school and home culture and argued that the solution lies in shifting the balance of power in schools from professionals to (local) lay people. Hence community school reforms which seek to recast roles and revitalize community-school relations may emerge from strikingly different political visions.

### Moments of (Re)Awakening

Writing during the first period of ascendance for the community school idea, John Dewey raises a critical historical question:

What is the meaning of the popular demand ... [for community schooling at] just this period? ... What forces are stirring that awaken such speedy

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<sup>22</sup> Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, “Toward Conflict and Resolution: Relationships Between Families and Schools,” Theory Into Practice v20 n2 1981, p. 99.

and favorable response to the notion that the school, as a place of instruction for children, is not performing its full function—that it needs also to operate as a centre of life for all ages and classes?<sup>23</sup>

While Dewey posed his query at the turn of the century, other reformers might have raised this identical question in 1938, 1968, and perhaps even in 1998. At these times, a loose coalition of citizens, educators, policy makers and other reformers have coalesced around the community school idea. While these coalitions never have constituted a majority position within American education, they have represented a sizable and powerful minority voice. What “forces” or conditions link these different periods? What do these conditions tell us about the social meaning and purpose of community schooling?

Dewey’s 1902 speech, “The School as Social Centre,” offers a detailed answer to his own question and a partial response to our broader historical questions. He argues that the push for community schooling at the turn of the century emerges from both evolutionary shifts in educational institutions and revolutionary changes in the broader social structure. At the institutional level, “the general principle of evolution—development from the undifferentiated toward the formation of distinct organs”—has transformed what education looks like and where it takes place. In recent generations, education has gradually moved from an “ordinary” process of “family and community life” into the “distinct” and “separate” setting of the school.<sup>24</sup> Such schools could remain aloof from the community as long as intellectual life remained detached from the daily concerns of most community members. However, the extraordinary expansion of urbanization and industrialization in late 19th century America unleashed unprecedented

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<sup>23</sup> John Dewey, “The School as Social Centre,” (1902) Middle Works 2:80.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 81.

demands on the social system and offered new opportunities for spreading scientific inquiry as new technologies enabled information to be circulated quickly and cheaply.<sup>25</sup> The rapidly growing and largely immigrant urban population desired social institutions which could use this new-found access to information to make neighborhoods safer, healthier, and more vibrant places.<sup>26</sup> Dewey believes that these conditions call for “sharing ... the intellectual and spiritual resources of the community.” Schools, he contends, represent the logical social centers for this exchange.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to providing an explanation for the initial emergence of the community school idea at the turn of the century, Dewey’s argument offers insight into the broader question of what forces “awaken” heightened interest in community schooling at different moments in time. Following Dewey, we would expect public dissatisfaction with schools “set apart” to increase during periods of social transformation in which citizens look to educational institutions as sites of community revitalization. Historian David Tyack makes a similar point in reviewing the broader history of educational reform in twentieth century America.

Reform periods in education are typically times when concerns about the state of the society or economy spill over into demands that the schools set

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<sup>25</sup> Alongside and aided by the emergence of the telegraph, traditional forms of print journalism became more accessible in the last decades of the 19th century. There was an expansion in the number of magazines and newspapers and the level of circulation. Specifically, during the 1870s, the number of newspapers in the United States doubled. Between 1882-1886 the price of daily newspapers dropped from 4 cents to 1 cent. See Herbert Kliebard, Kleibard’s The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893-1958 New York, Routledge, 1958, pp. 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Between 1860 and 1900, the United States population rose from 31 to 76 million, with immigrants accounting for nearly one third of the growth. Many of these new residents found jobs in factories which employed 6 million workers by 1900, four times as many as they had forty years before. Since ninety percent of manufacturing jobs were located in the cities, this shift signified both a move away from a predominantly agricultural workforce and a move towards greater urbanization. While this explosive growth led to a rise in real wages, it created unprecedented dislocations, cyclical downturns, and extreme pressures on social systems. In short, the growth outpaced the capacity of cities to provide safe jobs, decent housing, or public hygiene.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

things straight. The discovery of some problem—America losing in economic competition, the threat of Russian science, poverty, racial injustice, unassimilated immigrants—triggers such policy talk. Policymakers translate these anxieties and hopes into proposals for educational reform.<sup>28</sup>

Despite their seemingly similar positions, Tyack and Dewey imagine different agents of change instigating different sorts of reform. Tyack looks to policymakers as the authors of reform. Educational reform, in this understanding, reflects a desire to deflect public anxieties away from the political realm. On the other hand, Dewey believes that the public apprehends shifting conditions directly and then demands new structures. In Dewey's understanding the push for community schooling represents a grass-roots effort to create fluid lines between education and politics. He reasons that engaging the community in school programs or the curriculum is a step towards political action.

The very diversity of support for community schools points to the need to accommodate both Tyack's focus on the policy elite and Dewey's focus on the grass roots. (Think again of the varied backgrounds of participants at the 1911 Madison conference or the strange bedfellows who signed Fred Totten's 1970 statement.) In times of social tumult, policy elites and citizens are likely to look to community schools for a variety of (somewhat contradictory) reasons—to foster social order, initiate political change, solve pressing problems, or meet immediate needs. The community school movement achieves greater salience in such periods precisely because different players in the loose coalition can look to community schooling to meet their own interests. Importantly, not every form of social dislocation spawns a resurgence of community schooling. Rather, community schooling is particularly responsive to three socio-

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<sup>28</sup> David Tyack, "'Restructuring' in Historical Perspective: Tinkering Toward Utopia," Teachers College

political pressures which emerge in the context of certain forms of social transformation. These three tensions roughly map onto the three facets of community schooling described above: school extension, community curriculum, and recasting school-community roles.

A first pressure arises when prevailing institutions fail to meet the changing social demands of common people. Such failure disturbs policy elites concerned with stability and citizens interested in addressing felt needs. Together, they seek to expand or refashion the public sphere—the local institutional space dedicated to serving public needs and addressing public problems.<sup>29</sup> Such reform efforts often pose conflicts over different images of the public sphere. Should it be conceived as a site of recreation, service delivery, democratic engagement, or some mix of the above? Different models of school extension parallel these different conceptions of the public sphere; all of them respond to public dissatisfaction with the ability of prevailing institutions to address new social needs. Recall, for example, that President Clinton builds the case for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers on the fact that shifting labor conditions create growing demands for safe and productive after-school environments for youth whose parents work outside the home. A second pressure emerges when the public perceives that traditional sources of knowledge or processes of inquiry are inadequate or irrelevant to the task of addressing newly recognized social problems. This pressure presents itself in two ways. First,

sustained public dissatisfaction (over youth violence or continuing unemployment or racial conflict) leads many to question the legitimacy of both the officially sanctioned

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Record v92 n2 1990, pp. 170-191.

explanations and solutions and the national experts who promote these ideas. Second, community members and local policy elites begin to view these issues as local—rather than state or national—concerns. That is, they see the problems as tied to specific contexts and at least somewhat amenable to local action. As more value is placed on local knowledge and on problem solving by local experts, community curriculum takes on new momentum in the schools. Community curriculum thus feeds on a broader impulse to view the local neighborhood as the critical plane of activity and local citizens as the key agents in knowledge production.

A final pressure appears when social transformation exposes or exacerbates the fissures dividing professionals from members of the public. Significant social change—like the late 19th century industrialization and urbanization which Dewey addresses—pushes institutions and community members to take on new roles. These roles often embody different and contradictory visions of the future.<sup>30</sup> In this highly charged context, community members and professionals will often misunderstand or disagree with the changing roles which one another is playing. Both sides are thus more likely, at these moments, to recognize their divergent visions. They are also more likely to take action to create more common cause—either by promoting better communication or by reshaping professional-lay relations. This dynamic is clearly played out at various moments by teachers and parents. Engagement rather than disaffection characterizes community-school relations during periods when social roles are most volatile.

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<sup>29</sup> I purposefully use a broader definition of ‘public sphere’ than is common amongst political theorists who are primarily concerned with its civic role.

### Why So Little Lasting Change?

The three socio-political pressures which “awaken ... favorable response” to community schooling push against powerful forces shaping 20th century American education. The story of educational change in this century is largely a narrative of bureaucratization and centralization of decision making power. While there have always been many voices opposing bureaucracy and calling for decentralization, history, as David Tyack points out, “reveals a steady growth in state and then federal regulation, the size of districts, and the number of administrative staff.” Tyack goes on to say that after the “ball of [educational] centralization” started rolling in the early 20th century, it gradually picked up momentum as it “matched what was happening in other social, economic, and political institutions.”<sup>31</sup>

This trend towards rule-driven, highly differentiated educational systems, largely controlled from state capitals or Washington D.C. is generally at odds with the idea of community schooling. It tends to shift the locus of decision making—about school programs or community needs—away from local neighborhoods. It transfers power and agency from local citizens and professionals to external experts. It supports the development of state and national curriculum, and gives them force through state-sanctioned textbooks and legislatively-mandated standardized tests. Finally, it encourages teachers to take on narrow instructional roles and conform to a model of professionalism which sets off university training in child psychology and subject matter

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<sup>30</sup> For example, in “The School as a Social Centre,” Dewey speaks of the conflicting forces simultaneously pulling turn of the century immigrant parents to embrace ‘traditional’ and distinctively ‘modern’ patterns of child rearing.

<sup>31</sup> David Tyack, “‘Restructuring’ in Historical Perspective: Tinkering Toward Utopia,” p. 186.

from the common sense of lay people. At the same time, however, the general movement towards bureaucracy and centralization has played a role in undermining the idea that schools should be “place[s] set apart.” By encouraging institutional expansion and concentrating power (as well as resources), these forces have opened opportunities for schools to take on broader social roles. Importantly, this expansion—in social services and health particularly—has emerged alongside a shift *away* from local control and the agency of

local citizens. While more schools may have become sites for and conduits to an array of services, they thus have not necessarily become centers for community life.

When community schooling emerges as a salient force, it does so against the powerful crosscurrent of bureaucracy and centralization. In this sense, community schooling in twentieth century America is essentially an oppositional movement.<sup>32</sup> When social dislocation unleashes the three socio-political pressures described above, community schooling arises as a powerful alternative vision to what Tyack elsewhere terms the “one best system.”<sup>33</sup> At those moments, the public appeal of the “one best system”—its claims to science, efficiency, and economies of scale—is at its weakest. But, such moments of transformation—moments when a substantial minority of the public is willing to raise fundamental questions about its prevailing institutions—have been followed by longer periods when the vast majority of the public acquiesces to the forces of bureaucratization and centralization. During quiescent times, many policy elites

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<sup>32</sup> The editors of a special issue of *Harvard Educational Review* devoted to community education made a similar point in 1989. “Community-based education is rooted in the collective efforts of people—often communities that have been overlooked by national educational systems—determined to transform their reality. Community-based education is usually marginal to institutionalized centers of learning, such as public and private schools, but it can also emerge within a school system.” p. vi.

who supported community schooling as a response to crisis, may now seek to reintegrate the schools into the “one best system.” In addition, the intense engagement in local education and politics which community schooling demands is difficult to sustain on a wide scale over long periods of time. Further, it calls for a level of openness—to political dissent, ambiguous standards, and changing responsibilities—which is at odds with much of the history of 20th century America.

### Working Outside, Around, and Against Bureaucracy

To say that such a commitment to engagement or openness is unusual does not deny that a few communities have sustained forms of community schooling across periods of intense change and relative stability. Some of these cases point to the uneven spread of bureaucratic control across American education. For example, several recent histories of segregated African American schools in the Jim Crow South recount stories of schools which served as critical centers of community life from the 1920s until the late 1960s.<sup>34</sup> At one level, such ongoing models of community schooling reflect the particular experiences of these communities—their strong participatory values, communal relations, vertical integration of laborers with middle class professionals, and shared concern with economic hardship and threats of external violence. At another level, these communities were able to embrace models of community schooling precisely because the emerging educational bureaucracy did not wish to include them as full and equal participants in the

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<sup>33</sup>David Tyack, The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1974.

<sup>34</sup>Vanessa Siddle Walker, Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South, Chapel Hill NC, UNC Press, 1996; David Cecelski, Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994. Mamie Garvin Fields, Lemon Swamp and Other Places: A Carolina Memoir Free Press, New York, 1983. Whereas Siddle Walker and Cecelski tell the story of specific communities, Fields’ memoir follows her own career as a teacher (in segregated schools) across the first half of the 20th century.

state's school system. The bureaucratic imperatives of upholding standards and imposing regulations presume a base level of commitment to common goals and processes. State officials across the Jim Crow South simply did not look upon schools serving African American communities in this way. These officials held limited or nonexistent expectations for student outcomes, provided inadequate funding for textbooks or other curriculum material, and licensed African American who received training in separate (underfunded) institutions. Hence, a certain level of local autonomy over educational and community practice came with the oppressive and segregated system. As historian Siddie Walker argues, this autonomy—alongside extraordinary community resilience and inventiveness—allowed many African American schools to “become [things] that whites never expected they would be[.]”<sup>35</sup>

Other instances of long-term commitment to community schooling call attention to the creative ways which citizens and educators have managed to both build upon and work around existing lines of bureaucracy. For example, Donald Weaver recounts that many community educators have created community school programs outside of the existing k-12 bureaucratic structure so as to avoid conflicts with educators worried about “intrusion[s] upon their territory.” Indeed, Frank Manley, who developed the “lighted schoolhouse” model with C.S. Mott, built up an entire community education ‘system’ in Flint which paralleled, yet remained administratively separate from, the public school system.<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting that such accommodations with the prevailing bureaucratic structure have been most successful in creating vibrant models of school extension. As Weaver points out, this approach has not enabled community educators to play a

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<sup>35</sup> Siddie Walker, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Weaver, “The Community Education Ethos: Relationship of Principles to Practice,” p. 8.

significant role in shaping school reform—reform which addresses curriculum and professional-lay relations.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to communities which have managed to support ongoing forms of community schooling, there are many, many others who have created what educator Eliot Wigginton describes as a few ‘shining moments.’<sup>38</sup> Pockets of community school activity often arise under special conditions which allow particular communities temporarily to subvert the bureaucratic imperative. A charismatic leader emerges, additional resources (outside the lines of bureaucratic control) are made available, or some local crisis galvanizes the grass roots and local policy elite to action. This occasional bubbling up of community schooling is made possible by informal networks of community educators who keep an alternative vision of education and local political action alive through their teaching, writing, and example. It is this robust idea, supported by informal infrastructure beyond bureaucratic control, which again will “awaken” broader public demand for community schooling in some future moment.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid. p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Before its tragic demise (due to Wigginton’s personal problems) Wigginton’s Foxfire represented one of the most compelling public examples of integrating community studies into the high school curriculum. It is interesting to note that Wigginton’s success in a small rural community in Georgia did not translate into broad scale change when he sought to create a system of like-minded educators across the nation. This failed attempt at ‘scaling up’ might speak to the challenge of institutionalizing an oppositional movement on a broad scale. Eliot Wigginton, Sometimes a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience Garden City, New York, Anchor Press, 1985.

—SECTION TWO—

**REWORKING OLD ELEMENTS: CASE STUDIES OF  
COMMUNITY SCHOOLING IN 20TH CENTURY AMERICA**

History, at times, turns upon itself in remarkable ways, even if the new context and novel conditions contradict the conviction that history *always* repeats itself. More reasonably, perhaps, it might be said that history sustains its continuity by reworking old elements into new contexts. That is what appears to be the case for the ‘community governed schools’ of the inner-urban areas of the United States.

—Jacquetta Burnett and Joe Burnett, 1972<sup>39</sup>

While emerging from a common set of social pressures, community school movements of the 1900s, 1930s, or 1960s unfold in different ways. The driving political and economic issues of each period shape the way in which community school advocates conceive of their reform. For example, turn of the century concerns with defining and giving shape to the public sector meant that community school advocates at this time focused a great deal of attention on the school’s extension into broader social functions; Depression-era worries about the ravaged economy led many reformers to imagine community curriculum which might play a role in social reconstruction; 1960s-era conflicts over racial integration caused some advocates to argue for wholly new relationships between professional educators and community members. Hence, the reformers in each period chose to emphasize a different feature of community schooling—first school extension, then community curriculum, and finally more conscious school-community relations. Although elements of each facet of community

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<sup>39</sup> Jacquetta Burnett and Joe Burnett, “Issues in School-Community Relations in the Present Period,” in [A New Look at Progressive Education](#) James Squire (ed), Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1972, p. 345.

schooling appear across the century, one of these streams takes on particular salience in each period.

The case studies which follow offer portraits (in broad brush strokes) of the community schools movement at three moments in time. I focus on one narrative line in each case study, despite the fact that this means leaving many stories untold. As more and diverse voices have been included within the politics of twentieth century American education, it becomes increasingly difficult to write about any singular community school movement. Hence, the story of community schooling during the Progressive Era can be told in a somewhat straightforward narrative of the rise and fall of social centers. The curricular work of social reconstructionists during the 1930s provides a coherent story line, though the manifestation of this theory in practice plays out along several different lines. By the 1960s, there are many competing stories about community schooling. I choose to focus particular attention on the struggle to create community controlled schools in urban neighborhoods because the debate over this effort raises important questions about community—school relations more generally.

Rather than seeking to provide an exhaustive account of community schooling in twentieth century America, these case studies aim to foster new insights about the possibilities and limitations of community schooling.<sup>40</sup> For example, our vision of community schooling can be expanded by stories about New York City's social centers which drew one million people in 1910 to their public lecture series. Further, these cases highlight critical issues inherent in the community schooling project. They raise questions—about our vision of the public sphere, our understanding of knowledge, and

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<sup>40</sup> I purposefully have sought to place the Mott-Manley model at the periphery of these case studies, since the story of its development is widely known, particularly to the Mott Foundation.

our image of professional-lay relations—which are important to discussions of community schooling in our own times.

## **I. CREATING A PUBLIC SPHERE: THE SOCIAL CENTER MOVEMENT 1900-1916**

Scholars shall not assemble about the school building exceeding thirty minutes before school, and then they must enter their respective rooms, take their seats, and pursue their studies ...NO PLAYING MUST EVER BE ALLOWED IN THE SCHOOL BUILDING.

—Milwaukee School Board Regulation in 1860s<sup>41</sup>

The children who went to school back in the [eighteen] eighties skipped out of the school door at half past three and scampered down the street shouting with glee. Instruction was finished for the day and the building turned over to the janitor for sweeping.

—Clarence Perry, Russell Sage Foundation, 1910<sup>42</sup>

The full utilization of a public school plant is the only true economy; ... the present inadequate use of schoolhouses is wasteful precisely in proportion to the costliness of the grounds and buildings, and ... reform in this respect means a larger and better yield, physically, mentally, and morally, from the public schools, and therefore a significant addition to the health and wealth of the nation and to the public happiness.

—Charles Eliot, Harvard University President, 1903<sup>43</sup>

From the late 1890s until World War I, a broad and very diverse group of reformers joined together to support the wider use of America's schools. In addition to university presidents, this movement included socialists, populists, industrialists, representatives of the Social Gospel movement, members of women's clubs and the newly formed PTAs, and advocates for good government. Working for the most part outside existing school bureaucracies, these reformers first volunteered their time and resources to create new programs—penny lunches, after school recreation, vacation

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in William Reese, Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements During The Progressive Era, Boston: Routledge, 1986, p. 180.

<sup>42</sup> Clarence Perry, Wider Use of the School Plant New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1910, p. 181.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Eliot, "The Full Utilization of a Public School Plant," National Education Association 1903, p. 247.

schools, public lectures and debates—and then later pushed public entities to institutionalize these practices.

Their efforts helped shift the broader public’s common sense about the social role and purpose of schools, from “places set apart” towards social centers for the community.

Whereas this new understanding never fully prevailed over the ‘traditional’ or the newly emerging scientific approach to school management, it realized a far greater presence within mainstream American education than any time since.<sup>44</sup> What made this idea so popular? What was the appeal which held together this diverse group of grassroots and elite reformers? Why did this coalition ultimately break apart?

### NEW SCHOOLS FOR NEW TIMES

To understand the popularity of the social center idea, it is important to consider what made it attractive to different constituencies as well as the broader conditions which shaped these needs. Edward Ward, described by a colleague as the “John the Baptist” for the social center movement, argued in 1911 that the idea’s greatest strength lay in the fact that it offered something to almost everyone.<sup>45</sup>

To businessmen, fuller use of the schools meant dollars and cents economy; to physicians, a way to curry favor in the neighborhood; to conservatives, a way to reduce delinquency by offering children alternatives to street gangs; to democrats, a free forum for public debate of timely subjects to increase civic intelligence and general knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Charles Zueblin’s American Municipal Progress published in 1916, states that 71 cities and 21 states had established social centers by 1913; by 1913 17 states had provided ‘weder-use’ legislation. Cited in Edward Stevens, “Social Centers, Politics, and Social Efficiency in the Progressive Era,” History of Education Quarterly Spring 1972, 16-33.

<sup>45</sup> Edward Fitzpatrick, “The Political Aspects of the Community Center, Or the School Building as a Civic Center,” School and Society July 29, 1916 v4 n83, p. 160. Ward began his career administering the social centers in Rochester, New York, and later became a professor and state official in Wisconsin.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Ward, “School Extentions,” Common Good, v. 5 Jan 1911, pp. 12-16.

Ward’s description points toward a public sector in flux, with indeterminate social and fiscal obligations, unresolved social order, and uncertain roles for citizens, professionals, and elites. Indeed, the period from 1890-1916 witnessed tumultuous changes in the relationship between American markets and the state and the conditions of urban neighborhoods. During this time, business and political leaders began to challenge the hallowed nineteenth century ideal of free exchange within competitive markets. They argued that cooperation between newly forming corporations and state “administered markets” could address the “wastes of competition” and promote broad based economic growth. This shift away from *laissez faire* fueled ongoing public debate—sometimes characterized by consensus and other times by conflict—about what role the state might play in economic and social life.<sup>47</sup>

Since this shift came alongside and contributed to the drastic rise in industrialization, urbanization, and immigration, these public debates inevitably addressed the tremendous social needs of America’s urban communities. For example, Edward Stitt, a district superintendent in New York, made the case in 1911 for expanding the scope of state-run schools to include recreation services for the broader community. Stitt worried about the lack of recreation space available for “overworked young men and women” living in “congested neighborhoods[.]” This problem was a direct product of new social conditions. Factory life, with its regular work schedules and large pool of concentrated laborers, created demand for new sorts of leisure outside the home and workplace. Whereas churches might have “furnished proper facilities for caring for the great mass of operatives and factory hands” in traditional communities, they were, Stitt

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<sup>47</sup> Martin Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 10, 432.

argued, ill-prepared to respond to the diversity and size of urban communities.<sup>48</sup> Further, the ‘leisure problem’ was not just a matter of the church or the state providing private individuals with services. It was also, reformer JK Paulding reasoned, about creating “a life in which all citizens share.” For Paulding, the “chaos of beliefs and opinions, of clashing ambitions and conflicting passions” of turn of the century urban America, called for recreating community spirit. “The common life! It is just in this that we of this crowded, busy nineteenth-century metropolis are most deficient.” There is, Paulding concluded, “at least one agency at work in behalf of the common life—the common schools.”<sup>49</sup>

### BUILDING COMMUNITY THROUGH SOCIAL CENTERS

All sorts of groups followed Paulding in encouraging state-run public schools to take on more and more community building functions. As then-governor Woodrow Wilson recounted in 1911:

It occurred to the originators of this movement that, inasmuch as the school houses belonged to the community ... it would be a good idea to have all sorts of gatherings—for social purposes of entertainment, for purposes of conference, for any legitimate thing that might bring neighbors and friends together—in the school houses.<sup>50</sup>

During the first two decades of the 20th century many schools opened their doors during evenings, weekends, and vacations for the public to attend lectures, engage in debates, and participate in athletics or other leisure activities. In New York City alone, almost one

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<sup>48</sup> Edward Stitt, “Evening Recreation Centers,” in The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part One: The City School as a Community Center, edited by Chester Parker, 1911, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p.39.

<sup>49</sup> JK Paulding, “Public School as Center of Community Life,” Educational Review v14, Feb 1898, p. 148.

<sup>50</sup> Woodrow Wilson, “The Need of Citizenship Organization,” The American City November 1911, p. 265.

million people attended public lectures in 1910. The diversity and appeal of the topics (“Walt Whitman and the Hope of Democracy,” or “Mohammedanism and the Crusades,” or “The Man that is Down and Out,”) brought together a large cross-section of the community.<sup>51</sup> In Rochester, the public debates also featured speakers from different walks of life. At one of the debates, reported Harriet Rusk Childs in 1911, “the topic being the commission form of government, a Polish washwoman and the president of the WCTU were opposed by a day cleaner and a college professor.” The social center advocates believed in the democratizing power of bringing together rich and poor, Socialist and Republican, “on common ground” so that they might “become acquainted with one another[.]”<sup>52</sup> Such events led one local clergyman to comment that he had not witnessed such “common bond” since the Civil War.<sup>53</sup>

While many social center advocates characterized the newly emerging community spirit as inclusive, democratic, and wholesome, their meanings for these terms often embodied internal contradictions or represented divergent interests. This surface-level cohesion speaks to both a recurrent problematic within community schooling and the tenuous nature of this particular coalition. The ongoing issue revolves around an unresolved tension between what Tonnies classically termed, *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*.<sup>54</sup> *Gemeinschaft*, in this sense, refers to a form of community characterized by the intense bonds of blood and place often found in traditional rural communities or

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<sup>51</sup> Henry Leipziger and Clarence Perry, “Adult Education and the New York Plan of Public Lectures,” in The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part One: The City School as a Community Center, edited by Chester Parker, 1911, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 11, 13.

<sup>52</sup> Harriet Lusk Childs, “The Rochester Social Centers,” The American City July 1911, p 19.

<sup>53</sup> Clarence Perry, “The Community-Used School,” in The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part One: The City School as a Community Center, edited by Chester Parker, 1911, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 70.

<sup>54</sup> Ferdinand Tonnies, Community and Society, (Charles Loomis ed. and trans.) East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1957. (Originally published in 1887 as Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft).

artisanal villages. *Gesellschaft*, in contrast, signifies the more open, individualistic, and at times alienating conditions commonly associated with urban centers. Social center advocates at the turn of the century, much like many subsequent community school reformers, often made a nostalgic appeal to *gemeinschaft* values, without coming to terms with the tensions between these ideas and the diverse conditions of modern urban America. Hence, the President of the Women’s Municipal League of Boston pitched the social centers as an effort to “make our city a true home” and reformers like Edward Ward conjured the image of the ‘little red school house.’<sup>55</sup> Such invocations of *gemeinschaft* glossed over the very real differences in how various constituencies conceived of translating homelife into the public sector. Certainly, not everyone in Boston held to the Municipal League President’s idea of home. Nor did everyone in Rochester New York share Edward Ward’s (almost *gesellschaft*) image of a homelike setting as “a friendly, interesting place not far away ... where class and race lines, religious and political differences don’t count.”<sup>56</sup> The movement to build community thus emerged out of partial visions which often concealed deeper rifts.

#### TOWARDS A ‘WHOLESOME’ COMMUNITY

This tendency for reformers unconsciously to frame the social centers in their own moral vision is apparent in the many public appeals to ‘wholesome’ community values. “One of the first duties of a city ...is to give its boys and girls ... a place for wholesome play,” wrote Mary Josephine Mayer in 1911. This duty entailed creating another

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<sup>55</sup> Joel Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* Cuernavaca, Mexico, Centro Intercultural Documentation, 1971, chapter 4, p. 26.

<sup>56</sup> Edward Ward, “The Little Red School House,” *Charities* v22 August 7, 1909, p. 649.

alternative to the apparent disruption, decadence and danger of city streets.<sup>57</sup> “Where shall our boys and girls go after school hours—where but the streets? And it is more than a twice-told tale, this of the children of the streets who become the toughs of the ‘gang,’ the girls of the dance-halls.”<sup>58</sup> Some reformers argued that social centers could reduce street crime by channeling the destructive energies of youth into productive directions. Edward Ward tells the story of a Rochester merchant approaching a social center director to thank him for “accomplishing ... [the] impossible.” “I have been here nine years,” reported the merchant. “During that time there has always been a gang of toughs around these corners, making a continual nuisance. This winter the gang has disappeared.” “They are no longer a gang,” answered the director, “they are a debating club.”<sup>59</sup> Other reformers focused attention on the ability of social centers to protect young people from social ills. Clarence Perry reasoned that the centers could replace the dangerous pull of the ‘street’ with activities which promoted healthy bodies and cooperative social relations.

Many well-meaning youths are spending their evenings around card-tables when they might be playing basket-ball. Coteries of hopeful young people are ‘turkey-trotting’ in socially disintegrating dance halls when they might be waltzing in the atmosphere of happy and permanent social ties.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> There is a striking resemblance between the image of city streets presented by social center advocates at the turn of the century and portraits of urban life in the 1990s. For example, Ms. Courtright a teacher in a predominantly immigrant ‘tenement district’ in Chicago, speaks of her neighborhood’s needs in 1900 as follows: “In a crowded downtown district like this, where the only social life to be had is in visiting cheap theaters, wine rooms, and opium dens, or in promenading the streets, there is an overpowering need for a moral social center.” “The School and The Community,” The School Journal April, 1900, p. 458.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Josephine Mayer, “Our Public Schools as Social Centers,” The American Review of Reviews August 1911, p. 201.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Ward, “The Rochester Civic and Social Centers,” in The Tenth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part One: The City School as a Community Center, edited by Chester Parker, 1911, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 55.

<sup>60</sup> Clarence Perry, How to Start Social Centers Department of Recreation, Russell Sage Foundation, NY, 1920, p. 5.

Perry's rather tame examples of 'street life' point to the biases of class and culture shaping many reformers' visions of wholesome leisure. A sizable number of youth and adults in many urban neighborhoods might have viewed 'turkey-trotting' as an expression of working class youth culture. As social centers provided important new leisure opportunities, it thus was inevitable that they would experience some tension over who would define what form this leisure would take.

Much greater tension arose when social center leaders sought to promote their own understandings of 'wholesome' hygiene, nutrition, and health to the broader community. Importantly, social center advocates generally understood their role as representing the emerging 'science' of public health, rather than supporting a particular cultural approach.<sup>61</sup> The social centers offered reformers sites to demonstrate and then disseminate this new science. For example, in a 1909 article on "The Community-Used School," Clarence Perry pointed out that providing young people a "shower-bath" at new school gymnasiums allowed them to "acquire the custom of daily bathing." Perry reported that schools in Chicago took this hygiene campaign directly to the community, sending home "a constant stream of information upon the best ways of cooking, preserving food, securing pure milk, and keeping the home clean."<sup>62</sup> As historian Judith Raftery suggests, such campaigns commonly relied upon questionable science.

Much of the information [about nutrition] proved incorrect, often based as much on biases against ethnic foods as anything else. ... For instance,

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<sup>61</sup> The close relationship between hygiene, public health, and education during this period can be seen most vividly in turn of the century professional journals such as Teachers College Record. Like many other journals of this time, Teachers College Record featured articles on healthy alongside discussion of curricular plans.

<sup>62</sup> Perry, "The Community-Used School," p. 65, 66.

early nutritionists found little value in fruits and vegetables because they contained too much water.<sup>63</sup>

While turn of the century urban residents did not have the advantage of Raftery's hindsight, they often remained skeptical of nutrition or health claims which conflicted with their traditional knowledge and practice. Hence public health measures such as inoculations against childhood diseases often met resistance. As Raftery explains: "It was one thing to provide supervised playgrounds, and another to dictate how a family cared for its children's health."<sup>64</sup>

### UNRAVELING THE SOCIAL CENTER COALITION

The tensions between social center professionals and the community which they served enabled conservatives to chip away at the loose coalition supporting community schooling. In some cities, anti-tax industrialists, prominent Catholic Clergy, and educators committed to a narrow focus on "mental functions" joined forces to challenge the social centers. They charged that the centers were too expensive, that they usurped responsibilities properly left to individuals and the church, and that they diverted attention from cognitive development.<sup>65</sup> Such organized efforts were able to tie into the populist resentment which some community members held towards professionals generally, and health professionals particularly. In addition, some parents resonated with

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<sup>63</sup> Judith Rosenberg Raftery, Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles School, 1885-1941 Stanford University Press, 1992, p. 37. Historian George Sanchez similarly argues that efforts to refashion the diet of Mexican American immigrants in Los Angeles schools during this period were propelled by racist beliefs about Mexican American culture. Sanchez writes: In the eyes of reformers, the typical noon lunch of the Mexican child, thought to consist of a 'folded tortilla with no filling,' could easily be the first step to a lifetime of crime. With 'no milk or fruit to whet the appetite' the child could become lazy as well as hungry and might subsequently 'take food from the lunch boxes of more fortunate children. Thus, the initial step in a life of thieving is taken.'" George Sanchez, Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945 Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 102.

<sup>64</sup> Raftery, Land of Fair Promise p. 37.

the message that schools should play a narrower role. For example, David Tyack recounts how one confronted a teacher after receiving a medical inspector's note about her son's smell. "Teacher," she said, "Johnny ain't no rose. Learn him; don't smell him."<sup>66</sup>

The social center opponents proved most successful in attacking the educational and political roles of the centers. They argued that by inviting all members of the community to lecture or debate, the centers undermined what little community existed. Publicly airing differences, they charged, increased class, ethnic, and religious conflict. Further, they held that certain political views—particularly those of socialists—were seditious and hence had no place in public schools.<sup>67</sup> This challenge emerged most famously when Kendrick Shedd, a professor of Government at the University of Rochester, delivered a speech at a social center on February 4, 1911. Although Shedd had been a popular speaker in Rochester for years and his speech was sponsored by the Women's Civic Club, critics quickly denounced his remarks as un-American and pro-socialist. On February 5, Rochester Mayor Edgerton announced that Professor Shedd would be prohibited from speaking "in the public schoolbuildings of Rochester again." The Rochester Board of Education soon decided that in the future they would only support the public use of school buildings for recreational purposes.<sup>68</sup> Victor Berger, Milwaukee's socialist mayor countered that

social centers without free discussion is like telling children they can go swimming as long as they avoid the water. ... for parents and children

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<sup>65</sup> Reese, *Power and the Promise* p. 170.

<sup>66</sup> David Tyack, "Health and Social Services in Public Schools: Historical Perspectives" *Future of Children* v2 n1, 1992, p. 23.

<sup>67</sup> Reese, *Power and the Promise* p. 194-5.

<sup>68</sup> Stevens, "Social Centers, Politics, and Social Efficiency in the Progressive Era," p. 28. See also, Ford, "Madison Conference on Social Centers," p. 1230.

alike, the questions of light, transportation, wages, housing, and all the other important issues ... are certainly of as great importance as the Three Rs.<sup>69</sup>

Berger's view—and the centers themselves—came under increasing attack with the U.S. entrance into World War I. In the midst of what John Dewey termed the war's "cult of irrationality," most communities closed schools to all groups save patriotic organizations.<sup>70</sup> As different constituencies chose to either support the war effort or uphold pacifist principles, their decisions drove a final wedge between the loose coalition supporting the social center movement.<sup>71</sup> The war provided an alternative pressure for social unity. Further, by the war's end, the turn of the century concerns with social disorder and an ill-defined public sector gave way to new forms of state power and bureaucratization. While small pockets of educators held on to many of the social center's practices—particularly athletics and other entertainment—it ceased to exist as a movement.

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<sup>69</sup> Reese, *Power and the Promise* p. 202.

<sup>70</sup> It is important to note that Dewey supported Wilson's decision to enter the war. Dewey's concern, at least in the early part of the war, lay with the public hysteria which undermined civil liberties and democratic practice. John Dewey, "The Cult of Irrationality," (1918) *Middle Works* 11:108-9.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

## II. DARE THE SCHOOL BUILD A NEW SOCIAL ORDER? COMMUNITY CURRICULUM IN THE GREAT DEPRESSION

Our Progressive schools therefore cannot rest content with giving children an opportunity to study contemporary society in all of its aspects. This of course must be done, but I am convinced that they should go much farther. If the schools are to be really effective, they must become centers for the building, and not merely the contemplation, of our civilization.

—George Counts, 1932<sup>72</sup>

We have heard a great deal in recent years about the isolation of the school from life and about methods of overcoming or reducing that isolation. The point that I am emphasizing is that the isolation of knowledge of the school is the isolation of knowledge from action. ...only in this connection of knowledge and social action can education generate the understanding of present social forces, movements, problems, and needs that is necessary for the continued existence of democracy.

—John Dewey, 1936<sup>73</sup>

An increasing number of American educators are coming to believe that the public schools can and should take an active part in the process of social reconstruction which now seems to be under way in the United States.

—Samuel Everett, 1938<sup>74</sup>

During the 1930s, a large group of educators and reformers joined together under the broad banner of social reconstructionism, a movement which sought to give schools a critical role in addressing the social upheaval of the Great Depression. The social reconstructionists believed that the crisis posed by the Depression called for drastic relief measures and wholly new economic and political structures. They followed Roosevelt in arguing that something must be done to respond to the needs of the one third of the nation which was “ill housed, ill housed, ill nourished.”<sup>75</sup> While they disagreed about what sort of alternative system might be created, they agreed that schools must play a role in

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<sup>72</sup> George Counts, *Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* New York, 1932, p. 12.

<sup>73</sup> John Dewey, “The Challenge of Democracy to Education,” (1936) *Later Works* 11:183.

<sup>74</sup> Samuel Everett (ed) *The Community School* New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938, p. v.

teaching about pressing problems and their underlying causes. “Public schools,” wrote Samuel Everett in 1938, “should be primarily concerned with the improvement of community living and the improvement of the social order.”<sup>76</sup> Toward this end, public schools should become “community schools”—places where young people study and act upon local community problems.<sup>77</sup>

### ANTECEDENTS TO 1930S COMMUNITY CURRICULUM

The Depression era movement for community schooling brought together progressive educators’ long-standing interest in community study with a newly emerging desire to connect education more directly to politics. As early as the 1890s many educators advocated forms of nature study which took students outside the school into parks and local woods. By 1915, when John Dewey and his daughter Evelyn published an account of several progressive schools, community study had come to mean encouraging students to gather information which might make for better, more efficient community life and municipal government. Hence, students in Chicago conducted surveys of different neighborhoods to determine whether an alley needed cleaning or a street better lighting; in Missouri children evaluated their families’ grocery bills on the basis of nutrition and economics; in Indianapolis students operated a bank to help the youth in this low income, African American community establish a commitment to saving.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> The American Social History Project, Who Built America (New York: Pantheon Books, 1992).

<sup>76</sup> Samuel Everett, “An Analysis of the Programs,” in The Community School edited by Samuel Everett, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938, p. 442.

<sup>77</sup> While I purposefully emphasize curricular issues in this section, the community schools of the 1930s followed the earlier ‘social centers’ in seeing the school as a center for community life more generally.

<sup>78</sup> John and Evelyn Dewey, Schools of Tomorrow (1915) *Middle Works* 7:82, 46-7, 219.

While the Deweys' book promoted these examples as public "Schools of Tomorrow," such instances of community curriculum remained largely the domain of private or laboratory schools throughout the 1910s. Most public school educators of this period followed scientific curriculum makers like John Franklin Bobbit in arguing that curriculum should be broken down into small, discrete units, rather than presented as large, somewhat messy, cross-disciplinary problems.<sup>79</sup> William Kilpatrick's pathbreaking work on "the project method" opened up space for many of these same educators to reconsider the value of community study in the late 1910s and 1920s. The project method encouraged teachers to build their curriculum around specific projects related to the problems of social life. Kilpatrick argued that when students encounter these projects in four steps—purposing [identifying purpose], planning, executing, and judging—they both learn about the specific issues at hand *and* develop broader intellectual tools which can be used in other settings.<sup>80</sup> Although Kilpatrick's ideas did not differ greatly from the earlier advocates of community curriculum, his emphasis on intellectual development and his accessible writing style succeeded in providing a popularly accepted rationale for community study.

### COMMUNITY CURRICULUM AS SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

The raw material of the project method—the 'problems of social life'—changed dramatically with the economic collapse precipitated by the stock market crash on October 29, 1929. By the middle of November, the average value of stocks had fallen by

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<sup>79</sup> Herbert Kliebard, The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958 New York: Routledge, 1986, pp. 162-3.

<sup>80</sup> William Kilpatrick, "The Project Method," Teachers College Record v19, 1918, p. 333.

40%.<sup>81</sup> Businesses went bankrupt, fortunes were lost, and unemployment grew eight fold in eight weeks.<sup>82</sup> As the economy continued to tumble in ensuing months, many educators joined a broader pool of intellectuals calling for a fundamental reconstruction of America's social, political, and economic life. George Counts' widely read book challenged educators to take on a vital role in this reconstruction—to “Dare ...[to] Build a New Social Order.” To play such a role, educators (paradoxically) would need to move beyond their “sublime faith in education.”<sup>83</sup> That is, they could no longer presume that social progress would be advanced as long as they passed on knowledge or habits of thinking to the next generation. Educators now needed to promote a form of intelligence which was both more political and more directly connected to social action. “The time ought to come,” wrote John Dewey in 1930, “when no one will be judged to be an educated man or woman who does not have insight into the basic forces of industrial and urban civilization.” For William Kilpatrick such “social intelligence” could be fostered most powerfully through a new, more politicized form of the project method.

Our young people, working cooperatively with adults, must then engage in such social affairs and activities as they, at their several age levels, feel are vital to them. They will at first then deal mostly with local affairs, but they will not hesitate, as developing interest may lead them, to reach out into the problems of the state, the nation, and the world. ...And in particular they must work with controversial issues, for only thus can they grow into the intelligent citizenship needed by our democracy.<sup>84</sup>

A wide array of educators heeded the reconstructionists call and forged new forms of community curriculum built around the “unsolved problems and unpredictable trends

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<sup>81</sup> Frank Freidel and Alan Brinkley, America in the 20th Century New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982, p. 199.

<sup>82</sup> The total U.S. unemployment jumped from a half million in October to four million in December. Who Built America p. 319.

<sup>83</sup> Counts, Dare the School Build a New Social Order? p.1.

of a world in tumult and chaos.”<sup>85</sup> These efforts often encouraged youth and local community members to become engaged in the life of the school. At times, these models of community schooling revitalized local community spirit. Certainly, they promoted different forms of student learning. Yet they rarely realized the millennialist promise of their supporters. (Paul Hanna’s 1936 prediction comes to mind: “Children and youth, millions of them the world over, restless with tremendous energies! ...the great energy of youth requiring only a dynamic purpose to make that force the most constructive factor in social progress.”)<sup>86</sup> The brief descriptions of Depression-era community schooling which follow point to three different ways in which Hanna’s vision was reshaped by social conditions and political pressures.

### CURRICULUM AS A SOCIAL FORCE: THE ROLE OF LOCAL POLITICS

Leonard Covello’s work in New York City represents one of the most fully realized examples of community schooling from this period. Covello, who arrived in America at the age of 9, served as principal of Franklin High School, the first high school serving the predominantly immigrant population of East Harlem. Covello summarized his vision for this “New School in a New Community,” as follows:

The school must necessarily become the center of community life in its own neighborhood, a clearing-house, if you will, for all neighborhood ideas, programs, and enthusiasms. It must aid in correlating these according to an effective plan through which the wellbeing of the community as a whole may be forwarded and insured. It must establish

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<sup>84</sup> William Kilpatrick, “Principles of Community Learning,” in The Community School edited by Samuel Everett, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> Harold Rugg, American Life and the School Curriculum: Next Steps Towards Schools of Living New York, Ginn and Co. 1936.

<sup>86</sup> Paul Hanna, Youth Serves the Community, NY Appleton-Century Co, 1936 p. 21.

*intimate contacts* with the children, the adults, the homes, the welfare organizations, and even the business interests of the community.<sup>87</sup>

Towards this end, Covello worked to infuse the spirit and practice of democratic, community-based inquiry throughout Franklin High School. The school's curriculum was built around the theme: "know your community."<sup>88</sup> By sending students out to study their own community, Covello hoped to transform the negative image often associated with this inner city neighborhood.

There has been, in the past, an unfair tendency to stress the pathological too much and to emphasize too little the existence of a large body of citizens in the community who are home-making, home-loving, and alert to the obligation to live courageously and honorably, making the best of a bad situation.<sup>89</sup>

Importantly, Benjamin Franklin's community curriculum sought to shape policies as well as perceptions. When the East Harlem neighborhood initiated a campaign for new public housing, students in social studies classes conducted surveys on community businesses and organizations. With the aid of the art department, this statistical information was then transferred onto maps which were used by citizen groups to judge the effect of large housing projects on local community life. In another instance, curriculum and local political action converged over the issue of where new buildings for Franklin High School should be located. The students and many community members had their hearts set on East River Drive, one of the five proposed sites, but the city's administration believed the cost of building at the site would be prohibitive. When Mayor La Guardia informed the students of the administration's decision during a radio

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<sup>87</sup> Leonard Covello, "The School As A Center Of Community Life In An Immigrant Area," in The Community School edited by Samuel Everett, New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938, p. 127.

<sup>88</sup> Leonard Covello, The Heart Is The Teacher New York, McGraw Hill, 1958, p. 206.

<sup>89</sup> Covello, "The School As A Center Of Community Life In An Immigrant Area," p. 139.

panel discussion, a spokesman for the students rose to the microphone and replied: “Our social studies teachers arranged for us to make a study of land values. We checked the record and we found that according to the assessed valuation, the East River Drive site would actually cost less than any of the others.” Construction on the new buildings began the following year—at East River Drive.<sup>90</sup>

While Covello’s own account of the above incident implies that the students’ study persuaded La Guardia, the actual story reveals a much more complicated relationship between ‘social intelligence’ and political action. The Mayor’s willingness to provide high school students a public hearing and then heed the findings of their research must be explained in part by local political dynamics. Vito Marcantonio, one of La Guardia’s chief political allies, was Covello’s close friend and former student. Further, East Harlem, with its large Italian-American population, represented an important base of support for La Guardia. Importantly, Covello could rely upon strong support from this base because of his long-standing role as a community educator. Years before becoming principal of the new high school, he had forged alliances with many parents in his effort to convince the Board of Education to create an Italian Language Department at nearby Clinton High School.

How many homes I entered at this period where I had to guide a trembling hand in the signing of an ‘X’! How many cups of coffee I drank, jet black with just a speck of sugar, while explaining our purpose. The parents were usually astonished that they should be consulted in the matter of what was to be taught to their children. They couldn’t believe the schools were really interested in their opinion. .... Our visits usually turned into lessons in democracy, trying to make the immigrant understand his rights and privileges.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Covello, The Heart Is The Teacher.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 136.

The “reciprocal trust, ... mutual respect, and ... friendliness” which emerged from such interactions led community members to view community studies as an expression of the community’s interest.<sup>92</sup>

Hence the possibilities for community curriculum at Franklin High School turned on both the idiosyncratic distribution of local political power and a self-conscious effort to create local political support. The fact that its potency rested in part on political chance, suggests why Franklin’s curriculum, and the results it achieved, were so unusual. Alternatively, the deep connections which Franklin High School maintained to the local community and politicians point to certain unspoken limitations on the community curriculum. Covello’s principled commitment to forge a reciprocal relationship with the community and his pragmatic desire to sustain ties to power brokers such as La Guardia meant that the school’s curriculum avoided broad questions of economic and political reconstruction. While such issues might have been foremost to George Counts, they did not fit with how community members and local politicians understood their social problems. Rather than challenging the accepted beliefs of community members or pushing politicians to reassess their approach to politics, Franklin High School’s curriculum focused on issues such as zoning questions which sought to build a slightly better social order in East Harlem.

## COMMUNITY CURRICULUM & REVITALIZATION: POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 130.

Another striking example of community schooling in the 1930s arose out of a federally supported effort to revitalize a devastated coal mining community in West Virginia. In contrast to Franklin High School, this case featured a prominent “community” educator, Elsie Clapp, who came from outside the local community to establish a new educational model in Arthurdale, West Virginia. Arthurdale, as historian Daniel Perlstein explains, was “one of several subsistence homestead communities established as part of the New Deal’s effort to ameliorate the lives of people ‘stranded’ in places where declining industrial production precluded self-sufficiency.”<sup>93</sup> Arthurdale’s homesteaders came from the nearby Scott’s Run mining camps which had been economically ravaged in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Eleanor Roosevelt, a strong supporter of the Arthurdale homestead, imagined it as “a social experiment in community life which centers around its school.”<sup>94</sup> She and local project directors believed that the devastation of poverty in the mining camps had sapped the local citizens of their ‘social intelligence’ and their capacity to make a new life. In such a setting, the community school could guide various community revitalization efforts and encourage student learning in the process. Elsie Clapp thus sought to build a model of education in which “there is literally no division between learning and living ... learning and living are one.”<sup>95</sup>

On a number of measures, Clapp succeeded in making the Arthurdale community schools a vital agent in community revitalization. The schools played an important role

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<sup>93</sup> Daniel Perlstein, “Community and Democracy in American Schools: Arthurdale and the Fate of Progressive Education,” Teachers College Record v97 n4, 1996, p. 626. My account here follows generally from Perlstein’s work as well as Elsie Clapp’s own account in Elsie Clapp, Community Schools in Action New York: Viking, 1939.

<sup>94</sup>Quoted in Perlstein, “Community and Democracy in American Schools: Arthurdale and the Fate of Progressive Education,” p. 629.

in hosting or coordinating social services, public events, and adult education. Further, the students became actively involved in the process of building the physical, social, and economic infrastructure of this new community. For example, the youngest children studied farming or built their own mini-village as their parents began to farm small plots and construct the larger village. High school age youth studied the sciences by learning

about glassmaking—a course of study which offered insight into a new potential industry.<sup>96</sup>

Yet despite these successes—achievements which John Dewey believed held “extraordinary significance for education”—Arthur Dale’s community schools neither challenged the broader conditions which lead to the problems at Scott’s Run nor offered the local residents long term strategies for supporting themselves economically.<sup>97</sup> As Perlstein points out, Clapp’s lengthy narrative on Arthur Dale’s schools offers only occasional references to life in the mines. Clapp appears to have made no effort to engage students in a study of mining industry, let alone the social forces which had shaped its past and might shape its future.<sup>98</sup> As an outsider to this community, Clapp likely lacked a deep understanding of these issues. More importantly, she was empowered by outside funders and the local community to help build a new village—not to develop new social insights or economic structures. This functional model of community schooling carried a certain internal logic as long as the new village could

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 630.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 631.

<sup>97</sup> John Dewey, “Forward to Clapp’s Community Schools In Action,” (1939) Later Works 14:351.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. p. 636.

sustain economic growth. But the Arthurdale experiment failed to account for the limited economic opportunities available in this mining region. Eventually, the narrow ‘social intelligence’ fostered through the schools proved incapable of transforming this larger economic reality. It was certainly no fault of Clapp’s that the Arthurdale Homestead eventually collapsed when financial backers determined that there were no meaningful prospects for creating sufficient employment opportunities in the area. Nonetheless, this broader economic failure alongside the educational ‘success’ story points to the limitations of community curriculum which promotes more engagement and participation in a troubled social system.

#### COMMUNITY CURRICULUM AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

One final case from this period offers a cautionary tale of how community-based curriculum can be used to undermine local community interests. In the mid 1930s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs developed a plan to build community day schools on the Navajo Nation in Arizona. Unlike Franklin High School or the schools in Arthurdale West Virginia, the Navajo community schools were conceived as tools for promoting continuity rather than change. They represented an effort to preserve native cultures by fostering the study of local customs and social structures. Importantly, this academic study would occur in local day schools, rather than in the regional boarding schools which undermined the cohesion of the Navajo community. The New Deal administrators believed that community curriculum would forge a synthesis between traditional values and the ideals of modern inquiry. In so doing, they argued, it would improve native life while also supporting the broader reconstruction of society by offering the rest of

America a new social vision. Bureau of Indian Affairs Chief John Collier hoped that through their example, the Navajo community schools would “help turn mainstream culture in the United States away from excesses of individualism and materialism to a life of community and spiritual balance.”<sup>99</sup>

These educational and social goals did not exist in a political vacuum. During this period, the Bureau of Indian Affairs struggled to implement a set of controversial policies aimed at reducing soil erosion which threatened the newly finished Hoover Dam. They pushed the Navajos to reduce their herds of sheep, goats, and horses and to consolidate and centralize their service agencies.<sup>100</sup> For the Navajos, these policies represented a threat to both livelihood and way of life. Their resistance to Bureau policies spilled over into a distrust of the new community day schools. Like Arthurdale, the Navajo Nation’s community schools were initiated and run by outsiders—to their community and tribe. Yet, while Arthurdale’s residents had no reason to question the sincerity of Elsie Clapp’s commitment, the Navajo people often viewed their ‘community educators’ as just another instrument of the Bureau’s power. This understanding was reinforced when teachers, following the Bureau’s direction, continually raised the erosion issue as part of their ongoing discussions about, and studies of, tribal life. It is not surprising that teacher Ruth Werner would report that “the gulf between the Navajos and me was broad and deep.”<sup>101</sup> When teachers are implicated in the ‘problems of living,’ students are likely to look outside the school for insights about their community and

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<sup>99</sup> Thomas James, “Rhetoric and Resistance: Social Science and Community Schools for Navajos in the 1930s,” *History of Education Quarterly* v28 n4 1988, p.604. My discussion here draws generally on James’ excellent article.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 606.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 617.

social change. In such contexts, community curriculum ceases to be a tool for reconstruction and appears instead as a means for social control.<sup>102</sup>

## POLITICAL & BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES TO COMMUNITY

### CURRICULUM

The cases of community curriculum in East Harlem, Arthurdale, and the Navajo reservation point to different ways in which the broader Depression era political economy shaped the possibilities for social reconstruction. Covello's significant and hard-won political alliances provided real world power to community studies, albeit within a narrow scope of political issues. Alternatively, Clapp's community curriculum, which neglected the economic structures at the core of the "problems of living," proved inadequate to the Herculean task of transforming employment opportunities in a particularly depressed region. Finally, the coercive efforts of the Bureau of Indian Affairs unleashed substantial local resistance to community study, undermining the very cooperation and communal spirit which the initiative sought to reclaim.

Alongside these internal tensions, social reconstructionists faced a rising tide of opposition from conservative political forces. The changing public response to Harold Rugg's social studies curriculum points to how conservative curriculum critics gradually gained center stage in the tumultuous 1930s. Rugg, a professor at Teachers College

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<sup>102</sup> The Navajo community day schools are not an isolated instance of progressive educational ideas being used within coercive political contexts. For example, Lucy Adams, director of education for the Navajo schools later played a leading role in developing community schools for the Japanese Internment Camps during World War II. Other prominent community educators such as Paul Hanna played a hand in the planning as well. The educational ideas they developed embodied many of the core features of community schooling, yet the oppressive context of the camps undermined the very democratic principles which these practices sought to foster. See: Tom James' Exile Within: The Schooling of Japanese Americans Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1987. Lucy Adams, "Education in the Relocation

Columbia, wrote a social studies textbook series, Man and His Changing Society, which sold more than one million copies during the 1930s.<sup>103</sup> This series followed Rugg's belief that "a valid program of education must be constructed directly from the life of the people."<sup>104</sup> It should thus connect everyday local experiences to the problems of living. The textbooks which emerged from this philosophy, offered a decidedly different understanding of American history and social life than previous books. Rugg presented material critical of the slave trade, compared the conditions facing rich and poor neighborhoods in Washington D.C., and offered support to the idea that women could become scientists and professionals. Moreover, he encouraged educators and students to imagine the curriculum as a tool in building a new society characterized by social planning.<sup>105</sup>

Not surprisingly, conservatives challenged Rugg's views and the textbooks themselves as anti-capitalist and "anti-American." One official of the Daughters of Colonial Wars even claimed that Rugg's textbooks "tried to give the child an unbiased viewpoint instead of teaching him real Americanism." Another critic characterized Rugg's work as "treason in the textbooks."<sup>106</sup> As these charges were taken up during the late 1930s in the influential Hearst newspapers, a groundswell of opposition emerged. By the early 1940s, a great many districts across the nation took public stands against Rugg's textbooks, whether they had purchased them previously or not. In this increasingly conservative political climate, social reconstructionism fell out of favor, and

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Centers" California Journal of Secondary Education v 17 1942, pp. 477-479. Wanda Robertson, "Developing World Citizens in a Japanese Relocation Center," Childhood Education v20 1943, p. 66-71.

<sup>103</sup> Kliebard, The Struggle For the American Curriculum: 1893-1958, p. 204.

<sup>104</sup> Harold Rugg, American Life And The School Curriculum: Next Steps Towards Schools Of Living New York, Ginn and Co. 1936.

<sup>105</sup> Kliebard, The Struggle For the American Curriculum: 1893-1958, pp. 204-5.

with it went the political thrust of community studies. While community curriculum didn't disappear from schools in the 1940s, it no longer played the same role. Reflecting on the shift away from community curriculum and social reconstructionism in the 1940s, historian Herbert Kliebard writes:

Curriculum fashions, it has long been noted, are subject to wide pendulum swings. While this metaphor conveys something of the shifting positions that are constantly occurring in the educational world, the phenomenon might best be seen as a stream with several currents, one stronger than others. None ever completely dries up. When the weather and other conditions are right, a weak or insignificant current assumes more force and prominence only to decline when conditions particularly conducive to its newfound strength no longer prevail.<sup>107</sup>

#### AN ADDENDUM TO THE 1930S: THE CASE OF MEXICO

The story of the rise and fall of Rugg's textbook series raises the question of whether community curriculum, on a broad scale, might have built a new social order if the political climate during the late 1930s and early 1940s had become increasingly receptive to the reconstructionists' message. In other words, did the public's growing conservatism hold the schools back from playing a more significant political role? While such hypothetical questions do not allow for definitive responses, it is instructive to look to the case of Mexico during this same period.<sup>108</sup> The Mexican Program for Public Education for 1935 written by the new socialist government of President Cardenas offered detailed curriculum plans for weaving lessons about the problems of living—with particular attention to inequality and economic transformation—throughout the course of

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>107</sup> Kliebard, The Struggle For the American Curriculum: 1893-1958, p. 208.

<sup>108</sup> While this report focuses on community schooling within the United States, there is a rich history of community school efforts in Mexico. See, for example, Rafael Ramirez, "Establishing the People's Houses," Progressive Education v13 n2, 1936, pp. 110-116; and George Sanchez, A Revolution By Education, 1936.

study. However, when United States educator V.F. Calverton visited Mexican schools, he found that “the discrepancy between theory and practice is so great that the whole experiment is in danger of failure.”<sup>109</sup> Reporting in the reconstructionist journal, The Social Frontier, Calverton describes the tendency of principals and teachers to downplay the state mandated curricular reform. Asked why her school did not embrace the new curriculum, one principal replied: “Oh, no one pays attention to that. That’s just a theory. Politics, you know.”<sup>110</sup>

This principal’s response—which Calverton describes as typical—points to two challenges to any broad-scale effort to promote community curriculum. First, overtly political curriculum rubs against the grain of many educators’ understanding of professionalism and the ‘real’ work of schools. Most educators look upon their role as transmitting politically neutral knowledge and skills. (Whether or not educators actions and words always carry political significance, many educators clearly do not look upon their own work as political.) To stretch beyond this apolitical role, educators need to be actively enlisted as part of a broader movement for change. Second, there is an internal tension in any curriculum which seeks to institutionalize local community study across an entire state or nation. That is, policies which impose standardized curriculum undermine the very commitment to voluntarism, local knowledge, and problem solving which they ostensibly embrace. Any broad based movement for community curriculum must then be built on the shaky foundations of uncertain support and idiosyncratic local knowledge.

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<sup>109</sup> V.F. Calverton, “Education and Socialism in Mexico,” The Social Frontier April, 1936, p. 217.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 218.

### III. EXPANDING OPPORTUNITY, BUILDING POWER: THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL MOVEMENT 1964-1973

The community school concept today is less an idea than an ideology; it has become not only part of the rhetoric but even more significantly a part of the tactics of a social movement; and it is perilous to ignore its status and functions in this regard.

—Harold Pfautz, 1970<sup>111</sup>

Community education means many things to many people, but to me it means a new spirit of outreach by the schools for teaching new skills, for fulfilling more people intellectually, and for developing new interests among all age groups.

—Sidney Marland, U.S. Commissioner of Education, 1972<sup>112</sup>

The stage is set for a revolution. People—black people—want control over their schools for self-determination, for building a strong self-image, for individual and community development, for restoration of confidence in education, for economic stability, for recognition and for survival. Community control means community growth and development, and the school is the hub of this growth.

—Rhody McCoy, Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Supt., 1970<sup>113</sup>

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the community school idea again emerged as a powerful force within American education. “Short years ago few educators knew what ‘community education’ meant,” wrote Jack Minzey in 1972. “Suddenly the concept has national visibility, surprising even its avid promoters.”<sup>114</sup> Yet, unlike the previous periods when community schooling rose to salience, the fractured politics of post World War II American education meant that there was no one community school movement in

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<sup>111</sup> Harold Pfautz, “The Black Community, The Community School, and the Socialization Process: Some Caveats,” in Community Control of Schools, Henry Levin (ed), Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1970, p. 14.

<sup>112</sup> Sidney Marland, “The Federal Role in Community Education,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54, n3, 1972, p. 146.

<sup>113</sup> Rhody, McCoy, “The Formation of a Community-Controlled School District,” in Community Control of Schools, Henry Levin (ed), Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1970, p. 171.

<sup>114</sup> Jack Minzey, “Community Education: An Amalgam of Many Views,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54, n3, 1972, p. 150.

the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>115</sup> Rather, the new politics of education during this period featured several groups who invoked different models of community schooling. All of these groups looked to community schooling as a vehicle for enhancing power—to improve learning, expand opportunities, and address social problems. However, they presented different stories of how citizens could realize power through the schools. While many mainstream reformers imagined spreading power by providing greater access to ever-broader school programs, a number of urban leaders sought to promote community power by shifting the control over local schools from professional educators to lay community members. What factors shaped these different stories about power? Why did many African American leaders shift during this period from a concern with access towards a focus on control? What insights does this shift hold for school-community relations in urban centers?

### TOWARD ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

The tremendous growth in school districts embracing community schooling—from “a handful” in 1964 to “several hundred” by 1972—emerged as the American political landscape was reshaped in the wake of the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in Brown v Board of Education.<sup>116</sup> Brown precipitated three related lines of change. First, it placed education at the center of the struggle for racial equality in America. Second, it opened up political space for grassroots activists and political leaders to initiate civil disobedience and mass mobilization. These extraordinary acts of courage by ordinary people set in motion the Civil Rights Movement. The success of this movement fostered

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<sup>115</sup> For a discussion of this post-war fractured politics and its causes, see: Tyack, “‘Restructuring’ In Historical Perspective: Tinkering Toward Utopia,” pp. 179-80.

a broader political climate which valued citizen participation in public affairs. Third, Brown's focus on equal opportunity, taken together with the political pressure unleashed by the Civil Rights Movement, fostered a new federal role in education. In making the case against state-sanctioned segregated schools, the Warren Court pointed to the critical relationship between education and opportunity. "In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms."<sup>117</sup> While, with a few notable exceptions, the federal government did little to insure this right during the decade following the Brown decision, it began to assert a more activist role in 1964.<sup>118</sup> The goal of equal opportunity shaped the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

President Lyndon Johnson imagined the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as one of several "steppingstones" to a Great Society. As Richard Kluger argues, it was part of "a proliferating series of imaginative new federal programs [along with Model Cities, the Office of Economic Opportunity, VISTA, and Head Start] aimed at declaring war on poverty and ignorance."<sup>119</sup> At first glance this effort seems to echo George Counts' call for the schools to build a new social order. However, unlike the social reconstructionists, advocates for the Great Society viewed the schools (and related social programs) as a means to enable youth and citizens to participate in the *existing*

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<sup>116</sup> Minzey, "Community Education: An Amalgam of Many Views," p. 150.

<sup>117</sup> Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

<sup>118</sup> There was very little movement towards school desegregation prior to 1964. Indeed, in 1964, only 1.2% of African American school-age children in Southern states attended schools with any white students. Michael Klarman, "How Brown Changes Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," The Journal of American History June, 1994, p. 84.

economic and political order. The authors of Great Society legislation believed that the chief barrier to this participation lay in the “cultural deprivation” facing youth in low income communities. Towards this end, “compensatory” education programs sought to supplement or enhance the learning opportunities available to economically “disadvantaged” youth and communities. In addition to expanding educational and social programs, Great Society legislation encouraged parents and local citizens to become actively involved in the governance and oversight of local initiatives. The Johnson administration believed that “maximal feasible participation” would make programs more responsive and engage citizens directly in the Great Society.<sup>120</sup>

While much of the growth in community schooling in the late 1960s and early 1970s arose outside the direct influence of the Johnson Administration, it flowed from the Great Society’s twin commitments to expanded social programs and increased citizen participation. By the late 1960s these commitments framed the way many citizens, social reformers, and politicians thought about education generally, and community education in particular. They believed that schools needed to play a broader social role, reaching out to more and more youth and citizens. Hence, Sidney Marland, Nixon’s Commissioner of Education, reasoned that by adding programs in the late afternoon and evening, urban community schools could insure that “adults or their children [would] no longer ... be doomed to a life of failure simply because they have in the past been denied educational opportunities.”<sup>121</sup> This view was widely held across the political spectrum. Politicians and activists lined up in support of the idea that schools should become “multipurpose

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<sup>119</sup> Richard Kluger, Simple Justice: The History of *Brown v. Board of Education* and Black America’s Struggle for Equality. New York: Vintage Books, 1977, p. 760.

<sup>120</sup> Nicholas Lehman, The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, pp. 148-53.

human development laboratories ... [which] extend the use of the school plant and all of the learning facilities to people of all ages and circumstances to help them meet their learning needs. (As I recounted in the introductory section, Fred Totten managed to secure support for this statement from Republicans and Democrats, the Jaycees and the NAACP.)<sup>122</sup> Such breadth of support led advocates like Vasil Kerensky to conclude in 1972 that “community education is on the threshold of a major breakthrough.”<sup>123</sup>

Community schooling never passed through this threshold in the 1970s because its support was not nearly as deep as it was wide. Many leaders found it easy to sign on to this reform which seemed to offer much and cost little. Community school advocates promised many different outcomes to many different constituencies. Fred Totten is typical of such boosters from this period in pointing to community schooling as a vehicle for: reducing juvenile delinquency, enhancing literacy, elevating voter registration rates, raising student reading scores, promoting the passage of local school bonds, reducing unemployment, improving public health, and improving race relations.<sup>124</sup> This powerful engine of reform, advocates intimated, did not demand substantial new streams of funding. While community schooling required some additional expenditures for programs and outreach, its advocates reasoned that these costs would be recouped through greater productivity. For conservatives in particular, community schooling

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<sup>121</sup> Marland, “The Federal Role in Community Education,” p. 146.

<sup>122</sup> Fred Totten, “Widespread Support for Community Education,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54, n3, 1972, p. 147.

<sup>123</sup> Vasil Kerensky, “Correcting Some Misconceptions About Community Education,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54, n3, p. 158.

<sup>124</sup> Fred Totten, “Community Education: The Feasible Reform,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54, n3, p.149.

offered a better way to “mobilize existing resources, maximize physical plant facilities, and reduce unnecessary duplication.”<sup>125</sup>

Since community schooling could not possibly live up to these expectations, many of those who joined in support of the idea in the late 1960s and early 1970s began to turn to other emerging reforms by the mid-1970s. Some became disenchanted with the goals of access and opportunity, or at least with the increased public expenditures associated with these goals. Others worried about community schooling’s tendency to be, in Sidney Marland’s words, “less controlled and less predictable” than traditional education.<sup>126</sup> While a core of community schooling activity persisted, this core did not represent the sort of grassroots movement which could sustain political support for widescale programs. As we shall see, many poor people of color, who might have provided such support, looked to a different vision of community schools during this period.

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>126</sup> Marland, “The Federal Role in Community Education,” p. 146

## COMMUNITY CONTROL, COMMUNITY POWER

Writing in the New Republic in 1968, Joseph Featherstone described a movement for community schooling bubbling up within many urban communities.<sup>127</sup> “There is a new, clamorous insistence, among Negro and Puerto Rican leaders in particular, that is quite alien to the spirit of the old reform: city schools must be accountable to parents for their failures to teach children.”<sup>128</sup> This call to reconstruct the relationship between professionals and the lay public emerged within the same post-Brown political context as Johnson’s Great Society programs. Yet, whereas the authors of Great Society legislation placed faith in the capacity of schools to overcome social inequality, a growing number of urban leaders worried that the existing school system was partly to blame for this inequality. For Rhody McCoy, the superintendent of the experimental community school district in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, the historical pattern of abuse and failure was clear.

Parents have been deceived, degraded, and denied information or redress of their grievances by teachers, principals, and other administrators while their children have consistently maintained a pattern of failure. Moreover, any real community involvement in the schools has been discouraged by school personnel, though the failure of students in school has been blamed on parents.<sup>129</sup>

McCoy and other advocates of community control rejected the view that such past practice could be remedied through integration or compensatory educational programs.

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<sup>127</sup> It is important to note that urban communities during the late 1960s and early 1970s were characterized by great diversity of thought. Even in those areas where community control emerged as a dominant theme, there was substantial resistance to this strategy from various sectors. An interesting case of opposition to community controlled schools is that of Bayard Rustin. Rustin, a long-time civil rights leader, argued that community control wasn’t strategic “for the obvious reason that one-tenth of the population cannot accomplish much by itself.” Further it legitimized “the idea that segregated education is in fact a perfectly respectable, perfectly desirable, and perfectly viable way of life in a democratic society.” Daniel Perlstein, “The Case Against Community: Bayard Rustin and the 1968 School Crisis,” Educational Foundations Spring 1993, p. 48.

<sup>128</sup> Joseph Featherstone, “Community Control of Our Schools,” The New Republic January 13, 1968, p. 17.

Through the mid-1960s, school integration had touched only a few of the racially segregated neighborhoods of the North, and where it had, African American parents were rarely consulted.<sup>130</sup> “Integration,” as the New York Civil Liberties Union concluded in its 1968 report, “was not abandoned by black parents but by the Board of Education.”<sup>131</sup> While a broader cross-section of urban students had participated in compensatory educational programs, many parents and leaders questioned the very premise guiding these programs. Educational failure, these critics reasoned, was not a function of culturally deprived families, but of malfunctioning schools.

In a situation in which there are thousands of dropouts from elementary schools and junior high schools, the questions that must be raised are not whether there is something wrong with the children of their mothers or fathers, but whether there is something wrong with the educational system.<sup>132</sup>

As Mario Fantini and Marilyn Gittell concluded in 1969, “desegregation and compensatory education were not working and new options in educational reform were necessary.” Direct community participation was to be the essential ingredient.”<sup>133</sup>

The advocates of community controlled schools envisioned community participation serving several purposes. First, greater participation would reduce student alienation and restore legitimacy to the local schools. Charles Hamilton, in a seminal article on community schools in 1968, argued that the past failure of many urban schools meant that they no longer held legitimacy in the eyes of many community members. In

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<sup>129</sup> McCoy, “The Formation of a Community-Controlled School District,” p. 169.

<sup>130</sup> See: R. Stephen Browning (ed) From Brown to Bradley: School Desegregation 1954-1974 Washington D.C.: Jefferson Law Book Company, 1975.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Robert Maynard, “Black Nationalism and Community Schools,” in Community Control of Schools, Henry Levin (ed), Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1970, p. 105. This abandonment led activists like David Spencer to conclude: “Nobody from outside is going to tell us what kind of segregated school we’re going to have.” Quoted in Featherstone, “Community Control of Our Schools,” p. 18.

<sup>132</sup> James Garrett, quoted in Maynard, “Black Nationalism and Community Schools,” p. 106.

such a context, power must be transferred from centralized powerbrokers back to the local community.

What decision makers *say* is not of primary importance, but it is important what Black people *believe*. Do they *believe* that the school systems are operating on their behalf? Do they *believe* that the schools are *legitimate* in terms of educating their children and inculcating in them a proper sense of values?<sup>134</sup>

In addition to establishing legitimacy, participation offers community members power to shape the lives of themselves and the next generation.<sup>135</sup> “The point,” as Joseph Featherstone reasoned, “is to have schools that give parents a sense that they can play a role in shaping their children’s future.”<sup>136</sup> Towards this end, advocates of community control imagined parents and community members playing a role “in the hiring and firing of personnel, the selection of instructional materials, and the determination of curriculum content.”<sup>137</sup> Finally, participation offered urban parents opportunities for adult learning that were relevant to their own lives and concerns. In what Hamilton termed the “Comprehensive Family-Community-School Plan, parents would become at once “students, teachers, and legitimate members of the local school governing board.”<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Mario Fantini and Marilyn Gittell, “The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Experiment,” Phi Delta Kappan v50 n8, 1969, p. 442.

<sup>134</sup> Charles Hamilton, “Race and Education: A Search for Legitimacy,” Harvard Educational Review v 38 n4, 1969, p. 672.

<sup>135</sup> Leonard Fein makes the interesting point that this desire to shape young people’s lives emerges in part as a response to the limited opportunities for parents to influence youth in today’s media culture. Fein writes: “Tasks once assumed by the family and the church have now passed, by and large, to the mass media, and parents have no control over the stimuli to which their children are exposed. This situation has become so acute that genuine community efforts to retain (or to reassert) control over the schools may be regarded as a last attempt to gain some control over the education of the young.” Leonard Fein, “Community Schools and Social Theory: The Limits of Universalism,” in Community Control of Schools, Henry Levin (ed), Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1970, p. 78n.

<sup>136</sup> Featherstone, “Community Control of Our Schools,” p. 19.

<sup>137</sup> Hamilton, Race and Education: A Search for Legitimacy,” p. 683.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 682.

The most controversial aspect of the community control model was its call for parents and community members to take on roles presently being served by professional educators. This stance directly contradicted the prevailing wisdom captured by Myron Lieberman in 1960: The public interest is almost invariably better served by leaving professional questions to the professionals.”<sup>139</sup> Hamilton and others argued that professionals “have a vested self-interest” and hence need to be held accountable to community members. By “opening up the profession to question and challenge about what constitutes educational legitimacy,” community members could help professionals construct schools which hold more legitimacy and power. As Hamilton acknowledged, however, “no profession welcomes such intrusion from laymen.”<sup>140</sup> In their study of the community control experiment in Ocean Hill-Brownsville, Fantini and Gittell concluded that the very training and socialization of most teachers, “ill suits them to these new professional roles and workable relationships.”<sup>141</sup>

Fantini and Gittell’s concerns proved prescient. The New York teachers’ union led a drive to return the balance of power back to professionals. Their efforts, including a two-month strike, resulted in legislation which first weakened and then ultimately undermined the community control movement in New York city. The lessons from this experience were not lost on advocates for community control across the nation. Legal scholar Derrick Bell summarized these lessons in 1973:

The obstacles are overwhelming. In addition to the challenges of efficiently administering such a project, gaining parental support, hiring effective teachers, securing adequate financing, there is the serious (some

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<sup>139</sup> Myron Lieberman, The Future of Public Education Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, p. 60.

<sup>140</sup> Hamilton, Race and Education: A Search for Legitimacy,” p. 677.

<sup>141</sup> Mario Fantini and Marilyn Gittell, “The Ocean Hill-Brownsville Experiment,” Phi Delta Kappan v50 n8, 1969, p. 444.

would say fanatical) opposition of teachers unions and other groups with strong interests in the educational status quo.<sup>142</sup>

While not hopeful about the possibilities for fostering a broad-scale community control movement, Bell believed that it was important to draw upon the insights of community controlled schools to reshape school-community relations generally. For Bell, urban schools must embody a new sensibility, a new way of interacting with low income parents which parallels how schools have traditionally related to middle and upper income parents.

Parents in highly regarded suburban school communities have this sense, and in varying degree, teachers and administrators in those schools convey an understanding that their job success depends on satisfying the parents whose children are enrolled in the school, not the school board or the teacher union.<sup>143</sup>

Reflecting on the community control movement, Kenneth Clark arrived at a similar conclusion. When a school's "job is well done," he argued, "the parents are partners in the enterprise. Each parent shares responsibility with the school for the achievement of his child."<sup>144</sup> This vision offers a fitting legacy of the community control movement for community schooling generally.

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<sup>142</sup> Derrick Bell, "Integration—Is It A No Win Policy For Blacks?" *Civil Rights Digest* v5 n4, 1973, p. 20.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth Clark, quoted in David Seeley, *Education Through Partnership* Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute Studies in Education Policy, 1985, p. 126.

—SECTION THREE—

**COMMUNITY SCHOOLING: TOWARDS NEW  
POSSIBILITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

I see the community education concept spreading all over the United States; yes, even to other parts of the world ... I see people becoming involved in their local problems, their state, their national problems. They will work together solving their problems, developing new ways of doing things, and as they work together there will develop closer feelings of friendship, cooperation, and understanding which will work toward solving some of the great social problems threatening this nation.

—Charles S. Mott, 1972<sup>145</sup>

Throughout the twentieth century advocates for community schools have often presented their case with millennialist rhetoric. In 1911, Woodrow Wilson spoke of the social centers potential to “set forward the cause of civilization and the cause of human freedom.”<sup>146</sup> In 1936 George Sanchez described the movement to create community schools across Mexico as “A Revolution by Education.”<sup>147</sup> In 1972, Charles S. Mott imagined a world-wide renaissance of participatory democracy. Such rhetoric is required of oppositional movements which must offer a compelling alternative vision to the seeming inevitability of the status quo. Now, as we quickly approach our own millennium, what vision of community schooling’s purpose might we rally around? What steps might the Mott Foundation take to push this vision forward? The recommendations which follow only hint at a preliminary response to the first question while attending more directly to the second question. As will become evident, this focus

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<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Donald Weaver, “A Case for theory Development in Community Education,” Phi Delta Kappan v 54, n3, 1972, p. 154. (Weaver draws from an interview which Richard Pendell conducted with Mr. Mott in 1972):

<sup>146</sup> Woodrow Wilson, The Need of Citizenship Organization,” The American City November 1911, p. 267.

on process emerges from the democratic belief that educators and citizens must play a role in creating a new vision for new community schools.

### I. Expanding Public Discourse: Talking About Purpose and Power

The Mott Foundation can play an important role in expanding the character and scope of public discussions about community schooling. To do so, it must address two problems with prevailing talk about community schools. A first problem turns on the tendency to frame discussions around a limited understanding of community schooling's purpose. Educators and policy makers often talk about community schooling as an additional school program which can either help schools advance their existing goals or address some social problem outside the purview of the regular school program. In this light it becomes another reform strategy for improving waning test scores or reducing the local rates of juvenile delinquency. Certainly student achievement and public safety are important social ends. Yet, a public bombarded with multiple strategies for achieving these same goals is not likely to mobilize on behalf of community schooling. At best, community members—as well as professionals—will likely approach such community school initiatives as wary consumers. This response does not promise the sort of intense engagement in local education and politics which more robust forms of community schooling demand. Further, these goals lead to a truncated view of the public sphere and social life generally. Recall that the turn of the century social centers offered urban immigrants an image of vital democratic life filled with public lectures, debates,

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<sup>147</sup> George Sanchez, A Revolution By Education, New York: Viking Press, 1936.

recreation and leisure opportunities. Today, talk about community schooling must again inspire commitment by stretching the community's sense of the possible.

A second problem with most prevailing discussions of community schools is the failure of most educators and policy makers to address issues of power. Concha Delgado Gaitan, who has written extensively on the relationship between low-income immigrant parents and the schools, speaks of power as “the capacity to produce intended, foreseen, and unforeseen effects on others to accomplish results on behalf of oneself.”<sup>148</sup> This sense of power is largely absent from policy discussion of community schooling which tends to presume that after school programs or new curriculum or parent education inherently reflect the common interest of all parties. Yet, too often initiatives which are presented as neutral or scientific reflect the biases of middle class educators over against the values of poor and working class community members. This dynamic often leads to forms of resistance to community school initiatives, as it did with many of the hygiene reforms during the Progressive Era.

Inattention to power issues also places community curriculum in a vulnerable position. Frequently, when educators present community study as a fun way to learn about real life, they do not address the political and social significance of this new knowledge. This approach leaves teachers in the difficult position of either a) introducing projects with no sense of the consequences which this study might hold for the school or community; or b) avoiding the ‘problems of living’ as too controversial. In addition, the failure to discuss power relations undermines the capacity of schools to become true community centers. It is rare to hear echoes today of the Progressive Era

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<sup>148</sup> Concha Delgado Gaitan, “Involving Parents in Schools: A Process of Empowerment,” American Journal of Education v 100, n1, 1991, p. 22.

claims that the community “owns” the public schools or that the schools should be viewed as “the people’s houses.”<sup>149</sup> In low income communities, many parents frequently feel that they hold little power to shape the work of the school. Introducing discussions about parent and community power can be a vehicle for reshaping a community’s sense of itself as well as a vehicle for reform. In the early 1980s, Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot suggested that such a shift is essential for low income communities of color to foster climates of achievement in urban schools.

For a long time we have understood that the magic of suburban schools is not merely the relative affluence and abundant resources of the citizens (nor their whiteness), but also the balance of power between families and schools, the sense of responsibility and accountability teachers feel for the educational success of children, and the parents' sense of entitlement in demanding results from schools.<sup>150</sup>

The long and difficult pathway to a new sense of entitlement or a larger understanding of community schooling’s purpose must be paved with public and professional discourse about community schooling. The Mott Foundation can play a critical role in this process by convening such conversations. Indeed, the Foundation’s role in the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program provides an array of potential participants and opportunities for these discussions. These public conversations might be framed around two questions. A first question could ask participants to update Mr. Mott’s quote from 1972. What vision of democracy should our new community schools promote in the 21st century? Responses to this first question would lead to important conversations about new forms and practices which community schools might

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<sup>149</sup> George Ford, “Madison Conference on Social Centers,” *The Survey* Nov. 18, 1911, vxxvii n7. pp. 1229-31.

<sup>150</sup> Sara Lawrence Lightfoot, “Toward Conflict and Resolution: Relationships Between Families and Schools,” *Theory Into Practice* v20 n2, 1981. p. 101.

now adopt—conversations which would be greatly enhanced by a familiarity with the rich history of community schooling. A second question could introduce the issue of power by asking: How might we insure that those individuals and groups who traditionally have not been able to exercise power in schools play a critical role in shaping our community school efforts?<sup>151</sup> Of course, asking this latter question is not enough, if the conversations which the Mott Foundation convenes are not themselves inclusive and representative. It is thus important for the Foundation to reach out to gain the widest possible participation in these activities. In so doing, it will follow the example of the most progressive moments in the history of community schooling.

## II. Fostering Holistic Models—Extension, Curriculum, and School-Community Relations

One of the most striking differences between community educators in 1898 and 1998, is that the earlier group conceived of community schooling's strands as part of an organic whole. For John Dewey, the educational movement to reform the "place set apart" was part of a broader movement to democratize American life. Democracy, in this sense, embodies a set of understandings about the public sphere, about knowledge, and about professional-lay relations. While educators in different periods have emphasized school extension, or curriculum, or school-community relations, the most sophisticated of these reformers attended to each strand in the process. Hence, Leonard Covello's success in promoting community curriculum turned on his capacity to forge reciprocal relationships with community members and to provide an array of adult and youth

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<sup>151</sup> In responding to this question, participants will be able to draw upon several promising contemporary examples and an emerging body of literature. For example, a) the efforts of Ernesto Cortez and IAF organizers in Texas; b) the work of Paul Heckman and the Education and Community Change Project in Tucson; c) The Right Question Project in Boston; d) James Comer's work in New Haven (and elsewhere);

services at the school. Few educators today match Covello's breadth. Academic specialization and bureaucratic differentiation means that specialists in after-school learning centers, or community-based curriculum, or parent involvement programs rarely interact with one another. Too often, educators and the public view these programs as discrete efforts with distinct goals. For community schooling to emerge again as a movement, professionals and community members will need to view these disparate activities as part of a meaningful whole.

The Mott Foundation can encourage the development of holistic approaches to community schooling in two ways. First, it can support initiatives which promote exchange across institutional lines and areas of specialization. A few university-community partnerships offer local examples of this work. The Foundation should consider creating other sites where citizens and professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise might learn from one another. It could sponsor regional or national working groups on themes which cut across the different facets of community schooling. For example, one group could examine the implications of the turn towards a socio cultural view of learning for after school programs or adult learning opportunities.<sup>152</sup> Second, the Mott Foundation should seek to shape the professional identities of those who will be working most closely with students and communities. Teachers, school social workers, community liaisons, and others work within clearly defined, and fairly narrow, professional boundaries. The more all of these professionals come to see themselves as community educators, the greater the possibility of developing holistic

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and e) our own work with the Santa Monica schools through the Teachers For Urban Schools and Communities Project.

community education. The Foundation can support experimental efforts to create integrated training for these professionals. That is, training which brings together different (pre-service and in-service) professionals and engages them all in thinking about the relationship between after school programs, curriculum, social service, and adult education. Such initiatives would play an important role as well in creating networks which work outside and against the grain of the prevailing bureaucracy.

### III. Forging Ties Across Geographic Communities

One of the challenges to fostering vibrant democracy through community schools is the segregation which characterizes so many of our communities as we approach the 21st century. In a state like Michigan, for example, sixty percent of all African American students attend schools which enroll no white students. Further, the growing economic fault lines, both between and within cities and suburbs, contributes to the segregation of students along lines of class. Such conditions do not lend themselves to Edward Ward's vision of community schools as places which allow students and adults to overcome the divisiveness of "class and race lines." Nor, do they offer much hope of equal educational opportunities, given the drastic differences in resources available to schools serving affluent or low income communities.<sup>153</sup> How can community schooling advance the cause of multi-racial, cross-class democracy given the existing demographic realities?

The Mott Foundation can play a valuable role in linking diverse students, educators, and citizens through community school-related initiatives. The Foundation

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<sup>152</sup> The ascendancy of socio cultural views within educational psychology echoes the rise of pragmatism and progressive education at the turn of the century. While there have been few explicit efforts to infuse these new understandings within community schools, there is tremendous potential for such work.

<sup>153</sup> Gary Orfield and Sean Reardon, "Race, Poverty and Inequality," Race and Poverty, 1993, pp. 17-33.

should create metropolitan centers for community schooling which would sponsor activities aimed at bringing different communities together. For example, these centers could invite educators and students to share the products of their local community studies. Such exchanges would offer young people the opportunity to learn about one another's lives. Further, to the extent that these community studies mapped the social resources available in the different communities, the exchanges could serve as springboards for broader political efforts to promote equality. The centers could also sponsor activities which bring diverse communities together in one geographic location. Recreation or public space might be shared across municipal lines. Or communities might host public forums which bring students and adults together for dialogue and exchange. In this way, new forms of community schooling might take on the challenges of realizing democracy in a new age.

